

MEMBERSHIP

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Membership in the Religious Society of Friends exists only through membership in monthly meetings and is integral with four basic purposes of monthly meetings: 1) to provide for corporate worship in the manner of Friends; 2) to provide for corporate witness based in worship and Friends' historic testimonies; 3) to support and guide similarly based personal witness; and 4) to support and guide personal spiritual growth.

Quaker meetings for worship are open to the general public. In witness, Friends may join with others who share a concern. Monthly meeting business, however, is conducted by those who recognize the basic purposes, accept Friends' testimonies, and commit themselves to making the business process work. Quaker process is not based on rights, prohibitions, and privileges (the checks and balances of worldly organizations), but in unity, responsibility, and truth. The conduct of business in the manner of Friends is learned through participation and practice.

Participants who accept Friends testimonies and business process are encouraged to formalize participation by being recorded as members. The membership clearness process is a search for unity that the responsibilities are understood and the commitment truly made by both the participant and the meeting. The action of a meeting for business does not create membership. Rather it records that the membership relationship has already begun. Meetings do not offer membership; it must be applied for. Meetings have no formal mechanism for recognizing committed participants who have not applied for membership.

Recorded membership is a tool meetings use to identify those who are committed to the meeting process and included in the mutual care of the meeting community. Reduced participation due to age, health, family needs, work, or distance from meeting may at times occur without changing the membership commitment. When *commitment* lapses, however, so should membership. When a member who has withdrawn from participation in and commitment to the meeting remains recorded as a member, the meeting needs to examine the continuation of that membership record. Each monthly meeting is responsible for the truth as well as the accuracy of its membership records.

Membership defines the relationship between an individual and a meeting, not the relationship between a person and God. The recording of membership is not a Quaker substitute for baptism or confirmation. No spiritual test or affirmation of creed is required for membership, and no spiritual status is obtained. Friends do not regard themselves as a spiritually elect or elite group which everyone ought to aspire to join. Quakerism is not "The Way" to worship God. Given the diversity in meetings, it is only minimally a way. Rather, Quakerism is the reverse. Each Friend is a way God ministers to the world. Friends recognize the same ministry active, as well, in many non-Friends and see its potential in every human life. Membership is open to all. Friends are committed to the principle that it is possible, but not necessary, for anyone to become a Friend.