

Membership at Live Oak Friends Meeting

The purpose of these guidelines is to facilitate the process of admitting a new member, respecting the applicant and focusing serious, worshipful attention on the process. A clear process imparts to the applicant a sense of loving and attentive care from the meeting. Hopefully, the process will also serve to deepen the experience and make it meaningful to the applicant. It is important that the applicant consider the personal meaning of membership, and understand the strength of commitment that is expected of members of the Meeting. Membership should never become ritualistic or lightly held for any Friend.

Membership in the Religious Society of Friends is held through membership in a monthly meeting, and is the sole responsibility and privilege of the monthly meetings.

Many yearly meetings have published their own book of procedures, known as a Faith and Practice. Our yearly meeting has just begun writing a Faith and Practice and, although it officially adheres to the Faith and Practice of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, it refers to those of many different yearly meetings as needed. This document draws on writings from the Faith and Practices of several yearly meetings. It is intended as a guide to the membership process to enable those seeking membership, and as an informative statement of the procedures used by Live Oak Friends Meeting. As the spirit leads, adjustments are made.

BIRTHRIGHT MEMBERSHIP

Membership by birthright is an historic concept and is no longer granted by Live Oak Friends Meeting.

CONSIDERING MEMBERSHIP

1. Although Friends are often first attracted to meeting through finding unity with the Christian principles by which Quakers are known best by the outside world, the essence of Quakerism is in our form of worship, our belief in personal revelation, and our reliance on the experience of the Divine alive within us. It is the conviction of an applicant that the Inner Light exists within every creature, and in its ability to inform us how to live, that most defines Quakerism. The essence of membership is in the belief in truth through revelation; all commonality of principles and testimonies of Friends flow from the experience of the Light Within.

2. An applicant for membership should be familiar with the Meeting and its members on a spiritual and a practical level. This step should be given ample time. While an attender, the applicant should have attended meeting for worship regularly, participated in Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, and participated on a committee.

3. The applicant should be familiar with the basics of the history of Quakerism and have become familiar with Quaker principles and practices. It is recommended that a Friend considering membership should have read the Faith and Practice of a yearly meeting. Faith and Practice of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting is a good one with which to start, although many Friends find inspiration in those of other yearly meetings as well.

4. Friends should not aspire to have reached a spiritual destination before being “worthy” of applying for membership; it is not a reward for a job well done. Rather, it is a milestone –perhaps even only a beginning –on their spiritual path. In the best of circumstances, membership aids in the conveyance along the way to spiritual growth and understanding.

5. When a person has become convinced that the Quaker form of worship is the way to find their true spiritual path and is ready to make a commitment to living in supportive fellowship in the community, they should consider requesting membership.

6. The applicant begins the process by writing a letter to the Meeting requesting membership and delivering it to the Clerk of the Meeting. This letter will be read aloud at a Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business. The letter can be short or long, but often Friends use this opportunity to clarify, both for themselves and for the Meeting, why they have decided to become a member. The Clerk of the Meeting can use his/her discernment as to when to read the letter, and whether to read it in its entirety or excerpts from it.

7. An applicant should complete the commitment they might hold in another religious community before they request membership in the meeting. While there may be individual exceptions, applicants are expected to give up their membership in other religious communities when they become a member of the meeting.

8. When a couple or a family apply for membership together, individual clearness or clearness in a group can be arranged. Individual letters are preferable, but joint letters have been accepted. It is at the discretion of the Care and Concern Committee what is requested as an appropriate clearness process.

9. When the applicant(s) have young children, they can specify in their letter of request whether or not they are seeking associate membership for their children. Associate Membership is not automatically granted.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBERS

1. Faithful attendance and participation at Meeting for Worship. The Worship and Ministry Committee reminds us that our physical presence is not enough. As members, we also have a responsibility to share whatever measure of Light we are given.

2. Faithful attendance and participation at Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business. Participation can come in many forms: expressing affirmation of others, asking questions to attain clearness, or expressing our misgivings even when near unity seems apparent. It is all the light within the group that illuminates the best way forward.

3. Service on committees by joining one or more committees, attending meetings, participating in the work of the committee.

4. Financial contributions for support of the meeting, which can also include in-kind donations of services or supplies.

5. Involvement in regional and yearly meeting activities, including attending Bayou Quarterly and South Central Yearly Meetings.

PURPOSE OF THE CLEARNESS COMMITTEE FOR MEMBERSHIP

1. For the monthly meeting to become familiar with the applicant's knowledge and acceptance of the tenets of Quakerism.

2. For the applicant to ask questions about Quakerism and become more clear whether membership in the Society of Friends is an appropriate choice for their spiritual path.

