

Quaker Glossary

This is a glossary of Quaker terms.

ADVICES - Ideals stated as a continuing reminder of the basic faith and principles held to be essential to the life and witness of Friends. Friends have found it useful regularly to remind each other of their nature through the periodic reading and discussion of advices along with related queries.

AFSC - American Friends Service Committee.

AFFIRMATION - A legal declaration made by Friends or others who conscientiously decline to take an oath.

ATTENDER - One who attends and participates in meeting activities fairly regularly but has not become a member.

BIRTHRIGHT MEMBER - Friends born of Quaker parents and recorded at birth on a monthly meeting's membership roll.

BYM - Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

CENTER DOWN - A process by which we still or direct our conscious thought and open our minds in order that we may hear or sense the Spirit directly.

CLEARNESS - A condition in which there are no perceived obstacles to a proposed course of action by an individual or meeting.

CLEARNESS COMMITTEE - A group of Friends appointed or selected to assist a person or the meeting to clarify a decision or concern.

CLERK - A member who presides at meetings for worship with a concern for business, or the head of a committee. Meetings for business may also have recording and reading clerks.

CLOSING MEETING - The closing of the meeting for worship when a designated Friends shakes hands with the persons next to her or him. Following this, all shake hands with their neighbors.

CONCERN - A deep interest, whether by an individual or a meeting, in some spiritual or social matter. An interest so deep and vigorous that often it must be expressed in action.

CONTINUING REVELATION - The belief that God still speaks to persons directly today.

CONVENER - Member of a committee, usually the first-named, whom the meeting asks to call together the first meeting of that committee.

CONVINCED FRIEND - A person who becomes a Friend as a result of being led to this decision by the Inward Light, often after careful study, thought, and seeking.

CORPORATE - Term which refers to the united group of people (often called 'the body') of a Friends' meeting. While the Spirit may speak differently to individuals, the gathered meeting provides a clear perception of divine guidance for the community.

COVENANT - A commitment between two parties with God as the third party.

COVERED MEETING - A meeting for worship or business in which the participants feel the power and inspiration of God so strongly that they are united in silence that is often a reward of "waiting upon the Lord." Also called a *gathered* meeting.

DISCERNMENT - The process of discerning whether a decision, direction, or leading comes from the Spirit, and for gaining greater clarity about its full character and import for a Friend or a meeting.

DISCIPLINE - 1. A term related to discipleship, following a particular path. 2. The books of [Faith and Practice](#) of the Religious Society of Friends. Each yearly meeting may draw together its own book of discipline, so Friends may refer to Britain Yearly Meeting's discipline, for example, or that of other yearly meetings.

EFCI (or EFI, incorrectly) - Evangelical Friends Church International.

ELDERING - 1. nurturing and supporting a Friend to live into the fullness of his/her faith and ministry. 2. gently admonishing in love the ways, habits or thoughts of a Friend or attender after serious consideration by or consultation with respected members of the meeting.

ELDERS - Historically, those appointed to foster the vocal ministry of the meeting for worship and the spiritual condition of its members.

EPISTLE - A letter of serious import sent either by an individual or a group. Usually a formal letter sent annually by each yearly meeting to all Friends everywhere stating the condition, exercise, and experience of the yearly meeting.

EXERCISE - The exploration of a deep concern that has been brought to a meeting. The meeting may record this exploration as a "minute of exercise."

FACING BENCHES - The benches or seats in the front of the meeting room, facing the body of the meeting, on which Friends' ministers and elders generally sat. In recent times, many meetings have adopted a circular or square arrangement to eliminate the facing-bench distinction.

FCNL - Friends Committee on National Legislation.

FGC - Friends General Conference.

FUM - Friends United Meeting.

FWCC - Friends World Committee for Consultation.

GATHERED MEETING - An occasion when the meeting for worship or business attains more than the usual sense of divine presence, which touches the worshippers and unites them in holy fellowship and often shows in united themes of ministry. (See Thomas R. Kelly, "The Gathered Meeting," in *A Testament of Devotion*.)

GOOD ORDER - The procedures, found through Friends' experience, that facilitate our business and committee meetings as we seek to find and carry out God's will.

GOSPEL ORDER - Our order, organization, testimonies, and closeness as a spiritual community, modeled on the relationships between people that Jesus described in parables and showed through his healing, counsel, and prophetic message. Many Friends believe that Jesus lives amongst us and leads us in living this order. Our fellowship is local, regional, national, and international at the same time, since we are a spiritual group that Christ heads rather than an episcopal, congregational, or bureaucratic system.

HOLD IN THE LIGHT - To ask for God's presence to illumine a person, situation, or problem, whether in concern or thanksgiving.

