

**Being a Member
of Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting**

Berkeley, California

Prepared by Care of the Meeting Committee

What is a Quaker?

Seekers outside our Society are sometimes puzzled about what makes someone Quaker, since we have no formal creed. Or they may think, “Quakers let you believe anything you want.” It is more accurate to state that Friends hold that each of us can have a direct experience of communion with the Divine, and that our own experience of God is important in the development of our religious belief and practice.

There are now members of Friends meetings and churches in many countries around the world, most of whom consider themselves and their religion to be Christian, and who worship in services which are planned in advance or led by paid ministers. In contrast, Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting and many other meetings for worship are unprogrammed, and have no paid ministers. We find it is common for seekers to come to Quakerism not only from Christian backgrounds,¹ but also from other faith traditions or no religious background at all, and we appreciate this diversity. While some of us would describe ourselves and our religion as Christian, others would not. What, then, do we Quakers all have in common?

Historically, what unites us is our belief that there is something transcendent and precious in every person, which we often call “that of God” in all people. Different Quakers use different words to describe this. But we all believe everyone can be in contact with Inward Light and experience something beyond our individual selves to transform and guide our lives. We believe that all of us can be ministers, without ordination. We believe that each of us holds a measure of the Light, or the Truth; that together we discern a fuller understanding of Truth than we might singly; and that discernment may unfold and mature over time – thus, our openness to continuing revelation. Quaker meetings that struggle with the tension between strong identification with Christianity and strong distaste for the rigidities of established religion, often discover that engaging with these very poles is part of our strength.

Our belief in that of God in everyone leads to several commonly held “testimonies” – corporately held beliefs about how to put our faith into practice in our daily lives. These testimonies are central to our religious practice. We believe that violence is not acceptable, and seek to find peaceful solutions to every type of conflict. We hold that no one is our enemy or beyond redemption; and that everyone must be treated as a person who can be drawn by love to live in a way which manifests respect and consideration for others. We seek to apply these values to our own behavior in community, to live in harmony with each other, to care for one another, and to settle our conflicts peacefully and promptly. We do not elevate any one person above another, but accord equal respect and responsibility to all. We value and provide opportunities for education, as a means of ensuring that each person can reach his or her potential – spiritually, socially, and economically. We recognize the importance of living in right relationship with the natural world and sharing the earth’s

¹ Our historical foundation as a religious society is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, particularly as understood and articulated by Quakerism’s 17th century British founder, George Fox.

resources equitably and sustainably.

Every Quaker Meeting is Unique (but connected)

Quakerism is met and embraced in the experience of one particular Monthly Meeting. The grounds for seeking membership differ for individuals and there is no “creed” to accept. The commitment is to a process of spiritual growth in a particular social context – Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting. Our “ways and customs” evolve out of the Meeting’s collective experience of Worship, and in sharing the day-to-day experience of life activity that extends the collective Worship to all aspects of life.

Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting is itself linked to a long historical evolution, and to a supporting network of other Meetings. Most monthly meetings are part of larger aggregations of worshippers – quarterly meetings, yearly meetings, and broader associations. While an individual’s membership is based in the monthly meeting, in becoming a Friend one is also joined to these larger groups. In joining Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting, one also becomes a member of College Park Quarterly Meeting and Pacific Yearly Meeting, which is affiliated with Friends General Conference; it is hoped that each member will actively seek ways to relate to these larger Quaker groups.

To learn more about the historical roots of Friends, the evidence of the lives of Friends gone before us that were imbued with the indwelling Spirit and collectively affirmed as “Testimonies”, and the linkages to Quarterly and Yearly Meetings, the following are helpful, especially to prospective members and their membership committees:

Resources

- **Faith and Practice of Pacific Yearly Meeting** (2001): a summary of the collective understanding, procedures, and practices of those Monthly Meetings affiliated, along with Strawberry Creek, in Pacific Yearly Meeting.
- **Four Doors to Meeting for Worship** (1992) by William Taber: A Pendle Hill pamphlet. From the introduction: *Some people “find it” almost instantly when they attend their first Friends meeting for worship; as they settle into the silence they feel themselves gathered into a living Presence and they know they have come home at last. Others may experience their first Quaker worship as difficult and strange, but something keeps drawing them back until they gradually grow into a richer and richer experience of worship.*
- **Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of the Meeting** (1993) by Barry Morley. A Pendle Hill pamphlet. From the introduction: *Sense of the meeting is a gift. It came to the Quakers through their commitment to continuing revelation. They discovered that the Light which had come to teach the people could lead them to revealed corporate decisions. The Quakers cherished the gift.*

What Membership Means

To become a member of the Religious Society of Friends, one joins a local worship community, referred to as a “monthly meeting.” The rewards and joys which come to us in our worship and life together are rich and deep.

