

Guidelines for Seeking Membership in Pittsburgh Friends Meeting

Offered by the Clearness & Care Committee of Pittsburgh Monthly Meeting for Applicants for Membership and Members of Clearness Committees. These guidelines are based on the experience of Friends who have convened clearness committees and supplements the section on membership on pages 32-34 of our Meeting's *Faith and Practice*, Fourth Revision, 1993.

Why Membership?

"In Quaker faith and practice, the individual and the meeting are in a dynamic, mutually supportive, and reciprocal relation." - Tom Gates, "Members One Of Another: *The Dynamics Of Membership In Quaker Meeting*" – *Pendle Hill Pamphlet 371*

By formally seeking membership, an applicant is declaring that he or she has found a Spiritual home amongst Friends. Members are connected to the global network of Friends and Friends' organizations. Upon visiting or moving to another city, Members can introduce themselves as a member of a specific Monthly Meeting they call their spiritual home, allowing other Friends to understand a greater level of involvement and understanding of Quakerism. Although not true in Pittsburgh Meeting, some meetings restrict participation in Meeting for Business to members. Membership is a declaration that a person is entering into a mutual relationship with the Meeting and Society. The applicant is asserting that he or she will work to ensure the existence of Pittsburgh Meeting into the future for those who might find a spiritual home here. In return Pittsburgh Meeting offers a community of people who share similar values and yet are not restricted to a particular creed; who are encouraged to question and to tolerate differences.

Request for Membership

Pittsburgh Friends Meeting welcomes applications for membership from those who have been strengthened by their attendance at our Meetings for Worship and who are in substantial unity with our testimonies and practices. Most applicants are active in the Meeting a year or longer before requesting membership and are familiar with our *Faith and Practice*. Membership is a relationship of mutual spiritual support and involves each member accepting his or her share of responsibility for the Meeting's spiritual life, practical affairs, and financial obligations. A person interested in becoming a member of the Meeting writes a letter to the Clerk requesting membership.

Relation of Clearness Committee for Membership to Clearness & Care Committee and Business Meeting

The Clerk reads the applicant's letter requesting membership at the next Meeting for Business and passes it along to the Clearness & Care [C&C] Committee. The C&C Committee selects a clearness committee for membership consisting of three or four members of the Meeting, including at least one currently serving on the C&C Committee, one of whom is invited to convene. The C&C Committee reports the names

of the clearness committee members to the next Meeting for Business. The convener is responsible for arranging a meeting time convenient for all. The committee meets as often as necessary to come to unity on a recommendation regarding the application for membership. The convener reports on the meeting(s) with the applicant and presents the recommendation of the committee in writing to the C&C Committee. The C&C Committee considers the recommendation and informs the applicant at that time of its recommendation. A recommendation for membership is brought to the next Meeting for Business for action by the entire Meeting. A recommendation against membership may be brought to Meeting for Business for information, but should be handled as most appropriate for the specific situation. The Recorder sends a welcoming letter to the new member together with a form for personal information, which is entered in the Membership Record Book of the Meeting.

Spirit and Purpose a Clearness Committee on Membership

Clearness committee meetings are held in a worshipful spirit, with the conviction that the Inner Light will guide the group to clearness. Periods of silent worship at the beginning and end of the time spent together help to establish a spiritual framework. The applicant and the members of the committee will seek clearness on whether membership in the Meeting is an appropriate next step in the applicant's spiritual journey. To discern this, the applicant and the committee members share their experiences in seeking and discovering Truth. Clearness committee discussions are confidential to promote a frank exchange of experiences. Sufficient time should be allowed to ensure mutual understanding. This may mean more than one meeting.

Areas to Cover in a Membership Clearness Committee

MEMBERSHIP PROCEDURE: The clearness committee should ascertain that the applicant understands the procedure in acting on an application for membership, including the role of the C&C Committee and the Meeting for Business.

REASONS FOR APPLYING: It may be helpful to look both at the long-range and more immediate reasons for the application.

FRIENDS' BASIC FAITH AND TESTIMONIES: The applicant should believe in the basic Quaker faith in that of God or Spirit or Light in all persons as a foundation of our testimonies of love and unity, simplicity and honesty, moderation, peace, equality and social justice. The emphasis in Quakerism is on trying to live out our faith and testimonies. Applicants should feel free to discuss any difficulty they foresee in acting in accordance with the testimonies as listed in our *Faith and Practice*, pp. 16-18.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERSHIP: The degree of the applicant's commitment to the Meeting can partly be judged by his or her willingness to accept responsibilities such as participation in the spiritual life of the Meeting and regular attendance at Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Business. Also regular financial contributions to the Meeting are important to maintain the Meetinghouse, to support Meeting committee work, and

to support Friends' organizations. Willingness to serve on Meeting committees is also part of the responsibility of membership. It should be clear that the applicant is not committed to or a member of other Friends Meetings or religious groups.

SPIRITUAL MATTERS: Awareness of our emphasis on personal experience rather than creed, and sharing the experience of silent worship, are important. How the applicant understands God or the Inner Light may be discussed. The applicant should be aware of the varied theological perspectives among Friends in Pittsburgh Meeting and among different groups of Friends. Many Friends consider themselves Christians, some do not. Since some Friends find traditional Christian language difficult while others find it the best way to express their spirituality, we strive to understand each other's Truth beyond the limitations of language.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: Applicants should understand that our decision-making process at Meeting for Business and at committee meetings is based on reliance on the Inner Light as the way to unity. Just as the different messages at Meeting for Worship can point to a greater spiritual truth than a single message, so different proposals for action at Meeting for Business, presented on the basis of our partial insights, can lead to a better decision than any of us might have thought of individually.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER FRIENDS: While membership in the Society of Friends centers in a particular local meeting, applicants should realize that membership in Pittsburgh Monthly Meeting includes membership in Lake Erie Yearly Meeting and, through the Yearly Meeting, in Friends General Conference and Friends World Committee for Consultation. Applicants should be aware of the variety of national groups of Friends Meetings - Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting and Evangelical Friends International. Most of the last two groups have worship led by pastors. They should be aware of national Quaker organizations that promote Quaker concerns, such as American Friends Service Committee and Friends Committee on National Legislation.