

# Growing Our Meetings through Inreach, Outreach, and Integrating Newcomers

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Many Quakers deeply long to see our meetings grow – to experience deep and grounded worship, to participate in a thriving and active community life that embraces children, young adults, and diverse voices, and to share the gift of Quaker practice and faith with the wider world. To grow our meetings, to increase the vitality and voice of the Religious Society of Friends, calls for a holistic approach to growth. The *Grow Our Meetings* toolkit is designed to address three distinct components of meeting growth: Growing Our Spirits, Growing Our Presence, and Growing Our Quaker Community.

**Growing Our Spirits** (Inreach) – strengthening the meeting community, sharing personal journeys, and becoming welcoming and vibrant

**Growing Our Presence** (Outreach) – becoming known in the local community through publicity and inviting seekers in

**Growing our Quaker Community** (Integrating Newcomers) – welcoming visitors and accompanying visitors from newcomer to Quaker

The three components of growth – inreach, outreach, and integrating newcomers – are interconnected and equally important in supporting the health and vitality of our meetings.

Participating in inreach and spiritual deepening can be a transformative experience for both long-time Friends and those newcomers stepping in the door for the first time. Newcomers recognize the energy of a meeting that offers strong and deep inreach opportunities.

The ways we tell our story to each other and in the community through outreach shapes our own experience of connection and worship. Being intentional about outreach and welcoming newcomers into the Quaker Way can serve to foster a meeting environment that provides spiritual hospitality to both visitors and ourselves. In the process of preparing for outreach, meetings often experience deep spiritual sharing and take steps toward being more welcoming and inclusive of newcomers.

The simple act of thinking about welcoming newcomers, of getting ready to receive them, and of preparing to integrate them into the life of the meeting, can give new life to a meeting. For many meetings, this work may spark the development of spiritual nurture opportunities, new welcoming practices, improvements to the meeting house, or a strengthening of programming for children and families.

## **Inreach**

Inreach is about meeting the spiritual needs of the people who are already part of our meeting communities. Vibrant Quaker meetings share grounded worship, deep personal connections, and opportunities for exploring spirituality and faith in action, and inreach provides opportunities for this vibrancy to grow. Inreach contributes to growing our meetings because the visitors that walk through our doors can perceive the vitality, spiritual depth, and sense of connection we share, leading some of them to think, “Ah yes, this could be my spiritual home.”

There is great power in storytelling. To share our faith is to grow in our faith. Sharing our personal spiritual journeys builds community and invites us to know each other “in that which is eternal.” Making time for building these types of connections and being intentional about inviting Spirit into the activities we share as a meeting will increase our sense of knowing each other, nurturing the meeting and sharing a spiritual experience together.

## **Outreach**

Outreach is a component of meeting growth. Seekers want to know about the relevance of the Quaker way in their lives today. Outreach is bigger than advertising, publicity, and hosting public events, although these things are important and powerful. Effective outreach is about learning to speak about the Quaker way and our own experiences as Quakers, as well as living as “patterns and examples” in our daily lives in the wider community. In this way, folks in our communities can come to know that Quakers exist, Quakers do good work, Quaker process *works*, and Quaker spirituality offers a powerful gift for the world today.

Successful outreach is not about Quaker history or telling the whole Quaker story. It’s about telling your Quaker story in your community, in a way that is open, invitational, and authentic. Through outreach, we invite others to come through our doors and see if the Quaker spiritual path as we live it is right for them.

## **Welcoming & Integrating Newcomers**

Many meetings have a regular stream of visitors walking through their doors on Sunday mornings, but wonder why visitors don’t stick around and become part of the meeting community. A key component of meeting growth is being intentional about responding to the needs of newcomers with grace and welcoming, guiding them through the process of practicing the Quaker way and offering opportunities for building meaningful connections within the meeting.

Welcoming meetings invite newcomers to learn about the Quaker way, Quaker processes, and Quaker worship, AND to build connections and relationships with Friends in the meeting. Inreach activities or renewal opportunities that allow *everyone* in the meeting to explore their spirituality and the Quaker way together can meet the needs of newcomers and be a gift to the entire community. After all, we’re *all* on a spiritual journey!