

You are
welcome
here!

A Booklet of Learnings
from QuakerQuest
about Inviting Newcomers
into the Life of Our Meetings

QuakerQuest in the United States and Canada
is a project of Friends General Conference



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Deep within us all there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continuously return. Eternity is at our hearts, pressing upon our time-torn lives, warming us with intimations of an astounding destiny, calling us home unto Itself. Yielding to these persuasions, gladly committing ourselves in body and soul, utterly and completely, the Light Within, is the beginning of true life.

— Thomas R. Kelly
A Testament of Devotion

Introduction

Friends General Conference (FGC) has shepherded QuakerQuest in the US and Canada since 2007. Over this time we've seen changes in the conversation about being welcoming and changes in the number of people in attendance at worship in participating meetings.

- Meetings that have both the QuakerQuest workshop and hold public sessions have grown by a net of 11% in attendance at worship. (Net includes those that gained, stayed the same, and lost attendance.)
- Meetings that hold just the QuakerQuest workshop have grown by a net of 5% in attendance at worship.
- Meetings that have worked with FGC's QuakerQuest program grow by an average net of 7%.
- The Hallmarks of QuakerQuest, adapted from work done by the founders of

QuakerQuest, impact how Quakers talk with each other and with newcomers. For example, there is more emphasis on explaining the Quaker way in positive terms rather than by what we don't do or don't believe.

This packet includes QuakerQuest learnings for your and your meeting's use. These are of value whether or not you have participated in previous QuakerQuest activities.

Consider sharing these during committee meetings, using them in small group settings, and including them in your newsletter. Using one at a time will probably give the best opportunity for learning, sharing, changing — and having fun!

*— Prepared by the
FGC QuakerQuest staff,
working group members,
and Travel Team members, 2014*

For more resources, go to www.fgcquaker.org.

FGC (Friends General Conference) would like to thank the 12 Friends (from Britain Yearly Meeting), who founded QuakerQuest, for their gift and ministry in creating and honing the QuakerQuest program. FGC appreciates that the founders have asked FGC to shepherd QuakerQuest in the US and Canada.

FGC would also like to thank the Shoemaker Fund for its generous support of FGC's QuakerQuest Ministry and for the volunteer QQ Travel Team leaders who have given so much of their time.

Portions of this packet are based on the QuakerQuest Network's *QuakerQuest: How to Do It* manual and are used with permission.

Hallmarks of QuakerQuest

It is vital that the presenters use these hallmarks when preparing for QuakerQuest public sessions. We discovered that these are helpful for Friends in general, and invite Quakers to consider keeping these in mind whenever sharing with others.

Use Positive Language

- Say what Quakers do believe and do “do,” rather than what Quakers don’t believe and don’t do.

Use Very Little History

- There is time for that later.
- Seekers are usually interested first in what the Quaker way has to offer them today.
- Later, sharing about and holding classes in Quaker history will be part of integrating newcomers into the life of the meeting.

Avoid Jargon

- Jargon, like monthly meeting and First Day School, can be confusing and can indicate that Quakers are a closed group. If needed — or used — then explain the term. For example, testimonies can be explained as statements about putting faith into practice, as well as actions taken when putting faith into practice.

Don’t Criticize Other Religions or Other Branches of Quakerism

- This can come across as self-righteous and judgmental.
- There is no need to do this. Simply share what the Quaker way is.

Use Stories to Share Your Journey

- It isn’t necessary to speak on behalf of all Quakers everywhere, throughout time.
- Share from your heart.

Quaker on the Spot

Reflections from “The Friend on the Spot”

I’ve served as “Friend in the Corner” (the term we have been using for the designated Friend who will answer newcomers’ questions) several times and had very little *action*. Often I end up standing alone in the corner. Yet I know many seekers and newcomers have numerous questions about who we are, what we believe and how we go about business.

So . . . with my QuakerQuest consciousness fully engaged, I’ve wondered how we can be more welcoming of these questions — and seekers.

