

Glossary

Advices—Ideals stated as a continuing reminder of the basic faith and principles essential to the life and witness of Friends.

Affirmation—A legal declaration made by Friends or others who have conscientious objection to the taking of oaths.

Attender—One who attends meeting for worship and participates in meeting activities fairly regularly but is not a member.

Birthright member—A Friend born of Quaker parents. Individuals born into the Society of Friends are sometimes entered into the monthly meeting membership rolls automatically. Intermountain Yearly Meeting does not recognize a formal membership status based on an accident of birth.

Calling—A powerful sense of being destined and required to act on a specific concern.

Centering down—A process by which we still or direct our conscious thoughts and open our minds in order that we may hear God speaking directly to us.

Clearness (clarity)—A condition in which there are no perceived obstacles to a proposed course of action by an individual Friend or a meeting.

Clearness committee—A group of Friends appointed to assist a person or the meeting to clarify a decision or concern.

Clerk—An individual who presides at meetings of Friends, including business meetings and committee meetings.

Consensus—A secular term used to describe an agreement that is reached by a group without a vote and based on considering an issue together.

Concern—An interest deeply rooted in the Holy Spirit; one that can move both an individual and a meeting to action.

Convener—A member of a committee who calls together the first meeting of that committee.

Convinced Friend—A person who becomes a Quaker as a result of being led to this decision by the Inner Light after careful study, thought, and seeking.

Corporate—Referring to the body of a Friends' meeting. Although God may speak differently to individuals, the meeting as a whole provides a clear perception of divine guidance for the community after a period of discernment.

Continuing revelation—The belief that God speaks to persons directly today.

Child member, junior member, associate member—Terms used in some meetings with reference to the children in the meeting community who have not yet formally requested membership and been admitted.

Covered meeting—A meeting in which the participants, waiting faithfully upon the Spirit, feel the power and inspiration of God so strongly that they are united in silence.

Discernment—Knowledge of the Truth achieved by careful listening to the group considering the matter and to the Spirit. It is a gradually acquired skill that does not spring fully fledged.

Discipline—A book of faith and practice in the Religious Society of Friends, so called to reflect the spirit of discipleship felt by Friends.

Eldering—Gently admonishing in love the ways, habits, or thoughts of a Friend or attender after prayerful consideration and often after consultation with respected members of the meeting. Encouraging timid Friends to share their gifts with the meeting, or discouraging and/or questioning an individual's inappropriate behavior or speaking.

Elders—Historically, those Friends appointed to foster the vocal ministry of the meeting for worship and the spiritual condition of the members.

Epistle—A letter of serious import sent either by an individual or a group. An epistle is sent annually from each yearly meeting to "Friends everywhere" and states the condition and experience of the yearly meeting.

Gathered meeting—A meeting that attains more than the usual sense of Divine Presence, uniting the worshipers in a common experience of holy fellowship.

Good order of Friends—The procedures, found through Friends' experience, that facilitate our business and committee meetings as we seek to understand and carry out God's will.

Hold in the Light—To ask for God's presence to illuminate a person, situation, or problem, whether in concern or in thanksgiving.

Inner Light—The presence of God in our hearts and lives, a reality that guides and directs us, gives us strength to act on this guidance, and brings us into unity with the spirit of God and one another. The “Inner Light” is also called the “Inward Light,” the “Light Within,” the “Christ Within,” the “Light of Christ,” the “Holy Spirit,” and the “Seed.”

Lay down—To terminate a committee or meeting, recognizing that the work of that group has come to an end.

Leading —An inner conviction that impels one to follow a certain course under a sense of divine guidance. George Fox distinguished this relatively common experience from what he called “openings,” using “opening” to denote a fresh and major insight into the ways of God, often resulting in a specific course of action or a particular stand on a matter.

Letter of introduction—A letter from a Friends’ group that identifies the carrier of the letter as a member of the group, notes his or her participation in the life of the meeting, and sends greetings to any Friends visited.

Member—An individual who has been formally admitted into a monthly meeting after undergoing a process to determine clearness in their own minds and within the meeting community. Membership in a monthly meeting confers membership in the Religious Society of Friends.

Minding the Light—Being attentive to the Inner Light in each of us that can reveal God’s will.

Ministry—A gift of the Spirit, referring both to vocal ministry in the sense of speaking in meeting for worship and to pastoral care and service.

Minute—A statement of a decision taken and approved by those in attendance at a given business meeting and reflecting the facts discerned.

Moved to speak—The experience of a worshiper, in the quiet of a meeting, of feeling impelled by God to break the silence and offer a verbal message.

Monthly meeting—A term referring both to the group of Friends who form a worshipping community that meets once a month to conduct business and to that specific meeting for worship with a concern for business held by such a group.