3. Applicants should discuss any misgivings they might have, and be honest about any tension they feel over perceived incongruities between their personal convictions and those they believe to be more mainstream in the meeting. Beliefs and practices learned in the religion(s) of their childhood may hamper an adult's spiritual growth, especially the change from an external or judgmental God to the concept of an Inner Light. Other kinds of spiritual practices may have been beneficial to the individual's growth and compatible with Quaker beliefs and practices. These are topics for discussion with the Clearness Committee.

4. When accepting this applicant into membership, the Meeting is agreeing to accompany this person in their spiritual walk. The committee should discern if the Meeting community can meet its responsibilities to this applicant with love and care.

5. Meeting representatives should be forthright in outlining the expectations the Meeting has of its members, such as participation in committees, etc.

MEMBERSHIP PROCESS FOR NEW MEMBERS

Before Recommendation to Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

1. The Clerk of Care & Concern should acknowledge the receipt of the letter of request as soon as he/she receives it from the Clerk of the Meeting [within a few days] and outline to

the applicant the membership process and timeline that will be followed. The membership process will probably take 3--5 months.

2. At the next meeting of the Care & Concern Committee, the letter should be read and a clerk for the Clearness Committee appointed.

3. Clerk of the Clearness Committee for Membership starts the clearness process by:

a. Obtaining a copy of the membership packet from the Clerk of the Care and Concern Committee. This packet includes the documents required to record a new member [Information Sheet, Membership Log, and Membership Form] and a list of sample questions for use by the clearness committee.

b. Starting a Membership Log on which to track the progress of the membership process. This is one of the documents which should be delivered to the Records Clerk at the end of the process.

c. Asking the applicant if there are Friends they would like to have on their clearness committee. Although this request does not imply a commitment to include these Friends on the committee, the clerk can consider it in the selection of the committee.

d. Identifying the Friends who will serve on the committee.

e. Giving the applicant the information form to fill out; retrieving the completed form; distributing copies of the completed information form to everyone on the committee.

f. Ascertain whether there will be Associate Memberships involved in the process.

First time at Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business—Clerk reports request for membership

1. After a letter requesting membership is received by the Clerk of the Meeting, the Clerk announces the letter has been received at the next Meeting for Business. It is at the Clerk's discretion whether to read the letter aloud, or to refer the letter to the Care and Concern Committee first. The letter is then referred to the Care and Concern Committee.

2. This first time contact with Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business alerts the entire community to the beginning of a period of discernment for a pending membership.

3. At the next meeting of the Care and Concern Committee a Clerk of the Clearness Committee for Membership is selected. The clerk should contact the applicant within seven days of the Care and Concern meeting and ask the applicant(s) for requests of particular Friends they would like to have on the clearness committee. [Friends serving on membership committees must be members of the Religious Society of Friends.]

4. The Clerk of the Clearness Committee should give the applicant a draft form of the LOFM official membership form and the LOFM information form to fill out. These should be returned to the Clerk of the Clearness Committee during the time of preparation for the Meeting for Clearness.

Second time at Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business—Clearness Committee is identified

1. [If letter has not be read aloud previously] The Clerk of Care and Concern reads the letter requesting membership and informs the community of the name of the Clerk of the Clearness Committee. If the letter has been read previously, there is just a report that a Clearness Committee has been formed and names the clerk of that committee.

2. Friends who wish to have input in the discernment process should give that input to the Clerk of the Clearness Committee.

3. The Clerk of the Clearness Committee selects a committee of three to five members, including at least two that have participated in meeting for several years.

4. The Clerk of the Clearness Committee should communicate the purpose of the clearness meeting to all participants ahead of the meeting, with suggested questions and a description of the style of the meeting. The applicant's letter and the information form should be made available to all the committee members. These documents should be considered part of the archive and treated with discretion; members of the committee should not allow public access to these documents.

5. The Clearness Committee should meet with the applicant(s) before the next Care and Concern meeting if possible.

6. The Meeting for Clearness with the applicant should meet in a place free of distraction and conducive to focused worship. Ample time should be allowed for centering and worshipful consideration for each applicant. Although there is basic information to be asked in a clearness committee, and documents are available with sample questions, there is no required list of questions. It is important that the Clearness Committee meet as many times as needed and not assume that one time is standard. Three or more times may be appropriate.

7. Following the Meeting for Clearness with the applicant, the Clearness Committee meets alone, without the applicant, to jointly discern whether to recommend approval of the application.