First, the name. Things become what we call them. Since our QuakerQuest workshop, we’ve learned the difference between *greeting* and *welcoming* and now we are more welcoming. “Friend in the Corner” indicates that this designated Friend is being pushed off in the corner and is really not that important. Are we suggesting that seekers and their questions aren’t that important either?

So we need to think about what we call this important, engaging, and informed Friend. I don’t know whether “Friend on the Spot” (FOTS) is the best name, but it is better and carries some self-effacing humor with it.

I asked Joe (who was closing the meeting) to pose a specific question that the FOTS would answer:

- What does it mean to become a member?
- How does one do it?”

The result was that I had four folks clustered about me eagerly wanting to know about

membership. I think we may have picked up a couple potential new members as a result.

So I suggest that the closer throw out a sample question for the FOTS to answer each week. It gives newcomers something to grab on to. The question should be one they may well have thought of themselves, or is at least is intriguing. Here are just a few that come to mind:

- Who acts as pastor in the meeting? What if I need help? Where do I go?
- I’ve heard that Friends are active in social justice issues. What causes is this meeting involved in? How do I get involved?
- Why is it sometimes called a *monthly* meeting? What about a *yearly* meeting?
- I’ve heard Friends speak of *clearness committees*. What are those?
- How do people decide to speak in worship? Are there *ground rules*? Can we say anything?
- What is a clerk? How is a clerk chosen?
- What books do you recommend to find out more about Friends?

Other Friends drawn to answering a particular question or simply to help out should be invited to “be on the Spot” too!

Newcomers and seekers don’t want to wait months for a *newcomers’ gathering* for answers to questions like these.

– Contributed by Rick Seifert

Greeting versus Welcoming

After Multnomah Meeting (OR) Oregon, held its FGC QuakerQuest workshop in 2011, they asked how they could be more welcoming to newcomers. Here are one member's reflections:

Our QuakerQuest workshop revealed that we needed to change what greeters were doing at the door.

- Following the workshop, we decided that what we really needed were welcomers.
- Simply greeting wasn't allowing us to forge the kind of relationships needed to make people feel truly welcomed.
- We needed at least three welcomers on any given Sunday.
- A welcomer should stay with visitors, show them around, (time allowing) and point out the library, the social hall, and the rest rooms, before taking them to the meeting room.
- Along the way, the welcomer tries to find out basic information.
 - Are you familiar with Quakers and our form of worship? If not, welcomers have a printed description at the ready.
 - What's been your experience with Friends?
 - Are there any questions I can answer?
 - If you think of anything during worship, we can talk more later.

At the rise of meeting,

the welcomers revisit the newcomers and perhaps introduce them to others who might have similar interests.

- We are mindful of the QuakerQuest observation that if newcomers make just two or three friends within six months, they are far more likely to return.

To train ourselves,

we role-played welcoming various types of visitors. The types included the:

- Shy.
- I just came to worship.
- I just moved here from a far away place where I attended a meeting.
- Super-friendly who is unaware that meeting is starting in five minutes.
- I was raised Catholic (or Baptist or Lutheran or . . .) and I'm looking for the opposite.

Some things that we learned:

Be mindful not to make assumptions about experience with or knowledge about the Quaker way based on a person's appearance, age, race or ethnicity.

Not all seekers want to be *welcomed*. One person complained that proactive welcoming in one meeting was too much for her. She just wanted to observe. It is important to *read* the kind of person who shows up, and that skill takes practice and shared experience.

Even the smallest change, such as having name tags, can be controversial, and should be brought to business meeting for approval or simply for transparency, however small and obvious those changes seem to most.

- For example, one meeting wasn't using name tags but informally decided to. It turns out that a member of the meeting has an aversion to name tags and wasn't consulted and, to everyone's surprise, left the meeting.
- However, the same meeting, realizing after a QuakerQuest workshop that it didn't have a guest book, immediately went out and bought one—and no one left because of that informal decision.

