

Admission to Membership

(From Faith & Practice of Pittsburgh Friends Meeting)

Pittsburgh Friends Meeting welcomes into membership all who are in substantial unity with its testimonies and practices and find themselves strengthened by the Meeting for Worship. Membership involves accepting one's appropriate share of responsibility for the spiritual life and practical affairs of the Meeting, including care of the buildings and grounds, and financial support. Regular attenders who are clear about their commitment to the Meeting and its significance in their lives are encouraged to consider becoming members.

The period of acquaintance with the Meeting before requesting membership is usually at least one year or longer. Newer attenders who express an interest in the Meeting should be encouraged to read the writings of Friends and to become familiar with the activities and concerns of Friends generally through Friends' periodicals and conferences and by attending sessions of Yearly Meeting. They are advised to attend our Meeting for Worship and monthly Meeting for Business regularly in order to deepen their understanding of the Society of Friends. Study of the Testimonies, Advices, and Queries will help them to know whether they feel in harmony with the spirit of Quakerism.

One becomes a member of the Society of Friends by joining a particular local meeting. Therefore, persons considering membership in Pittsburgh Monthly Meeting should be especially familiar with its aspirations and concerns and be willing to share in its responsibilities, challenges, and joys. They should be familiar with this Faith and Practice and feel free to discuss its content with members. Membership in Pittsburgh Friends Meeting includes membership in Lake Erie Yearly Meeting and Friends General Conference.

When inquirers are clear as to their desire, they write to the Clerk requesting membership. The Clerk promptly acknowledges the request and forwards it to the Committee on Clearness and Care. The Clearness and Care Committee selects a committee of three or four members of the Meeting, including at least one from the Clearness and Care Committee, to meet with the applicant, and reports their names to Meeting for Business and in the Newsletter. This clearness committee for membership becomes acquainted with the applicant; they explore together the responsibilities and implications of membership, and the committee reports its recommendation to the Clearness and Care Committee within an appropriate length of time. The Clearness and Care Committee, after deliberation, makes a recommendation to Meeting for Business. The Meeting acts on the recommendation, and the Clerk sends a letter notifying the applicant of the result. If the application is approved, the Recorder completes the records, with the help of the new member.

The membership committee should make certain that the applicant understands this procedure. If the committee feels that the applicant is not ready for membership, it may suggest a delay during which he or she may become better acquainted with Quakerism and Pittsburgh Meeting. Sometimes it may become clear to the applicant or the committee that membership is not advisable, and the application is not carried forward.

The membership committee should make sure that the applicant has no commitment to other Meetings (unless dual membership will be agreed upon) or to other religious groups. Attenders who wish to retain membership in another group but want to express their unity with the Society of Friends may become members of the Wider Quaker Fellowship.

Applicants should understand Friends' emphasis on personal experience rather than formal creed. The committee may want to discuss with prospective members what their experience of God or of the Inward Light means to them. The committee makes clear that, although there are no creedal requirements for membership, Friends emphasize the responsibility of striving to live out our Quaker beliefs and testimonies. Applicants should feel free to discuss any difficulty they foresee in acting in accordance with the testimonies; they should understand that when the Meeting seeks unity in action based on the testimonies and interpreted under the guidance of the Inner Light it is following a basic principle of Quakerism.

The committee may wish to inquire what led the applicant to seek membership in the Meeting and to explore the reasons. It should learn the degree of the applicant's commitment to the Meeting in terms of regular attendance at meetings for worship and business. It should be made clear that the Meeting members carry on the work that in other religious groups is performed by paid clergy. The applicant also needs to know of the Meeting's financial responsibilities, as stated in the annual budget, to carry on its work, to maintain the Meeting House, and support the work of Friends' organizations such as the American Friends Service Committee and the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

Applicants need to understand and appreciate the spirit and principles underlying our worship based on silent waiting, the absence of paid ministry and of outward sacraments, and the conduct of marriage and memorial services. Strong emphasis on the decision-making process and the importance of the Spirit in Meeting for Business will help new members to share the responsibility for this process.

Those seeking membership should have some knowledge of the history and principles of Quakerism and should be aware that most Quakers consider themselves to be a part of the Christian community. They should also know of the diversity of practice and belief in the wider body of Friends.

At the close of the session or sessions together, both the applicant and the members of the membership committee should feel that they have shared in an open, friendly, clarifying, and useful experience.