8. The Clerk of the Clearness Committee reports the committee's recommendation in writing to the Care and Concern Committee. Either this report, or a letter of recommendation based on this report, is prepared for Care and Concern to report at the next Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business. This letter or report should include information that supports the committee's recommendation and tells something about the spiritual background of the applicant; not a biography, but something that informs the

community about this person's new commitment to the community. Occasionally, a committee will have new insights into a Friend that would help the new member be better known in the community. However, care should be taken not to share anything shared in the Clearness Committee that could have been said in confidence.

9. The Clerk of the Clearness Committee should notify the applicant of the recommendation before it is presented to Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.

Third time at Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business—Care and Concern Committee reads the recommendation document in its next report to Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.

1. A recommendation for membership should be seasoned by the Meeting for at least one month. During that time, any concerns about the recommendation should be communicated to the Clerk of the Clearness Committee. Although it is best if issues of concern are brought to the Clearness Committee before the recommendation, the seasoning process still allows for further consideration.

2. If there are substantive questions about the applicant's preparation for membership, the Clearness Committee can mentor the applicant and/or meet as needed to resolve these questions.

3. Under exceptional circumstances, memberships have been accepted without the customary seasoning period.

4. All documents related to the process should be delivered to the Records Clerk for the member's permanent record. They should not remain with the Care and Concern Committee.

Fourth time at Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business—Approval for Membership

1. The recommendation of the Care and Concern Committee having been seasoned, new members are accepted through the consideration of the Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, and a formal Minute recording the action is approved.

2. The Minute recording the new membership should include the actual date when membership was approved, as well as the Minute number.

MEMBERSHIP PROCESS FOR TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP

1. Memberships received from other meetings

- a. The applicant requests a letter of transfer from their current meeting be sent to the Clerk of LOFM.

b. First time at Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business--Upon receipt of this letter, the clerk either reads it or provides it to the Clerk of Care and Concern to include in their report to Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.

c. LOFM does not require a clearness committee for transfers of membership, however, the letter of transfer is referred to the Care and Concern Committee for consideration of the standing of that member in the meeting. A recommendation for membership in the receiving meeting is based on clarity that the member is in good standing in the home meeting.

d. The Clerk of Care and Concern provides an Information Form and a Membership Form to the transferring applicant, to be returned to the Care and Concern Committee. Sometimes another member of the committee becomes the contact for the process.

e. The request for transfer is considered at the next meeting of the Care and Concern Committee. After consideration, and receipt of the information forms from the transferring Friend, approval for a minute of receipt of the transfer is given by the Care and Concern Committee to Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.

[A cautionary note: it is good practice to have clear communication with the meeting from which the transfer is occurring. Membership is being extended on the basis of the applicant's good standing in that meeting.]

f. Second time at Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business the Meeting acts on the recommendation of the Care and Concern Committee by approving a Minute of Transfer. The current practice has been to not require seasoning of this minute; it can be passed immediately.

g. A letter notifying the previous monthly meeting of LOFM's acceptance of the applicant as a member is then sent by the Clerk of the Meeting.

h. Copies of all relevant documents are delivered to the Records Clerk.

2. Memberships removed by transfer

a. A letter of request for transfer is sent to the Clerk of LOFM by the applicant.

b. The letter is referred to the Care and Concern Committee for consideration of the standing of that member in the meeting. A recommendation for membership in the receiving meeting is based on clarity that the applicant is a member in good standing in the home meeting.

c. The Clerk writes a letter of recommendation for membership to the receiving meeting and reads it aloud in Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.

d. A formal minute is passed, recording the date, the meeting to which the Friend is transferring, and the yearly meeting with which it is affiliated. The Minute is often included in the letter of recommendation to the receiving meeting.

e. Copies of all relevant documents are delivered to the Records Clerk.

Welcoming New Members and Transfers

1. Friends can offer a transfer member who is new to the community an informal meeting with a small group of Friends. It would provide a personal time to get acquainted with each other, and would allow the meeting to make clear the expectations it has of its members. Details could be given about committees, how to donate, quarterly and yearly meetings, the web page, etc.

2. A welcoming for the new member is held at the rise of Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business as soon as practical. The Care and Concern Committee coordinates this event with the Hospitality Committee. It is an appropriate time to present the membership gift.

3. A gift of a book or magazine subscription is made. Currently we are gifting both new members and transfers into meeting a book of current interest about Quakerism. The Care and Concern Committee chooses and buys these books. They are then signed and presented on behalf of LOFM by the Clerk of the Meeting.

MINUTES OF MEMBERSHIP

1. It is best to pass separate minutes for each individual, even if a couple is applying together. They are separate members with separate histories in the meeting.

