

You Are Welcome Here!

90-minute Interest Group Agenda

Materials Needed:

- ✓ *You Are Welcome Here!* booklets, one for each participant and more to take home
- ✓ Flipchart, markers, and tape
- ✓ Sample *Cards for Newcomers*

Instructions for using this Agenda

The words in *italics* are meant to be read aloud, but feel free, of course, to speak in a way that feels natural to you.

For a 60-minute session, omit the *Eyes of the Seeker* exercise and consider shortening other exercises to best fit the needs of the group.

(10 minutes) Introductions and Welcome

Start with a brief period of centering worship. Introduce yourself.

Share: *The You Are Welcome Here! booklet is a collection of learnings we've gathered from our seven-plus years of supporting meetings through the QuakerQuest process in the U.S. and Canada. We know that meetings often deeply desire to be welcoming, open places of spiritual nurture for each other and visitors, and the You Are Welcome Here! resource is a way to share great ideas that can be easily adopted in meetings of any size.*

Our goals during today's session are:

- *to explore what it means to be a welcoming community*
- *to look at our meetings through the eyes of newcomers*
- *and to share good ideas for incorporating visitors into the spiritual, social, and organizational life of our meeting.*

Go around the circle for introductions. Each person gives name and meeting.

(15 minutes) What Does Welcoming Look Like?

Prompt: *Think about times in your life when you felt the most welcomed. This can be at a Quaker meeting or in another setting. What did people do to help you know you were welcomed? What worked well? How did it feel?*

Share with a partner for 6 minutes (3 minutes each).

Large group brainstorm: “What does welcoming look like? What does welcoming feel like?” Record on flip chart paper

(15 minutes) The Eyes of a Seeker

Explain: *Now we’re going to take a moment to look at your meeting through a new lens. We’re going to take a mental walk through the meetinghouse on a Sunday morning, looking at the space and the meeting culture as a newcomer might experience them.*

Please close your eyes and imagine a person who lives in your community and is on a spiritual journey. This person is seeking a spiritual home and a community of like-hearted folks, and wonders if the Quaker Way might be a good fit.

- *How does this person, someone unfamiliar with your meeting, find information about who you are and the faith you share? (pause)*
- *What happens when this person first arrives on the street? (pause) When they walk through the door? (pause) Who is there? (pause) How does the visitor find their way?*
- *What do they see in the meetinghouse? What does the space look like? (pause) Is it organized, cared for, clean? (pause)*
- *If the visitor has brought children, how are they greeted? (pause)*
- *How does a newcomer learn about what’s happening during meeting for worship? (pause)*
- *What happens after worship? How are introductions made? (pause) What ‘languages’ are spoken? (pause)*
- *Who speaks to newcomers after meeting? (pause) What are those conversations like?*
- *How are visitors or new attenders invited into the life of the community? (pause)*

Now please open your eyes and reflect on what you saw during the visualization. What did you notice? Did you encounter any barriers to welcoming and inclusion? What are the growing edges in your home meetings around this issue?

Please turn to a different partner and share one thing that works well in your meeting and one challenge you noticed during the visualization. (4 minutes)

This exercise of seeing through the eyes of a newcomer can be useful for the whole meeting as a form of self-reflection and to prompt small adjustments that can make a big difference.

(25 minutes) Explore the *You Are Welcome Here!* booklet

[The YAWH booklet has ten articles listed on the Contents page on the inside cover. When assigning articles, do not include the *Introduction* or *Hallmarks of QuakerQuest*.]

For a large group (20+ participants): Divide into ten groups. Each group reads one article and discusses what they took away from the article and how it might apply to their home meeting. Invite a representative from each group to share a brief summary with the larger group.

For medium groups (10-20), have each individual read one article. (Page 8 and Page 12 are shorter pieces and can be combined. The longest article is on pages 4-5). Some articles will be read by multiple people. After reading, invite participants to come together into groups of 3-4, in which they briefly summarize their article and discuss what they took away from the reading and how it might apply to their home meeting. Invite a representative from each group to share a brief summary of the conversation with the larger group.

For small groups (fewer than 10 participants), divide into either 2 or 3 smaller groups.

- ✓ Ask one group to read *Greeting versus Welcoming* (page 4-5)
- ✓ One group reads *A Kitchen Welcome* (page 7)
- ✓ If there is a third group, they will read *Questions for QuakerQuest In-reach* (page 10).

[Or the articles of your choice that seem to best reflect the concerns of the individuals present.] Each group reads one article and discusses what they took away from the article and how it might apply to their home meeting. Invite a representative from each group to share a brief summary with the larger group.

If the groups need prompting, offer the following discussion questions:

1. How might the ideas presented in this booklet work well for our meeting?
2. What ideas in this book might not be so helpful in our community?
3. What kinds of barriers can we remove so that we as a meeting can be more welcoming?
4. How do the ideas in this booklet reflect the qualities of welcoming we listed earlier?

Conclude the discussion: *We've been talking today about seekers, visitors, and newcomers, yet I also want to invite you to consider that there is value in adopting welcoming practices, regardless of whether visitors ever come through the door of your meetinghouse. What impact might this have on your sense of spiritual connection and community?*

(15 minutes) Good Ideas and Great Practices

We know that there are already great things happening in meetings everywhere and that the You Are Welcome Here! booklet only captures a few. What other ideas do you have for welcoming and including newcomers? What practices have you seen work well in your meeting or elsewhere? Let's share the "Good Ideas and Great Practices" for welcoming newcomers that we're already implementing in our home meetings, so that we can all take with us a list of exciting possibilities.

Record on flip chart paper: Good Ideas and Great Practices

If you need to get the conversation started, here are some examples to share from other meetings:

- ✓ The Quaker Minute -- after worship every week, someone gives a one minute explanation of a Quaker topics, such as clearness, gathered meeting, leading, weighty Friend
- ✓ Offer a training on how to be more welcoming
- ✓ Once a month, follow meeting for worship with an opportunity to talk about what happens during worship and how to center down
- ✓ Have a crafts table at coffee hour to include kids and encourage intergenerational connections
- ✓ Introduce yourselves to newcomers, not the other way around
- ✓ Give Ministry & Counsel members red cups to carry during fellowship so they're easy to identify when people want to talk
- ✓ Instead of standing for introductions, everyone walks across the room to greet someone they don't know very well

(5 minutes) Share Cards for Newcomers with printing instructions

The *You are Welcome Here!* newcomer card example is on the back cover of the booklet. These have been written in accessible language and all six are available as a PDF download on FGC's website. They are a free resource that can be printed and shared with visitors.

(5 minutes) Thank you and closing

Encourage everyone present to take copies of the booklet for every member of their meeting.