The training was a fun, eye-opening exercise that took us out of the comfort zone of being a greeter.

Our numbers have grown.

The growth has had at least something, and perhaps a lot, to do with replacing greeters with welcomers. We now have a two-person team, from Worship and Ministry, responsible for organizing and monitoring welcoming.

– *Contributed by Rick Seifert*

Welcomers, we discovered, need to be aware, open, articulate, and flexible.

Welcoming is an art, not a science.

QuakerQuest Learnings

Incorporating Newcomers

Small groups are vital for incorporating newcomers into the life of the meeting.

- Small groups can focus on Quaker learnings, such as history or business meeting, and can focus on other things, such as going to movies, spiritual journeys, poetry, and lunch.
- These should start periodically so that newcomers can join a new group and not have to wait a long time to participate in a group.
 - It can be difficult to join a small or large group that has already formed.
- Check to see if the topic/s are of interest to newcomers before offering new groups.
- Check to see if the time of the group works for the newcomers.
 - (In some meetings, in the past, groups for newcomers didn't generate any attendance and the leaders became frustrated. Consider whether newcomers were asked if the time offered was a time when they could attend.)

Tips for initiating conversations and getting to know newcomers:

- Do not ask someone why he or she came to meeting. "Why are you here?" or an equivalent question can come across as a challenge or can sound dismissive. You may be curious and want to start a conversation and be friendly. However, it can sound like, "Why are **YOU** here? **SOMEONE LIKE YOU** doesn't belong here."
- Asking which college someone attended or attends can make a barrier to inclusion.

Quakers have various levels of education and are in various professions. Keep in mind that George Fox said in 1647, "... the Lord opened unto me that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge was not enough to fit and qualify men to be ministers of Christ."

- Use general or open-ended statements or questions, followed by listening, to begin a conversation. Conversation starters that might be helpful include:
 - It's nice to see you here. I'm [give your name].
 - We have refreshments in the other room. Would you like to join me there?
 - It's really cold/hot/rainy today. I love/hate this type of weather.
 - We have a class starting soon on x. Is that something that interests you?
 - Worship today is/isn't typical.
- Wait several months before asking if someone would like to join a committee; and, be open to including newcomers when they express interest in joining a committee.
- Be sure to welcome all newcomers equally. Be nice but not effusive.
 - For example, telling a young adult in the first week or month of attendance how valuable he or she is and offering to make him or her clerk of a committee is not, in fact, welcoming.
 - Clustering around the only person of color to assure her or him that she or he is particularly welcome is not, in fact, welcoming.
- Do not assume that a person of color is new to the Quaker way.

A Kitchen Welcome

Or, how we put learnings from QuakerQuest insights into practice in one meeting

We found the coffee and directions for making decaf and regular

A newcomer who seemed quiet, and who appeared to feel a little awkward, began attending our meeting regularly. I remembered that the real heart of a meeting is often in the kitchen. So after meeting I asked if she would like to have a tour of the kitchen and see how we set up the food and clean up after the meal. She was interested, so we took a look around, at the sink, soap, drying rack. We looked at the storage places for plates, silverware, and glasses. We found the coffee and directions for making decaf and regular, and found out how to move the serving table into the worship room to act as the buffet.

That was about 2 months ago. This friend kept attending. Last Sunday, I found her in the kitchen, elbow deep in soapy water, washing away. No one had asked—she just felt at home enough to do what was needed. How do you think she had come to feel about the meeting?

Becoming in the know can help an attender feel that they belong

Sometimes we think it's more polite to serve our visitors and newer attenders. Yet, it's the people who know how the kitchen works who seem to be right at home with Quakers.

Becoming one of the group in the know can help an attender feel that they belong rather than that they are a visitor. It might be to work on the yard with Building and Grounds, or hang out with young friends to assist the main teacher. It might be helping set up chairs, or collect hymnals.

