

Preparing for Outreach: Meetinghouse Walk-through Exercise

This exercise is designed to invite meeting members and attenders to view the meetinghouse through a new lens. It gets people out of their seats and moving and can energize a meeting to consider ways to make its space more welcoming and inviting for each other and for visitors.

This activity can take between 30-60 minutes.

Begin with a moment of gratitude for the hard work of the Friends who have carried the responsibility of tending to the meetinghouse as members of the Facilities committee or the House & Grounds committee. Thank them for the many ways that they have created a sense of beauty and welcome in the meetinghouse, especially given constraints of time and resources.

Divide into groups of three and invite Friends to imagine themselves as seekers looking for a spiritual home. The key questions to consider are:

- *What is it like to visit the meetinghouse for the first time?*
- *What do newcomers see in this space that those of us who have been around for a while may not notice anymore?*
- *In what ways can we make our space and our practices more inviting and welcoming for visitors and each other?*

Point out that this focus of this exercise is to celebrate what's working well and share good ideas for going forward.

Send the groups outside to the street and ask them to walk toward the building with their 'newcomer eyes' on and see what they notice. If there are multiple ways to approach the meetinghouse, from a front walkway and a back parking lot, for example, or from multiple streets if the meetinghouse is on a corner, make sure to assign groups to each approach.

Towards the end of their 20 minute "tour," each group should confer and report back with what they experienced and what suggestions they may have for enhancing the welcome for newcomers.

As it may be helpful, refer each group to the questions below. Or use them during the full group discussion if no one mentions an important area or concept. In all of this, be sure to allow the groups to have their own experience and come to their own conclusions. That said, these queries can be of help when thoughtfully used.

- ✓ How does someone unfamiliar with our meeting find information about who we are and the faith we share?

- ✓ Are directions to the meeting clear? What about public transportation?
- ✓ What about way-finding signage? How many “*Do not . . .*” signs do we encounter?
- ✓ What does the sign on the meetinghouse say? Is it clear that visitors are welcome? Is the wording understandable to a visitor who does not speak “Quakerese”? Could phrases like “Monthly Meeting,” “First Day,” or “Religious Society of Friends” be translated into contemporary language?
- ✓ Is it clear where visitors can park? Is it clear what entrance to use?
- ✓ How accessible is the meetinghouse to people with limited mobility or other special needs?
- ✓ Does the meetinghouse look well cared for? Would a fresh coat of paint be useful? How's the roof? What do the landscaping, exterior, and interior of the building say about how the meeting cares about its property?
- ✓ On a Sunday morning, who's welcoming at the door? What do they say? Is there more than one person? Did the welcoming go beyond a greeting? Would a brief tour of the building be helpful, if there is time?
- ✓ What's the first thing you see when you enter? What do you want people to see? Is the area clean? Well lit? Cluttered?
- ✓ Is there a welcoming brochure? Other resources about the Quaker Way, Meeting for Worship, Programming for Children? Is the language approachable and inclusive?
- ✓ How are children made welcome? What is a "First Day School" anyway?
- ✓ Are the restrooms easy to find? What about the coffee? Is it clear where Meeting for Worship takes place? Is there adequate signage inside the Meetinghouse?
- ✓ Are there instructions as to what form our Quaker worship takes? How does a newcomer learn what is happening during Meeting for Worship?
- ✓ Are newcomers alerted that they will be invited to stand and introduce themselves briefly? Is this optional?
- ✓ Are seekers acquainted with the library and various brochures? Are they given the newsletter? How does a newcomer learn about ways to get involved in the life of the meeting?
- ✓ What does the organization of our space say about our priorities as a community? Is history our priority? Spirituality? Activism? Outreach? Youth? Community?

When all groups have gathered after the tour, spend 20-30 minutes discussing your observations, suggestions, and next steps. Encourage a positive and constructive conversation by focusing on what's working well and good ideas for going forward. Again, be sure to care for the House & Grounds committee by highlighting what is good about the meeting's facilities and thanking them for all the work they and others have done for the meeting. Similarly, it may be appropriate to honor the Friends who have gone before us and whose legacy can be seen in the artifacts, artwork, signage, furniture, flowerbeds, and design choices throughout the meetinghouse.

Contributed by Rick Seifert, Multnomah Meeting, and John Holding, Lopez Island Preparative Meeting. Some questions adapted from the *Center for Congregations Resource Consulting Guide*, 2010.