

# Activities: Spiritual Hospitality for Newcomers

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This set of activities prompts Friends to begin to see with the eyes of a newcomer and invites them to remember what it felt like when they were new or returned to a Quaker meeting. It reminds Friends of the special gifts that the Quaker way has to share with the world and encourages participants to consider how best to meet the needs of newcomers who begin visiting their meeting. The conversations sparked during this exercise can motivate and guide Friends toward creative forms of outreach, inreach, and spiritual hospitality.

**Materials:** flip chart paper, markers, easel

**Plan** for this conversation to take about 60-75 minutes. Arrange chairs in a circle so that all participants can see the flip chart paper.

## Exercise 1: What Are Seekers Looking for Today?

**Introduction:** Today's activities will focus on **Spiritual Hospitality** – the practices of our meeting that support folks in their spiritual journey by accepting them where they are and encouraging them to grow in their faithfulness.

**Paired Questions:** Pair participants with the person next to them, unless they are related or know each other well.

Briefly **set the scene** of the present day world. With environmental destruction, violence, consumerism, growing inequality, and many other social problems, many people seek answers and guidance within a faith community. When we think about seekers, or people looking for a spiritual home, what is it that they hope to find? **What might seekers be looking for in this area?** (discuss in pairs for 4 minutes)

In the same pairs: **What were you looking for when you became a Quaker? Or, if raised in a Quaker family, why did you stay or return?** (discuss in pairs for 2 minutes each, total for 4 minutes)

**Full group feedback:** Write "What Are Newcomers Looking For?" on the top of the flip chart paper. **Going back to the question about what newcomers might be looking for, please share a word or short phrase that describes what seekers and newcomers might be looking for in a spiritual home.** Repeat the word or phrase so that everyone can hear. Record responses on the flip chart. (5-10 minutes)

[Possible responses: answers to life's questions, community, nonjudgmental atmosphere, meaning, friendship, a place to raise their kids, roots in something "bigger," support for leadings, spiritual grounding, social action...]

NOTE: This is only a brainstorming list. Actual newcomers may come for various reasons.

**End with the comment (if true): We didn't hear anything about Quaker history or yearly meetings structures!** In general, people are not that interested in history while they are initially seeking. They want to know how the Quaker way is relevant to their life TODAY. For this reason, it is important that the messages we share with newcomers and through outreach reflect the Quaker experience in contemporary society, not only historical figures, bonnets, or horses and buggies.

## **Exercise 2: What Does the Quaker Way Offer?**

Next, **write** "What Does the Quaker Way Offer?" on a new sheet of flip chart paper.

**Group Brainstorm:** Ask participants: **What is special or powerful about the Quaker way\*? What do we have to share?**

Note: We are not asking what is unique about the Quaker way since other traditions have many similarities; We're looking for what is unique in the way we combine what is special and powerful.

**Record** responses on the flip chart using a scribe.

It may take a few minutes for the group to begin to share. Leave time at the beginning & throughout this exercise for ideas to emerge.

Items to bring out if not mentioned by the group:

- Direct experience of the Divine
- Transforming power of worship
- That of God in everyone
- Faith in action - testimonies
- Silence
- Listening
- Joy
- Role of women
- Equality

[\*The originators of QuakerQuest found the phrase "the Quaker way," more inviting than "Quakerism". You might consider that for yourselves.]



We address their need for meaning by providing opportunities for new attenders to learn about Quaker faith and practice and to deepen their own spiritual experience. We address their need for belonging by creating opportunities for them to make friends.

Studies show that if people make 1-2 friends in their first 6 months in a spiritual community, they are much more likely to stay.

**What can we do, as a meeting and as individuals, to build connections with newcomers and share that sense of belonging? How can we expand the web of connections to embrace newcomers?**

Social opportunities and intentional small groups geared to the interests of newcomers can be a source of friendships. **What kind of small groups or social events could be added to our meeting's activities?**

**Draw** 2-3 dots outside of the web of connections representing a group of newcomers. Connect the dots with the dots in the web by using suggestions of small group activities from the participants. **The activities don't need to be specifically spiritual.**

On flip chart paper, **record** the brainstormed list of suggested activities.

[Possible small group examples: spiritual inreach groups, Friendly Eights meal-sharing groups (or Friendly Sevens), nature walk groups, book clubs, bread baking groups, Quaker 101 classes, Friendly Parenting groups, healing circles, Game Night groups, Bible Study groups, and so on...]

**Point out** that adding these activities to the life of our meeting benefits not only newcomers, but can also strengthen the relationships between those of us who have been around for a long time!

If there is time, it can be helpful to **invite recent newcomers to share** their experience of being new in the meeting, but only if they'd like to share at this time. (Anyone who has been here under five years can be considered a newcomer for this exercise).

These activities are adapted from the QuakerQuest Full Day Workshop.