

You Are Welcome Here! Discussion Guide

You Are Welcome Here! is a booklet about welcoming newcomers into the life of Quaker meetings, featuring stories and suggestions collected from Friends and meetings across North America. It is available as a free PDF download at <http://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/YAWH>



This discussion guide is designed to structure a group exploration of the *You Are Welcome Here!* booklet, with a focus on generating ideas for welcoming and integrating newcomers into the life of your meeting.

If you choose to do all of the activities listed below, plan for a 60-minute session.

Materials Needed:

- ✓ *You Are Welcome Here!* booklets, one for each participant
- ✓ 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.

(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 collected from Quakers and meetings across the U.S. and Canada. The stories and ideas in You Are Welcome Here! reflect the fact that meetings often deeply desire to be welcoming, open places of spiritual nurture for each other and visitors.*

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.*

(20 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).

Return to a large group brainstorm and collect the responses to these questions in two lists: “What does welcoming look like? What does welcoming feel like?” Record on flip chart paper

(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 your meeting] 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 our 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 our meeting or elsewhere? Let's share the "Good Ideas and Great Practices" for welcoming newcomers that we're already implementing in our meeting, 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 (<http://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/newcomers-cards>). The cards are a free resource that can be printed and shared with visitors. Is this something we might like to offer to visitors in our meeting?