INWARD LIGHT - This refers to the power and inspiration of God or Christ coming inwardly to us to show us our true motivations, guide us, lead us, and give us strength to act on this guidance--thus bringing us into unity with the Spirit. This concept differs from "conscience," which is a developed awareness of the merits or faults of our conduct, intentions, or character and the sense of obligation to do right. The "Inward Light" is also called the "Light Within," the "Christ Within," the "Light of Christ," the "Holy Spirit," and "The Seed." Often, the term is written "Inner Light," implying that the light comes from each of us, but that is not part of early Friends' concept.

LABOR WITH - An effort by one or more Friends to help another struggle with a concern or a difficulty and come through to a resolution.

LAY DOWN - To terminate a committee or concern when its work is completed or no longer felt necessary. A monthly meeting may be laid down when it is no longer functioning.

LEADING - An inner conviction that impels one to follow a certain course under a sense of divine guidance. A Friend may submit a leading to the meeting for testing by corporate wisdom.

MEETING FOR SUFFERINGS - A committee to support and care for members and their families who suffer because of their commitment to Friends' principles. In Britain in recent years it refers to a representative committee that acts in a deliberative and executive manner for Friends when Britain Yearly Meeting is not in session.

MINDING THE LIGHT - An expression used to remind us that there is an "Inward Light" in each of us that can reveal God's will, if we listen and follow its direction.

MINISTERS - Those recognized by a meeting as having a special gift for some aspect of ministry. Some may be recorded by their meeting and the yearly meeting. Some who carry a concern that leads them to visit other meeting or groups in the wider world, may carry a "Travel Minute." Others are recognized on a more informal basis.

MINUTE - A statement of an item of business approved by those in attendance at a given meeting for worship with a concern for business.

MONTHLY MEETING - A group of people who have established a community that generally meets every week for meeting for worship and once a month for meeting for business. Generally, the monthly meeting is considered the foundation of Quaker life.

MOVED TO SPEAK - An experience, in the quietness of the meeting, of feeling led by God to speak.

NEYM - New England Yearly Meeting.

OPENING - Movement of unexpected enlightenment or inspiration from God.

OVERSEERS - Traditionally, a committee that has responsibility for the pastoral care of the meeting's membership. Recently, many meetings have renamed this committee "Pastoral Care" or "Care and Counsel," because of the associations the term "overseers" carries to the institution of slavery.

PLAIN DRESS - Undecorated garments without bright colors which were worn by Friends to express simplicity in dress, primarily in the 18th and 19th centuries. Today, the term refers to the wearing of garments that were typical of Quakers from that era.

PLAIN SPEECH - 1. Fortright and divinely-led speech that is simple in language. 2. The use of the pronouns 'thee,' 'thy,' and 'thine' by Friends up until the early 20th century, and occasionally today as a witness to the testimony of early Friends for equality. In the 1600's, a wealthy person or member of the nobility was addressed by the plural pronoun 'you' while inferiors or children were addressed by the singular pronoun 'thou.' Friends and many others refused to recognize such distinctions. They said "thou" to everyone and thus brought upon themselves much persecution that they might have avoided with the use of the honorific 'you.' 3. Because the days and months were named for non-Christian gods, goddesses and emperors, early Friends preferred to use "First-Day," "Second-Day," "First Month," "Second Month" and so on. These usages are still common among some Friends and are often used in the minutes of Friends' business proceedings.

PREPARATIVE MEETING - 1. A group of Friends, generally under the care and guidance of an established monthly meeting, preparing to become a monthly meeting. 2. Originally, and still in Britain Yearly Meeting, a term used to refer to one of a group of meetings that "prepare" business to be brought before the monthly meeting.

PROGRAMMED MEETING - A meeting for worship usually conducted by a pastor with a pre-arranged program including music, readings, a sermon, and offering. It may also include

periods of silence and waiting when Friends may be moved to speak from the body of the meeting.

PROCEED AS WAY OPENS - To wait for guidance from God; to avoid hasty judgement or action; to wait for future circumstances to help solve a problem.

PYM (or PhYM) - Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

QUAKER - The unofficial name of a member of the Religious Society of Friends. Originally the use was pejorative but the word was reclaimed by Friends in recognition of the physical sensation that many feel when being moved by the Spirit.

QUARTERLY MEETING - a collection of monthly meetings and worship groups that are near each other geographically and that meet together four times a year for worship and business. Some groupings that meeting on a different time cycle may be termed **Regional Meetings** or **Half-Yearly Meetings**.

