

Some Thoughts on Identifying and Welcoming Newcomers

Friends, as we live up to our name, want visitors to feel welcome. First, of course, it is necessary to know who is a newcomer. Various meetings have found other ways to identify and meet the needs of newcomers. Below are some tips growing out of their experiences. You might want to try the ones that most fit with your meeting's culture – and even try some new things that might stretch you a bit.

Tips

Welcoming

- Have someone designated to arrive at the worship space/meetinghouse at least fifteen minutes early to greet newcomers and regular members and attenders.
 - Have a packet of Quaker materials assembled for newcomers. You might want to use the “Newcomers Cards” from FGC.
<http://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/newcomers-cards>
 - Be prepared to give basic information about the meeting space – where to sit, where social hour will be, where the bathrooms are, and so forth.
 - Have a guest book for newcomers to sign. Invite them to write their name, address, phone number and email as they feel comfortable.

Introductions

Learning the names of newcomers is crucial. The important thing is to do it in a way that does not make them feel singled out. Here are some ways other meetings have handled introductions.

- Use nametags. Members and regular attenders could have reusable, printed name tags. Newcomers would be invited to take a blank name tag and marker to create their own for the day.
- Some small meetings join hands to form a circle after worship and invite everyone to share their name and a to express joys and concerns. Include children in this.
- The clerk of larger meetings often welcomes newcomers, announces that members of Ministry and Counsel will be holding red mugs during the social hour, and encourages newcomers to approach them with questions.
- If your meeting is too large to have everyone participate in full introductions, you might ask members of Ministry and Counsel to introduce themselves and invite newcomers to approach them during the social hour with any questions they may have.

- Invite Friends seated on the left and right of newcomers to take the responsibility for introducing them at the appropriate time.
- Have your welcomers learn newcomers' names at the door and introduce them at the appropriate time

Social Time

A social time after meeting can be especially tricky for newcomers. Forego the chance to only visit with Friends and/or conduct some quick business. Rather, use this opportunity to connect with visitors.

- Welcome newcomers and ask them if they have any questions about Quakers
- Speak to them about their interests and then introduce them to others in the meeting who share that interest.
- If they enjoyed the worship, specifically invite them to return for worship again.
- Invite newcomers to an upcoming meeting event, such as an adult study class or social gathering.

Follow-up

During the week following a visit, send a letter or email thanking the newcomers for coming to meeting and invite them to return. Your group will want to assign this responsibility to a specific person, group of people or committee.

When newcomers do return, make certain to let them know that you are happy to see them again.

There are many ways to make newcomers feel at home. Think of ways that your meeting can authentically welcome visitors in a way that includes them, instead of singling them out in manner that suggests they don't belong. When Friends respond to new attenders in the same warm, generous spirit with which we care for guests in our own home, all reports of lonely visitors staring into coffee-cups will come to an end. The not so simple act of hospitality has amazing power.

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.