



Advancement Basics, Part One

First-Time Visitors & New Attenders

What aspects of meeting life influence a visitor's decision to become a regular attender and active participant? The quality of our worship, the vitality of our meetings, and the ways we inform newcomers about our faith all affect a visitor's decision whether to return. Newcomers also need to feel that they are welcomed and that they will be accepted as part of the community.

Meetings can help first-time visitors and new attenders find meaning, belonging, and information in several ways, from the profoundly spiritual to the seemingly mundane. This series of ideas in question form provides the opportunity for you and your meeting to review these basic aspects of Quaker advancement. We encourage meetings that wish to grow to consider whether they are truly ready to receive newcomers into their community and to nurture them in the Spirit.

Meeting for Worship

Is your meeting for worship grounded in expectant waiting and Spirit-led ministry? Do you find ways to explain Quaker worship to newcomers? Do you provide opportunities for Friends, new and old, to deepen or renew their spiritual life through

worship sharing, spiritual friendships, and Quaker study? Are you knowledgeable about Quaker beliefs, practices and testimonies? Do you attend to your own spiritual growth? Do you come to meeting spiritually prepared to enter into worship?

First Impressions

Atmosphere

Does your meeting practice Spirit-led hospitality? Do you open your hearts to first-time visitors and new attenders? Do you seek that of God in each person who attends your meeting, however short or long their involvement in Quakerism, however “Quakerly” their behavior? Do you reach out to newcomers as fellow seekers and avoid seeing them as prospects? Do you greet all newcomers equally?

Introductions and Announcements

Does your announcement period reflect the vitality of your meeting and of Quakerism? Are you aware that many newcomers do not appreciate being singled out to introduce themselves? Are you aware that many Friends have difficulty remembering names? After worship does everyone present, first-time visitor and long-time member alike, introduce themselves? Or, does everyone wear name tags? Do you provide opportunities to share joys and concerns? Are members, attenders, and visitors enriched by your announcement period?

Guest Book

Do you have a guest book and do you invite visitors to sign? Do you include a column for their address and/or their email? Do you follow up to thank them for visiting, to ask whether they have any questions, and to give them the name of a person to contact should any questions arise?

Information

Do you have a supply of simple literature on Quakerism to offer visitors? Are you prepared to explain your faith to visitors

who ask what Quakers believe? Do you avoid using unnecessary insider language and Quaker jargon which can confuse newcomers? Do you have a flyer that explains the life and work of your community? Do you make known the existence of Quaker study centers, gatherings, interest groups, and support groups? Does your meeting offer support and encouragement to newcomers who might like to participate?

Bulletin Boards

Do your bulletin boards (portable or permanent) reflect the diversity and vitality of your meeting and the wider Quaker world? Do you enliven the bulletin boards with photographs of meeting activities? Do you use large-print labels to organize material and help visitors catch the range of the meeting’s connections and interests?

Children

Do you make it clear to visitors that you have a First Day School and that their children would be welcome?

Meeting Facility

Do signs outside your building make it clear where to enter? Do you keep your meeting rooms well maintained and attractive? Does your space convey the impression that Friends truly care about the meeting? Is your meeting physically accessible? Is there help for the hearing impaired? Do you have room for new adults and new children? Will visitors find a place to park?

Knitting Newcomers into the Community

Small Groups

Are you aware that studies have shown that newcomers who make two or three friends within their first six months in a church (or meeting) are much more likely to stay? Are you aware that studies have also shown that small group activities (newly formed groups of up to ten people) are critically important in enabling newcomers to make friends? Do you provide these opportunities?

Inclusion

Do you find ways to include newcomers or sporadic attenders in the life and work of the meeting? Are you open to the ideas and insights of newcomers? Do you offer opportunities to mingle after worship? Do newcomers attend your pot lucks and other get-togethers? If not, what might help them feel more welcome? Do you think of including new attenders in your social life outside of meeting? Do you reach out to members and attenders who have been absent from meeting? Do you extend invitations to former attenders? Is the meeting open to diversity and differentness? Do you listen to each other with love and openness? Do newcomers find that they have visited a truly open and caring community?

Worship Sharing

Are you aware of how worship sharing can be used to help members and attenders to build community by getting to know each other better? Do you offer worship sharing in your meeting?

Pastoral Care

Do you find opportunities to get to know newcomers? Would you be aware if a newcomer were going through a time of personal crisis? Does your system of pastoral care extend to newcomers?

Children

Does your meeting attend to the needs of children and parents? Is there a strong First Day School? Do those other than the parents of new attenders care for the children and teach First Day School? Are you as attentive to the children of newcomers as you are to those whom you have known for several years? Do you find opportunities to include children in the life and work of the meeting as appropriate? Do your generations mingle in a spirit of love?

There is something sacred in each person. How we relate to people is what we actually believe about them. Words are not the thing, relationship is all. We are the epistles, we are the texts, the manifestations of God. How we treat others is our personal statement about God. If enquirers want to know what Friends are about, they will read the books—perhaps—but they will also read us.

— Harvey Gillman, *Spiritual Hospitality*,
Pendle Hill Pamphlet #314, p. 12

Opportunities to Learn About Quakerism and Grow in the Spirit

Classes for Newcomers

Do you have programs to help new attenders explore Quaker beliefs and practices? Do you use or adapt curricula or have you considered using short pamphlets, classic Pendle Hill pamphlets, Friends Journal articles, or book chapters in classes for newcomers? Do you present materials in ways that make the Quaker faith accessible? Do you communicate the joy of Quakerism as well as its basic tenets? Do newcomers to your meeting find Quakerism to be an accessible religion?

Classes for the Whole Meeting

Do you include newcomers in Quakerism classes or discussion groups offered to the entire meeting? Do you begin with an accessible introduction to bring newcomers to the topic? Do you speak to newcomers before the class begins to bring them up to date on the issues or to inform them about aspects of Quakerism which underlie the discussion?

Worship Sharing

Do you provide opportunities for members and attenders, including new attenders, to deepen their spiritual life through worship sharing? Do you provide opportunities to share spiritual journeys? Do you provide other opportunities for members and attenders to get to know each other more deeply in the Spirit through worship sharing?

Witness

Does your meeting engage in and support witness activities inspired by your Quaker faith? Do you find ways to let newcomers know about these activities? Do you offer newcomers opportunities to participate?

Meeting for Business

Is your meeting for business a time of worshipful sharing and careful attention to matters at hand? Are minutes kept and distributed so that everyone is aware of the meeting's decisions? Do you make an effort to explain Quaker process to newcomers? Do you make it clear that they are welcome to participate in meeting for business?

Many of the people who come to us are both refugees and seekers. . . . Some discover what they need among Friends, others go elsewhere. . . .

But if someone comes asking for bread, we cannot say, sorry we are too busy discovering our own riches; when we have found them, we'll offer you a few. Our riches are precisely for sharing. And the world is very, very hungry.

— Harvey Gillman, Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1995, section 28.10