I asked what she did for fun

By the way, sitting with this newer friend at lunch, I asked what she did for fun (one of my favorite questions—rather than where do you live, or where do you work, because some folks have neither a house nor job). Turns out this friend has been in a collage class, and had a photo of her latest collage on her phone. She also mentioned that she hopes to move to a different apartment in order to have a kitten. Immediately, there were connections with all those around us, and friendly conversations and connections ensued.

Consider the “ministry of introduction to the kitchen”

You might want to consider the “ministry of introduction to the kitchen,” as you find many small and simple ways to welcome new folks into the life of the meeting.

— *Contributed by Gita Larson*

Adult Classes

Many meetings discern after the initial QuakerQuest workshop that they want to learn more about the Quaker way and about each other before considering public sessions. Some meetings decide to hold public sessions and want to learn more about the Quaker way and about each other before holding those sessions. One way to do this is to have classes.

The goals of classes can include:

- Getting to know each other while discussing something important.
- Studying texts or using curriculum to learn about various aspects of Quaker faith and practice.
- Considering how each person understands aspects of the Quaker way and what that means for them.
- Valuing the different experiences and understandings that exist in the meeting.
- Incorporating newcomers into the life of the meeting.

Some tips for classes:

- Small classes (6–8) can work well for getting to know each other and rotating leadership.
- Consider what time of day and which day works best for those whom you are hoping will be in the class.
- Ask others, particularly newcomers, what topics they are interested in.
- Consider having multiple classes each week on different topics and/or short term classes (2–4 weeks for each class) that enable different people to participate.
- Offer topics on Quakerism as well as spirituality in general.
- Offer topics that aren't specifically religious (knitting, hiking, bread-making, etc.)
- Make sure that there are interactive portions and times for sharing during every class.

FGC Resources

FGC has a number of resources, including Friends who can lead workshops and retreats on a variety of topics (through the FGC Traveling Ministries Program) as well as additional tips and curricula for adults and children at www.fgcquaker.org.

QuakerQuest Learnings

Advertising Works

*People come to QuakerQuest public sessions as a fairly risk-free way to check out Quakers. And, people **will come to other events at the meeting**, especially if you use the tips below to give **visibility to the meeting in general**, not just for public sessions.*

- A vibrant, inviting website is essential.
 - List the time of worship and a picture of people on the home page.
 - Do not use a picture of a meeting house or space that does not have people in it. That is not inviting to most newcomers.
 - FGC can help get your meeting on the web. Visit quakercloud.org for details.
- Meetings should consider a regular round of advertising for different programs that are offered or for the beginning of a new series.
 - Consider advertising widely at the start of a new series of classes or even the start of one new class. For example:
 - Walk and Talk, a new adult class at the VeryFriendly Meeting begins this Sunday morning at 9:00, followed by worship at 10:30. It will be held every Sunday in September. The first topic: Spirituality in Nature. Join us, rain or shine. You are welcome here.
- Give the time for worship on all publicity.
- Language that is helpful in advertising:
 - **You are welcome here.** This is much more welcoming than “All are welcome” or “Everyone is welcome.”
 - **Welcoming and Affirming.** This is a way

of saying that the meeting is welcoming and affirming to LGBTQ people. (LGBTQ is the acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people.)

- Use this language and symbol only if your meeting is welcoming and affirming.
- Find ways to **welcome groups** that may not be in the majority in your meeting.
 - Consider having a rainbow flag on the website and/or prominently displayed at the meetinghouse.
 - If there are pictures on the walls, be sure they represent different ages, genders, and racial/ethnic backgrounds, or create new ones.
- For more ideas, visit fgcquaker.org/services/quaker-quest/publicity-quaker-quest
- Patience is usually rewarded.
 - Newcomers could come to worship any time after the publicity begins – for QuakerQuest public sessions or for other events – and for years afterwards.
 - Often, the second series of three or four public sessions gets a larger attendance than the first couple of weeks. When this happens, it is usually because of on-going and increased advertising over the six or eight weeks of public sessions.
 - This learning is relevant for any event, not just QuakerQuest events.

