

# *Building a Friends Meeting*

There is more to a Friends meeting than an hour of silent worship on Sundays. A vital meeting challenges us to spiritual growth every day of the week. It gathers us into a loving, supportive fellowship. It creates sacred space in which we can find healing, strength, and vision. It sends us out into the world to serve and to witness to the possibility of transformation, peace, and divine love.

As you think about building (or rebuilding) your meeting or worship group, you might want to plan your Sunday schedule to include each of these elements:

**Gathered worship:** Include the children if possible. Spread a large piece of paper on a low table (freezer paper works well) and encourage the children to draw their images of what happens in meeting or of any messages that are given. Twenty minutes or a half hour of silence may be enough at first, especially if you have young children or people very new to Quakerism. Remember that in gathered worship, we are knitted together and transformed by the presence of Christ, the Inward Teacher, among us. Expect to be changed!

**Worship-sharing:** Schedule regular opportunities for worship-sharing. The guidelines for worship sharing (on the back of this sheet) ensure that everyone has an opportunity to speak, and everyone is truly listened to. This is a terrific tool for getting to know each other, for nurturing your own spiritual life, for resolving conflicts, and for transacting meeting business. Your Sunday schedule might include half an hour of worship, and half an hour of worship-sharing until you are ready for more.

**Shared teaching and learning:** Pick out Quaker classics to study together (see the “Basic Quakerism” list for the small meeting library). Do worship sharing around what you found exciting in the reading, or what it revealed about your own experience. You could make study and sharing part of your regular Sunday schedule, or choose a special time for it.

**A common meal:** Sharing food is a wonderful, simple sacrament, and a great community builder. All it takes is soup or salad and a loaf of bread. Plan to bring food for everyone at first. Before long everyone will be contributing something and a potluck will be born.

**Witness:** Your meeting may want to engage in peace or social justice projects as a group, or you may want to provide a base of support for individual witness. Take time to talk about how each of you is living out your beliefs. You might want to read one of the traditional “queries” from Faith and Practice each month, and share what it means to you.

Community has always been a critical part of Quakerism. Early Friends felt knitted together in the experience of gathered worship, and this sense of connection spilled over into all aspects of their lives. They worked, traveled, witnessed, and suffered together, and cared for each other’s families in times of need. They sought to recreate the intense spiritual fellowships of primitive Christianity. The word “Friend” was rich with meaning.

We cannot return to the days of early Friends, but we can respond to the deep hunger for community in today’s hectic, scattered world. Our meetings hold open precious time and space for individual reflection and spiritual growth. They also challenge us to become a gathered people, connected to each other, listening to each other, and caring for each other. Taking a holistic approach to meeting building—sharing meals, sharing life stories, witnessing together in the world—may help us rediscover the power and joy of early Quakerism.



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