

Integrating Newcomers: Newcomer Timeline Activity

This activity is designed to encourage Friends to think about ways to welcome and meet the varying needs of newcomers at different points in time.

This activity will take between 45-60 minutes.

Materials: flipchart paper, markers, tape

Background for Facilitators: Integrating newcomers as a component of meeting growth. 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 meeting the needs of newcomers and guiding them through the process of understanding the Quaker Way and building connections within the meeting.

Discussion: *Raise your hand if you've ever been a newcomer or visitor to a Quaker meeting or church.*

In pairs, take a moment to **think about how you as an individual moved from being a newcomer to seeing your meeting as your spiritual home.** What did the meeting do that was helpful? How did you learn about what it means to be Quaker? How did you learn about Quaker history and practices? How did you build relationships with other Friends? What was less-than-helpful? If you were raised Quaker, think about a time when you sought to become part of a new meeting or a non-Quaker community, or, think about the things your meeting does to help newcomers become integrated.

Share in pairs for 10 minutes, then **join** with another pair and share with each other what you've noticed and heard.

On a whiteboard or on side-by-side sheets of flipchart paper, draw the timeline below and label it "**Needs of Newcomers**" [You will be recording responses in five columns, one under each category]

... 0 ... 1A ... 1B ... 3-4 visits ... 6 months ...

Think about a newcomer to a Quaker meeting at these different points in time. Zero is someone who is considering a visit to a Quaker meeting. 1A is someone who is walking through the door for the first time on a Sunday morning. 1B is immediately after worship, most likely during coffee hour, if they stay for coffee hour that first time. We also have a newcomer who has attended Meeting for Worship 3-4 times or who has been a consistent presence over about six months.

What does this newcomer need at each of these points in time?

Let's break into five small groups. Each group will discuss the needs of the newcomer at one point in time. Think about what an individual might need in terms of:

[List these five items on the wall so that groups can refer to them during their discussions]

- *Information about the meeting*
- *Connections within the meeting*
- *Opportunities for spiritual deepening*
- *Information about the Quaker Way (Faith & Practices)*
- *Treatment from folks in the meeting*

You can assume that your newcomer is new to the Quaker Way (not a transfer from another meeting or Friends School).

Divide participants into five groups and assign each group one of the points on the timeline to discuss. Suggest that it might be helpful to have one person record the group's thoughts. After about ten minutes, return to the large group and **ask each group to share** the top 3-5 things they listed as needs of newcomers at different points in time. Some examples might include:

Zero: Clear information on a website about how to find the meeting, times of worship, what to expect during worship, what Quakers believe, how to dress, to know that they are welcome to visit...

1A: warm greeting with handshake and a smile, Welcome packet about worship, activities in the life of the meeting, "when to speak in worship" diagram, directions to the bathroom/worship room/coffee, Cards for Newcomers (FGC printable resource), opportunities for children.

1B: access to a collection of materials for Newcomers that give basic and more in-depth resources on Quakers and the meeting, depending on familiarity with Quakers, interests & or the meeting itself. Introductions to Friends with similar interests. To be met where they are, with sensitivity and a welcoming smile, and not to be pressured...

3-4 Visits: invitations into the life of the meeting, introductions to Friends with similar interests, opportunities for service to the meeting (help with prepping food for potluck), opportunities to learn about the Quaker Way without pressure

6 months: talking about membership or committee service without pressure, invitations to participate in small groups, opportunities for friendship and connection. (Always be open to possible conversation about these deeper commitments, especially in terms of having info available, but most likely not bringing it up before someone has become a regular attender unless interest has been expressed.)

Now, let's think about a newcomer who has been a member or attender of another meeting, attended a Friends School or Quaker college, served as a volunteer with Quaker Voluntary Service, or is otherwise familiar with the Quaker Way. Looking at what we've already written, what might be the needs of this person? How are this person's needs different than someone who is totally new to the Quaker Way?

Participants might point out a newcomer with a Quaker background might need the same information and introductions as a newcomer with no Quaker background, but at a different pace. A newcomer with a Quaker background may be more ready to jump into inreach groups or committee work sooner than someone who is being introduced to the basics of Quaker faith & practice.

Notes for Facilitators:

- ✓ At all points, Friends need to listen intently to newcomers to see what they want, what they think they need, and how they want to be treated.
- ✓ We can assume that all newcomers are on a spiritual journey and many may have had deep spiritual experiences before walking through our doors.
- ✓ When someone new walks in the door, we need to ask gentle, open-ended questions rather than assume someone is or is not already a Quaker.