There can be a lag of months or years after a program before anyone new comes to worship.

Questions for QuakerQuest In-Reach

Cincinnati Friends Meeting (Friends United Meeting) decided to offer ways for people to share with each other as part of its efforts to deepen spiritual connections, after their QuakerQuest workshop and while preparing to hold QuakerQuest public sessions. Each topic was offered four times to ensure that everyone had the chance to attend a session on each topic. The meeting developed this particular process, the topics, and the questions.

Faith

1. What do you believe about God, Jesus, etc.?
2. Can you be a Quaker and believe differently?

Corporate Practice

1. What happens internally during meeting for worship?
2. What do you think that worshipping together does for you and others?
3. What is the effect of a prepared message?

Individual Practice

1. What are your spiritual practices?
2. What difference do those practices make?

Ethics and/or Morals*

1. What are acceptable/unacceptable sexual practices? How do we answer such questions?

2. What do you do when conflicting views both feel they are in the Light/are right?
3. Is there anything which would get one disowned by Cincinnati Friends Meeting?
4. How does being a Quaker affect what you do when you don't know what to do?

Personal History

1. What brought you to Quakerism and/or to Cincinnati Friends Meeting?
2. What brings you back?
3. What was your experience the first few times or months?

Community

1. What do you feel you contribute to the life of the meeting?
2. Is it OK to come to meeting until I am sure I want to be a Quaker?
3. Do I have to join, or serve on a committee?
4. What are the differences among visitor, attenders, and members?

Other

1. What do you know about Quaker theology, history, and practice? What do you think is important to know?
2. What do you dislike about Quakerism?
3. What do you find challenging or what do you fear?

*The meeting is an "open and affirming" congregation and says so on its homepage. These questions are alive for the meeting as a member of Friends United Meeting.
<http://cincinnati.friends.org/index.html>

Add Water and Stir First Day School

What do we do when children show up in our small meeting?

What does a small meeting without a regular children's First Day School/ Religious Education program do when children of any age show up? Preparation gave one meeting the confidence to welcome young visitors, and have something for them to do the minute they walked into the meeting.

We had read a short comment in *Friends Journal* by an adult friend about her experience in a small meeting with only herself as a young Friend attending for much of her elementary school years.

- She said that several Friends, just a few, would sit with her, read interesting books or passages from books, and have conversations about life, and about how to live in her world. They would talk about problems or opportunities at school or with friends or at home. She remembers the warmth and concern, and fun, of these times.

We wanted to be welcoming to any young Friend who happened our way. We wanted to be prepared.

- We purchased a large (3'6") plastic drawers set on coasters, and filled it with "quiet" toys for different ages, books, art supplies, a floor blanket/quilt, etc. We asked the kindergarten where our meeting was meeting to let us store it there out of their way. After all, our rental agreement included storage space.

- As children came, we'd wheel out the rolling bin, and depending on their age, we or they would pull open the drawers to find the surprises just for them.

While our numbers were never "big," the impact of preparation and welcome, we think, has kept several families connected to the meeting community for over a decade.

- Our children were invited to join us at rise of meeting, and describe what they had done in First Day School.
 - A remarkable thing happened: those same young children, as they grew up, continued to lift their voices in our meeting and in other arenas. They had experienced being listened to with great respect and enthusiasm and love, and they knew their words, thoughts, feelings, and voices mattered.
- Some of these children helped make food for hungry folks who the meeting helped feed one Sunday a month for over a decade. Sometimes they spread pimiento cheese on bread and put lunch bags together. Sometimes they chopped and stirred to make soups.

What might work well for current and future children in your meeting?

For resources about building or strengthening children's and youth programming, including using *Sparkling Still*, go to <http://www.fgcquaker.org/deepen/religious-education>

— *Contributed by Gita Larson*

Moving Forward Together as a Meeting

Circling Back to the Big Questions

I found that meeting communities I've visited for QuakerQuest workshops often circled back to what I call Big Questions. How might these be used for fuel for discussions and discernment?

