

Guidelines for Small Groups

Small groups can be a wonderful exercise for Friends to listen deeply, without judgment or criticism, to each other and to the Inward Teacher who is within each person. Small groups create a space where people from your worship group can listen to each other into a deeper understanding of the divine Presence within and among every person. Such listening is a manifestation of love. This loving listening creates a space in which it is safe to let go of old props and ideas and to be open to new insights which the Spirit offers. A good size for a small group is about 4 to 8 people who agree to meet regularly over a period of time.

The guidelines are simple:

- Begin with silent prayer, that each person present will be open to hear God in him or herself and in the others there, and that God would be present and teach us what God wants those gathered to learn.
- For your first gathering, you might want to begin by answering out of the silence the question “What was your childhood or early experience of God/religion/spirituality?” Invite those present to speak when they feel ready, making certain to leave a space of silence after the previous speaker so that the group can savor and be fed by what was been offered.
- In the silence between speakers, participants should ask God to show them where they should pay particular attention. If you find someone's words jarring or disquieting, you should silently pray that God give the speaker what he or she needs, and gives you whatever understanding God feels you need at this point.
- It is fine for participants to ask a brief question for clarification or to briefly comment to affirm or encourage the speaker. Responses should be loving and develop from a prayerful silence. Criticisms, corrections, or advice are to be avoided.
- When everyone in the group has had an opportunity to speak, take time for a general summary that includes briefly articulating common themes or experiences.
- Confidentiality is important. Whatever is said within the group needs to stay within the group and not be repeated to others outside the group. Gossip, even well-meaning, kills trust. Trust is necessary for creating a safe place in which people are willing to speak of that which is very close to their hearts.
- For the second meeting, the group might address “How do you experience God at work in your life now?” The process outlined above is repeated.
- At subsequent meetings, the group may want to settle on using the old Quaker query (or some variation) “How hast the Lord dealt with thee since last we were together?” The idea behind this query is to enable spiritual growth and to learn to pay attention in love to what the Spirit is doing within each Friend, to recognize and respond to the subtle (or

not so subtle) guidance that is received, and to share with other Friends how this is working.

Such a small group provides a specific discipline and reason to keep paying attention to our spiritual lives. Speaking of experiences of God and of things of the Spirit with other Friends helps to encourage them, validate them, and make them more real. Hearing one another's experiences helps all to see and identify God's work. It enlarges Friends spiritual imaginations and ability to experience the ways that God interacts with God's people.

Connect

Connect with FGC:

- FGC has resources to support new and existing groups
- FGC can help a group connect with other local Quaker groups
- FGC can help you get listed on QuakerFinder.org to help others find you

FGC staff and volunteers are happy to talk with you about this, or any other issue, your meeting or worship group is facing. Please contact us by emailing us or phoning 215-561-1700.

This document was downloaded from the website of Friends General Conference. Explore the many resources and opportunities we offer for Quakers, Quaker meetings, and all interested individuals. Go to www.fgcquaker.org.