2. The minute recording membership should include the full name of the applicant, a sentiment of welcoming into the community, and the date the membership becomes effective [usually the date of that day].

3. For memberships received from other Quaker meetings, the minute should include the basic information as above, but also the name of the transferring meeting and the yearly meeting with which it is affiliated, if applicable.

4. Likewise, removal of memberships by transfer to other meetings should have the name of the receiving meeting and its yearly meeting.

5. When a Minute is passed recording the withdrawal or transfer of membership from LOFM for any reason, the Clerk of the Meeting should send a copy of that Minute to the former member.

SOJOURNING MEMBERS

Friends may attend a monthly meeting because they have moved temporarily into its vicinity, but may not wish to give up membership in their home Meeting, to which they expect to return eventually. Their desires in this regard should be set forth in a minute from their home Meeting. Such Friends are listed as Sojourning Members of the Meeting they attend. Sojourning Friends may fulfill all functions that they are willing to undertake and that the host Meeting sees fit to assign to them. However, they should not be counted in the statistical reports of the host Meeting. Their sojourning membership ends when they leave the area of the Meeting where they have sojourned. Its clerk should then notify their home Meeting. Those who continue as sojourning Friends for an extended period should be asked to examine their reasons for remaining in that status, and to consider a transfer of membership. --quoted from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice

ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

“Friends have a particular responsibility to bring children under the loving care of the meeting. Friends should be sensitive to the needs of these young people, nurturing their spiritual well-being and helping them grow into mature and concerned members.”

---from New York Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice.

To this end, Live Oak Friends Meeting children can become Associate Members of the meeting, either by the request of a parent, or by their own request. Live Oak Friends Meeting has chosen to break with the historic precedent of allowing only the children of adult members to become Associate Members. When a family regularly attends Live Oak Friends Meeting, parents can request Associate Membership for their children. Additionally, the children themselves can apply for Associate Membership for membership, with their parents' permission. We feel this practice allows children who are growing up in our meeting with a strong Quaker identity to normalize their relationship to the meeting, whether or not their parents have chosen to make a membership commitment. It may also support and encourage these Young Friends to actively consider their personal commitment to adult membership.

Applications for Associate Membership from a child whose parent is not a Member will be considered with love and respect by the Care and Concern Committee on a case by case basis. All Associate Memberships will be minuted by Meeting for Business.

Although we encourage the children of our community to become members, Associate Membership does not bestow any additional rights or responsibilities that do not also belong to all of our children. It also does not automatically translate into adult membership. It may, however, at some later date, provide useful documentation of their life long association with the Religious Society of Friends for those Young Friends who are concerned with military registration or service.

1. Live Oak Friends Meeting does not assign associate membership as a birthright. Parents desiring to have their children recorded as Associate Members need to request associate membership.

2. Associate membership is available to Friends under the age of 22 years. It is often requested for the children of adult Friends applying for membership in the Religious Society of Friends. It can be requested for children of any age up to 18 years of age. It should be a consideration for those children born into the meeting, as their associate membership can be recorded at the time their birth is recorded. The same is true for when a child is adopted; a request for associate membership recorded at the same time of adoption would mark the arrival of the child into the community, an important historic event for the meeting records.

3. Older Quaker children can request full membership if they are led. They go through the same process as for all membership requests. It is important that Young Friends are made aware of both the importance of full membership and the process which is used to apply. They should be encouraged, as they graduate from high school, to consider their status as an Associate Member or as a young attender, and whether they are ready to assume the responsibility of membership.

4. Associate Membership concludes at the end of the year in which a Friend turns 22 years old. It is at this time their status will be changed to an adult attender if they have not chosen to become a full member.

5. Associate Members or their parents can request the discontinuance of their membership for any reason. If a family leaves the community it is appropriate for the Records Clerk to inquire of the member or their parents whether to discontinue the membership. This process is at the discretion of the Records Clerk and does not necessarily follow the more formal procedure used in the case of adult members.

RESIGNATION FROM MEETING—released at your own request

There are many reasons Friends lose interest in the Meeting. Hopefully, once someone has become a member they continue to grow in the Spirit and participate in the community, but the reality is, sometimes they don't. For whatever the reason, when this happens, and a Friend is no longer interested in fulfilling their responsibilities as a member of meeting, or they no longer self-identify as being of the Quaker faith, it is important that they not continue in their membership as a vestigial relationship. We encourage Friends to be clear about their desire to be a member of Live Oak Friends Meeting and to act appropriately.

1. When a Friend wants to resign their membership, they write a letter stating their request to the Clerk of the Meeting.