Notion—The original Quaker term for an idea or proposal that is “heady”—that is, lacking in spiritual depth. The term is more generally applied to any approach to religious matters that is not primarily based on first-hand spiritual experience.

Opening—A moment of unexpected enlightenment or inspiration from God. As used by George Fox, revelations into the meaning of life and the scriptures.

Overseers—Individuals, usually organized as a committee, with a responsibility for pastoral care of the meeting community.

Preparative meeting—Originally, and still in Britain, a term used to refer to a meeting that prepares business to be brought before the monthly meeting. In Intermountain Yearly Meeting, the term refers to an organized group of Friends that is under the care and guidance of an established monthly meeting and is preparing to become a monthly meeting.

Proceed as way opens—To wait for guidance from God; to avoid hasty judgment or action; to wait for future circumstances to help solve a problem.

Programmed meeting—A meeting for worship, usually conducted by a pastor, with a prearranged program, including music, an offering, a sermon, and periods of silence and waiting during which Friends feel free to speak from the body of the meeting.

Quaker—Originally a description of a person experiencing the trembling sometimes resulting from spiritual experience (as when one is moved to speak during a meeting for worship). The term was applied in derision by a justice before whom George Fox appeared and was later adopted by the movement.

Queries—Questions that, in conjunction with “advices,” enable individuals and meetings to examine themselves in relation to the standard of conduct the Religious Society of Friends has established for itself.

Regional meeting—A group of monthly meetings within a geographic region. Regional Meetings meet together at various intervals as led. Names such as “quarterly meeting” or “half yearly meeting” refer to the established intervals for specific regional meetings.

Release—To free a concerned and qualified Friend for religious service related to a specific concern by removing other expectations, providing financial assistance, giving other support, and so on.

Seasoning—Considering a matter for a period of time in order for all to experience the will of God with regard to it.

Sense of the meeting—An agreement in a Quaker meeting by all or most of those present, based on their understanding of God's purpose for the matter at hand. When sense of the meeting has been reached, Friends feel a sense of the rightness of the decision and a commitment to carry that decision forward. Recently described succinctly as a "commitment to faith," in contradistinction to "consensus," which is described as "the product of an intellectual process."

Sojourning member—A member of a monthly meeting who resides temporarily elsewhere and becomes a recognized part of a monthly meeting in the area of that temporary residence. After proper procedures, the Friends is understood to have the same rights and responsibilities as the members of that meeting. The assessment for support of the yearly meeting remains with the sojourning member's home meeting, however.

Speaks to my condition—A term referring to the fact that a statement or comment is particularly apt or timely to an individual and helpful to her or him at that particular moment.

Stand aside—To decide not to declare unity with a consensus decision but nevertheless not to block it from proceeding. A Friend who stands aside has a responsibility to support and carry forward the decision of the meeting, but he or she may ask to have the lack of agreement minuted.

Tender—Gentle, considerate, loving, sympathetic, caring. In Fox's writing, the word "tender" was used with the connotation of softened and receptive to the Light and Power of God.

Testimonies—Public statements or witness based on beliefs of the Religious Society of Friends that give direction to our lives.

Threshing meeting—A meeting held to discuss a controversial issue, at which all points of view are heard, but no decision is made.

Travel minute—The endorsement a meeting gives to one of its members who is traveling, usually among Friends, under the weight of a concern. This is distinct from a letter of introduction that a monthly meeting may prepare for a Friend who plans to visit Friends in the course of traveling. For travel outside the yearly meeting, the yearly meeting usually endorses the travel minute.

Truth—Friends' understanding of the will of God as made clear by direct revelation.

Unprogrammed (silent) meeting—A meeting for worship in which no individual is in charge. In such a meeting, the gathered Friends sit in silence, waiting upon God and "leadings of the Spirit," which may give rise to vocal messages that are shared with the meeting. Meetings in which Friends spend the whole time in silence can also be occasions of great inspiration. This is the form of worship practiced by early Friends.

Unity—A common understanding of the will of the Spirit dependent on the willingness of all to seek the truth in each others' utterances, to be open to persuasion, and to recognize and accept the sense of the meeting as recorded in a minute, knowing that dissenting views have been heard and considered seriously.

Visitation—Formal visiting among Friends for various purposes.

Wait upon the Lord—Actively to seek and attend to God's will in expectant, quiet worship.

Worship group—A group convened to worship together regularly after the manner of Friends. A worship group is generally under the care of a monthly meeting.

Worship sharing—A group worship experience during which Friends share their experiences on a particular topic, hearing from all who wish to speak and focusing on listening deeply to one another without discussion.

Yearly meeting—An association of monthly meetings, often encompassing several regional meetings, that conducts an annual meeting with a concern for business and allows Friends to experience wider fellowship and greater effect in their public witness.