

Meeting Guidelines

MEMBERSHIP GUIDELINES

Approved 16th day, First Month, 1994

Membership in the Atlanta Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

As membership in the meeting is membership in a community, the test of membership is compatibility with the meeting community. Members are either born into the meeting or join it because they desire to fit into the pattern of behavior peculiar to the meeting and find themselves able to do so. The test of membership is not a particular kind of religious experience, nor acceptance of any particular religious, social or economic creed. Sincere religious experience and right religious belief are both important, but they develop in the course of participation in the activities of the meeting. Anyone who can become so integrated with the meeting that he helps the whole and the whole helps him is qualified to become a member.

(Howard Brinton, Friends for 300 Years)

To be a member of the Society of Friends means, I believe, to subscribe in sincerity to the concept ...that there is that of God in each human being; that we are called to seek this element of God in all, even our enemies; that this belief leads us to renounce war and violence as an acceptable means of attaining ends, however good; and that it leads us to work for the material and spiritual welfare of all humankind. Lloyd B. Swift, "On the meaning of Membership in the Religious Society of Friends."

(Friends Journal, 1986)

Membership is an outward affirmation of an inner experience of the Divine and of unity with the other members of a living community. It implies a commitment to enter wholeheartedly into the spiritual and corporate activities of the Society and to assume responsibility for both service and support, as the way opens. The Society should reach out to and welcome into active membership all who find unity with the principles and testimonies of Friends.

Prospective members should have attended meeting for some time and have developed an appreciation for Friends' forms of worship and business. The appropriate time to apply for membership will vary from person to person. One indication that the time to apply may be approaching is the recognition that meeting for worship has become a central part

of one's life. Atlanta Friends Meeting recognizes that some who are active in the life of the meeting choose not to seek membership. Others will want their commitment to our community to be publicly recorded. The following procedures for membership supplement and revise those described in SAYMA's Guide to Our Faith and Our Practice (1990), pp. 21-24.

Application for membership

Although membership is ultimately the responsibility of the Monthly Meeting, the application process begins with Ministry and Worship. A person seeking membership should address a letter to Ministry and Worship stating why the applicant feels drawn into the fellowship of the Religious Society of Friends and indicating the extent of his or her sympathy with its principles and testimonies. Some applicants may wish to explore and share with others the stages of their spiritual journey, but others may prefer a shorter statement. With permission of the authors, some letters requesting membership are filed by Ministry and Worship in the meeting library.

Ministry and Worship will name a clearness committee of at least 3 of its members to visit with the applicant. Before visiting, the convenor of the clearness committee will give the applicant a copy of SAYMA's Guide to Our Faith and Our Practice. The clearness committee is not called to judge the applicant, but rather to ensure that applicants are clear about the testimonies and practices of Friends, about the extent of their agreement with those testimonies and practices, and about the responsibilities membership in our Society entails. Friends do not accept creed as a test of membership, nor do we require prospective members to have attained any fixed point on their spiritual journey. Membership is a commitment to a continued pilgrimage, and we hope it will open that way to new leadings for both the new member and the community.

In keeping with Friends' traditional use of Queries for self-examination, applicants may wish to consider the following questions as they explore their readiness for membership.

1. Why am I drawn to seek membership at this time?
2. Do I sincerely seek the Light to guide both my spiritual development and the choices I make in my everyday life, and do I seek that of God in others?
3. Have I resolved any commitment to other religious groups that might conflict with membership in the Religious Society of Friends?
4. Do I attend meeting for membership regularly, and have I attended Meeting for Business?
5. Am I familiar with the testimonies and practices of the Religious Society of Friends and am I clear to what extent I am in agreement with them?
6. Am I familiar with the Queries as means of examining the extent to which I live according to Friends' principles?
7. Am I familiar with Quaker history?

9. Am I familiar with the diversity of belief among branches of the Society of Friends, and with the various Quaker organizations, such as SAYMA and FGC?
10. Am I prepared wholeheartedly to share responsibility for the life of the meeting, including attending Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Business, serving on committees and contributing financially as means allow?

If the committee and applicant reach clarity on membership, the committee will report back to Ministry and Worship, which upon reaching clearness brings the request forward to Monthly Meeting for Business. With the applicant's permission, the letter requesting membership may be read at Monthly Meeting or published in the newsletter. Monthly Meeting normally postpones action until a subsequent session in order that Friends may become better acquainted with the prospective member and to allow time for any concerns to be raised. The applicant may be introduced after Meeting for Worship during this period. Approval of a new member is recorded in the minutes of Meeting for Business. The archivist of the Meeting will record biographical data for meeting records. The new member will be invited to choose a book or books on Quaker topics as a gift from the Meeting and should be welcomed at the regular monthly pot-luck following approval of membership.

It is possible that the committee or applicant will find obstacles to membership. In this case, the applicant may choose to withdraw the request or may ask to have it brought before Monthly Meeting for its consideration. If the Monthly Meeting declines to offer membership, Ministry and Worship should endeavor to keep in sympathetic touch with the applicant, explaining the reason for the hesitation and seeking to help remove it. In such a case, Ministry and Worship should encourage reconsideration of the decision as soon as they judge it to be appropriate.

Special types of membership

A member of the Religious Society of Friends belongs to a particular monthly meeting. Friends are strongly encouraged to have their membership in the meeting which they are active. Friends wishing to transfer membership from one meeting to another should have a letter or certificate of transfer from their previous meeting forwarded to Ministry and Worship. A clearness process is normally not required, but Ministry and Worship extends a welcoming visit and brings the request to Meeting for Business. Monthly Meeting then proceeds as above, deferring a decision so that Friends may get to know the person requesting transfer.

A **sojourning member** is a member of another meeting who resides in Atlanta for an extended period. Sojourning members may have a letter of introduction addressed to Ministry and Worship, which will appoint members to visit and welcome the sojourner. Ministry and Worship will then introduce the sojourning member after Meeting for Worship and at Monthly Meeting for Business. No decision is required.

Associate members are children of parent(s) who are members of the meeting. Associate membership expresses the importance both for children to be members of the community and for them to make their own decision, when they are ready, about the

continuance of their membership. Parent(s) who join the meeting and members who have or adopt children should be asked if they wish the children to be listed as associate members. If the children of the new member are 12 or over, they should be asked at this point if they wish to be listed or not, or if they wish to apply for regular membership. Care should be taken to help those listed as associate members to feel themselves full participants in the fellowship of the Meeting. As they approach maturity they should be given the opportunity, at appropriate times, in accordance with their religious and mental development, to decide whether or not they wish to be recorded as members of the Society of Friends. Associate members who feel led to join the meeting should follow the regular procedure outlined above.

In order to ensure the meeting's care for the children of our community, Ministry and Worship will record births and adoptions to both members and attenders (if they wish) in the minutes of Meeting for Business.

Discontinuance of membership

If a member submits a resignation, the meeting is not absolved from further care. A committee may be appointed to visit this person in love, inquire into the cause of resignation, and, if fitting, encourage a reconsideration of the action. If this purpose continues and the meeting accedes, a minute should be made stating that the member is released at his or her own request. The clerk will then inform the person of this action in a letter conveying the affectionate regard of the meeting. The meeting should be open to a renewed application from this person, handling it according to the usual procedure for new members.

Periodically, Ministry and Worship will contact members who exhibit a lack of interest in the meeting. If its efforts to restore interest are ineffectual, the Monthly Meeting may record a minute giving the circumstances and removing the individual from membership.

All dealings involving discontinuance of membership should be handled with the utmost patience and consideration, both for the sake of the individual and for the sake of the meeting

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