How ready are we for change?

- Is our meeting ready to embrace change?
- Is the whole meeting willing and ready to take on the work of welcoming and following through with newcomers?
- Are we, as a meeting, willing to engage with new media and social media as a means of invitation and welcoming?

How open are we to various types of differences?

- Are seekers who do not identify as Christian welcome here?
- Does the leadership in our meeting foster a sense of welcoming by making discussions and plans inclusive and transparent?

What are we hoping for?

- What is the difference between being faithful and being successful? What might faithful look like in our meeting?
- Do we as a meeting community need to have a visioning session to share the hopes and dreams of those already in our community, both as a valuable process and to focus on common goals and priorities?

– *Contributed by Kathy Slattery*

I'd like to Join the Meeting

Variations of stories like these have been shared on numerous occasions:

Regular Attender Hi, I'm thinking of joining the meeting.

Member, shaking her head What?! You've only been coming for 2 [or 5 or 10] years?

Regular Attender Hi, this is my first time at meeting and I've found my spiritual home. How do I join?

Member, grinning Can you write your letter this week? Nominating Committee's been looking for a new clerk of the meeting for several months and you'd do just fine.

Regular Attender I've been attending meeting for five years, clerked several committees, and now am ready to join. What do I need to do?

Member, sighing sadly Well, it entails a lot of responsibility and commitment. Why don't you let me know in a few years if you still feel like this is the place for you?

New, and regular, Attender I've been coming every week for the last six months and feel like this is my spiritual home. And, I read *Faith and Practice* like you suggested.

Member I'm so glad.

New, and regular, Attender I'd like to become a member.

Member, aghast, and stepping back from the attender What?! It takes years to decide that. Keep coming, participating, reading more books, doing the work — if you are sure in four or five years, then we can discuss if this might be right for you.

Consider these responses, instead:

Regular Attender Hi, I'm thinking of joining the meeting.

Member, smiling That's fantastic! Tell me more.

Regular Attender Hi, this is my first time at meeting and I've found my spiritual home. How do I join?

Member, joyfully I'd like to hear more about your experience. Do you want to grab some coffee and join me in the fellowship room?

Regular Attender I've been attending meeting for five years, clerked several committees, and now am ready to join. What do I need to do?

Member, bubbling with joy I'm so glad! Let's go together to the clerk of Care and Council so that you can start the process. Let me know if there's any way that I can be helpful to you.

New, and regular, Attender I've been coming every week for the last six months and feel like this is my spiritual home. And, I read *Faith and Practice* like you suggested.

Member, nodding I'm so glad.

New, and regular, Attender I'd like to become a member.

Member, happily That's awesome! Let me introduce you to the clerk of Care and Council so that you can start the process.

You are Welcome Here!

We come together in worship

- to listen to God;
- to know and be known by God;
- to grow in our faith;
- to be changed;
- to support each other; and
- to help one another do what God asks us to do.

Our time together looks like

- sitting quietly together;
- listening if someone is moved by the Spirit to speak;
- including children for a time before or after a children's program;
- shaking hands when worship ends; and greeting those around us.

You are welcome to join us as you are. Dress as you feel comfortable.

We believe that every person is loved by the Divine Spirit. There are Quakers of all ages, religious backgrounds, races, education, sexual orientations, gender identities, and classes.

Please feel free to ask the person who ends meeting any questions you might have after Worship.

1216 ARCH STREET, 2B
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19107
WWW.FGCQUAKER.ORG



Sample of cards for newcomers, available online

There are six cards for newcomers:

- You are Welcome Here!
- Quaker Worship
- What Do Quakers Believe?
- How a Quaker Meeting Works
- Quaker Testimonies
- Quakers and Prayer

To print or order, go to:

<http://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/newcomers-cards>

Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts, which are the leadings of God.

— Advices, 26.01

Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain, 1964

QuakerQuest in the United States and Canada
is a project of Friends General Conference