2. That letter is referred to the Care and Concern Committee for consideration. Although there is no further required process at this time for resigning, it has been discerned that when someone leaves the community, it is always worth a moment of reflection. After consideration by the committee, the resignation can be presented to the Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business to be read aloud and recorded in a formal Minute.

3. Although not required, it is recommended that the Care and Concern Committee

contact the person resigning and offer their support. A Clearness Committee can even be convened.

4. Under some circumstances, particularly when a member appears to have religious beliefs that are in conflict with their membership in the meeting, the meeting can ask for their resignation.

5. When a member joins another religious group, they are deemed to have resigned from the meeting and are removed from membership. The Clerk of the Meeting can provide a letter of recommendation and conveyance to the new religious community to the person concerned. This action will be recorded with an official minute that includes the name of the institution and the date.

6. A letter of acceptance of a resignation should be written by the Clerk of the Meeting to the Friend who has asked to be released. This letter should be read in Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.

RELEASE BY THE MONTHLY MEETING

1. Live Oak Friends Meeting has chosen to follow the process for release from membership as stated in the New York Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, July 31, 1998 edition, as follows: "After having made sustained and diligent efforts to reclaim the commitment of those Friends who have lost touch with the meetings, monthly meetings may discontinue their membership. Before taking that action, the meeting should have sent letters of loving inquiry to such members at least once a year for a period of three years. Having received no satisfactory replies, the monthly meeting clerk may make a minute discontinuing membership and so inform the persons concerned."

----New York Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, 1998 edition.

2. "The clerk of the Meeting should promptly send written notice of this action to the individual. Such notice should also remind the released individual that an appeal to quarterly meeting is possible; in such a case the quarterly meeting may be able to play a mediating role. It is, however, the monthly meeting's responsibility to make the final decision."

----PYM Faith and Practice 2002 edition

3. "Some persons may wish to retain membership in the Religious Society of Friends when, over a period of many years, they are not active in any monthly meeting. At its discretion, a monthly meeting may carry inactive persons on its membership rolls, while recognizing its obligation to report them as part of the basis for financial assessment by the quarterly and yearly meeting. Long-term nominal membership is generally discouraged, however, except when active Meeting participation is not possible because of poor health, residence far away from any Meeting (so that transfer of membership or sojourning membership is not feasible), or when some other compelling factor is present."

---PYM Faith and Practice 2002 edition

DISOWNMENT

Although disownment of members is rare, Live Oak Friends Meeting reserves the right to take action if and when the need arises. In such a situation, the procedure to be followed is stated in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, 2002 edition:

1. "In the case of a Friend whose actions seem out of harmony with the standard of conduct appropriate to the Religious Society of Friends, the Meeting, primarily through the overseers may seek to renew the commitment of the member to Friends' practice. If these efforts fail, and if the overseers* believe that they can accomplish nothing (*At LOFM, the traditional Oversight Committee has been renamed the Care and Concern Committee. Members of that committee are the "overseers" to which this passage refers. further, they should report this to the monthly meeting, which may appoint a special committee to make further attempts to reach a satisfactory solution.)

2. "If all these efforts are to no avail, the monthly meeting should take steps toward removal of the Friend from membership. The overseers or a special committee should present in writing a proposed minute recommending such action. When the minute is received by the monthly meeting, a copy should be given promptly to the person involved, and action should be deferred to a future meeting. Friends toward whom the monthly meeting has acted in this way should be advised that they may explain their position to the monthly meeting in person or in writing." --PYM Faith and Practice, 2002.

3. "If the monthly meeting subsequently believes that the membership of the Friend in question should be discontinued, the minute of removal should be adopted and the Friend notified of the action and of the potential mediating role of quarterly meeting." -----PYM Faith and Practice, 2002.

RECLAMATION OF MEMBERSHIP

"A person whose membership has been ended either by resignation or by action of the monthly meeting, and who desires to rejoin either the same or a different monthly meeting, may do so by following the procedure outlined earlier for application for membership." -----PYM Faith and Practice 2002 edition

MEMBERSHIP RECORDS

1. Personal records of members include:

- a. All documents concerning membership or transfer application: Membership Log, Membership Form, Information form, letter of request, letter of recommendation, letter of transfer.
- b. Other documents that are collected throughout the activity of the Friend in the life of the meeting.
- c. Relevant pictures.
- d. Writings and articles either published or provided by the applicant to the archive.
- e. Memorial Minutes and obituaries.

2. The Records Clerk maintains the personal files of all members, active or inactive.

3. When members leave the meeting, living or dead, a copy of the Membership record of that former member is sent to the archive at Swarthmore College.