QUERIES - Formally, the Queries are a set of open-ended questions that Friends use to examine both the individual life and the life of the meeting in the light of God's wish for us. Many meetings read the Advices and Queries periodically from our book of *Faith and Practice* as a recurring exercise in spiritual self-examination. Informally, Friends often use queries that have been crafted ad hoc to address a specific concern. We then pose these questions to ourselves in meeting for worship, in committees, in conferences and workshops, or any group gathered to consider a concern, and then seek to answer them in a spirit of worship.

READING CLERK - The yearly meeting has reading clerks who read epistles, memorial minutes, and other documents in the sessions of the yearly meeting.

RECORDING CLERK - The recording clerk records the minutes of the meeting for business in worship.

RECORDING OF MINISTERS - A Friends' Meeting may minute the designation as a minister, a member whom the meeting recognizes as having a special gift of ministry or service to the meeting or community. The yearly meeting may confirm the recording.

RELEASE - 1. To remove a Friend from committee or membership rolls. 2. To set a concerned and qualified Friend free for religious service, such as travelling among Friends. This may require the meeting to take over responsibilities of the concerned person while he/she is away.

SEASONING - A process to ensure that decisions are truly grounded in God's will. Seasoning usually requires taking extra time to hold a decision in prayer to make sure that it stands the test of time.

SENSE OF THE MEETING - A perception of Truth that emerges from the corporate business process as Friends seek God's will. After full consideration of a matter and allowing for the development of new insights and wisdom with God's leading, if the clerk feels that a decision has been reached, she/he states the sense of the meeting as a minute for the meeting's approval. No vote is taken. Unity is sought, but if it is not attained to a reasonable degree, the clerk can hold the item over for reconsideration at a later time. The clerk must decide on the degree of unity required, basing that judgement on the importance of the subject and the experience and wisdom of those who speak to it.

SOJOURNING MEMBER - A Friend who is temporarily residing in the area of another monthly meeting, accepted by that meeting as a participating member, but still maintaining formal membership in his/her home meeting.

SPEAK TO ONE'S CONDITION - The experience of receiving a message directly from God or through another person, that touches one at a deep level, helps one solve a problem, or make a right decision.

STANDING ASIDE - The withdrawal of opposition by a member not able to unite with a proposed minute, thus freeing the meeting to proceed.

STATE OF THE MEETING - An annual report that states the condition of the monthly meeting to the quarterly meeting and yearly meeting, for Friends' consideration. The yearly meeting summarizes these reports into an annual **State of the Society** Report.

STOP IN THE MIND - An expression that Friends may use to explain that they cannot follow a course of action. Scruples about engaging in an activity or approving a minute that are felt but not easily explained.

TESTIMONIES - Collectively, "testimonies" are public statements about how we are to live based on our collective experience of revelation in meeting for worship. Individually, we Friends believe that we are to "let our lives speak" as testimonies to Truth, that we are to bear witness with our lives to the truths revealed inwardly to us about how we should live, how we should minister to the suffering of others, and how we should strive to bring God's love, peace, and justice to the world.

TRAVEL MINUTE - The endorsement a meeting gives to one of its members who is travelling, among Friends or in the wider world, under the weight of a concern. This is different from a letter of introduction, which the meeting may approve for a Friend who plans to visit Friends in the course of travelling. For travel outside the yearly meeting, the yearly meeting must also endorse this minute.

UNITY - A shared perception in a business meeting that a minute arrived at through corporate worship is Friends' best understanding of God's will for them. It implies that everyone will take part in or support the concern under consideration.

UNPROGRAMMED MEETING - A meeting for worship which has no pre-determined order of service. The gathered Friends sit in silence, waiting upon God and "leadings of the Spirit" which may give rise to vocal messages to share with the meeting. Some meetings for worship can pass without any vocal message and still be occasions of great inspiration.

VISITATION - Formal visiting among Friends.

WAIT UPON THE LORD - To actively seek and attend to God's will in expectant, quiet worship.

WEIGHTY FRIEND - A Friend who is informally recognized as having special experience and wisdom.

WITNESS - To testify to or take action based on religious conviction, often at some personal cost.

WORLDLY - Having to do with secular values.

WORSHIP SHARING - Friends gathered in small groups in a spirit of worship to share what rises up for them in the silence. Worship Sharing groups often meet to consider a set of prepared queries, offering the gathered Friends an opportunity to begin discernment on some concern and to get to know each other better. Unlike in open, waiting worship, all participants in a Worship Sharing group are encouraged to speak, though no one is required to.

YEARLY MEETING (YM) - A collection of monthly and regional meetings that organize together to share witness and resources. It generally meets at least once a year to conduct business. New York Yearly meeting consists of meetings throughout New York State, parts of southwestern Connecticut and northern New Jersey and conducts meetings for business 3 times per year.