Community Worship

Meeting for worship, including meeting for worship on the occasion of business, is the core of our life together. As with all monthly meetings in Pacific Yearly Meeting, we have no paid ministers, and our meetings for worship are “unprogrammed,” held in expectant silence, free of prescribed ritual. Each member of our Meeting has an important role to play: to come to worship regularly, prepared to participate fully, whether in centered waiting or vocal ministry.

Shared Decision-Making

In conducting our business, our decision-making process is “Spirit-led;” we seek understandings from a higher source, transcending the insights of individuals. As our meetings for business are a vital part of our communal life, each of us shares responsibility to be present and to help assure that they are conducted in a spirit of worship. Our decision-making process includes deep listening, opening to spiritual guidance, and finding a “sense of the meeting” that speaks for the group as a whole. Reaching unity is neither unanimity nor consensus. According to Pacific Yearly Meetings’s *Faith and Practice* -- to which we look for guidance in personal preparation and behavior, in this and other practices -- unity reflects “the spiritual oneness and harmony whose realization is a primary objective of a Meeting for Worship for Business, the state of finding and recognizing a unified sense (often referred to as God’s will) about a concern or item of business”. In reaching unity, we are seeking a path that is right for the community as a whole.

As a member of Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting, it is important to be aware of key decisions (Minutes) that have been approved and represent some of our strongest values. These include Minutes on same gender marriage, earthcare, homelessness and racial justice (see appendix).

Doing the Work Together

Other areas of corporate responsibility include seeing to it that the work of the meeting – through its committees – is carried out without undue burden on a few individuals, and that our financial obligations are met. When each member examines their resources and gifts in light of the larger community’s need – in worship, business, committee work and finances – and is generous and responsible in sharing those gifts, our corporate health is maintained. Members are expected to be rigorous with themselves in this process, and to inform the community if they experience difficulty discerning or sharing those gifts and resources.

Living Our Values

Members are also encouraged and supported to nurture their spiritual life and live out the testimonies outside of meeting for worship, finding work or service consistent with our beliefs in the outside world, and participating in smaller study and prayer groups within the Meeting. We also care for one another on a personal, one-to-one basis, as well as corporately, to the best of our abilities.. We appreciate each other’s presence and gifts, looking for the strengths in our diversity; we are attentive to each member to see that individual worth is appreciated and spiritual needs are met.

We join and stay because this community of faith is what best nurtures our spirit; we participate in the life of the community as a matter of course. Yet we are also intentional and organized. Many of

our committees exist to help focus and facilitate our caring for each other. We are asked about our gifts -- by the nominating committee and the finance committee. Our Care of the Meeting Committee and Mutual Care Committee keep track of the well-being of each member and prayerfully consider how to resolve situations where the covenant relationship between Meeting community and member or potential member is unclear or troubled.

Commitment

We see membership in our community as a covenant among us, which in addition to making possible those rewards and joys, defines the expectations of our relationships. In this covenant, the individual must be present to the community, as the community must be attentive to each member. Thus, the commitment of membership formally identifies what the individual requires from and offers to the meetings, as well as what the meeting needs of the individual and offers in return. In the spiritual context of a worshipping community, the covenant of membership is a willingness to stay with the commitment through inevitable hard times, and a willingness to be transformed.

Each member shares in the responsibility of helping to build and maintain a Meeting family that models the Community of God. With each member of our Meeting a potential minister, membership is a vital and active relationship of one to another. Each member is expected to bring to the community the gifts they have, and to share those gifts.

We recognize several ways of relating to the Meeting besides full active membership. We welcome *attenders*, those who are visiting or not yet clear that our Meeting will be their spiritual home. Attenders are invited into the life of the Meeting; our commitment to individuals' personal and spiritual well-being goes first, however, to our members. We offer the option of *Associate Membership* to the children of our members, giving our young people a formal relationship to the Meeting before they might be ready to become full members.

Becoming a Member – The Process

After a letter from an attender requesting consideration for membership in Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends has been received by the Clerk of Meeting and read in a Meeting for Business, a Membership clearness committee is appointed by Care of the Meeting Committee to meet with the prospective member. This process is followed for requests of new membership in the Society of Friends as well as for transfers of membership from another monthly meeting.

Membership Committees of two or three people include a member of the Care of the Meeting Committee as convener. Those Friends who gather as a Membership Committee should remain mindful that exploring readiness for membership means sharing in a process of serious self-examination by a prospective member. The process requires the profound and reverent attention of the committee as well as of the prospective member. The members of the committee are called upon to be sensitive, loving, inquiring but never inquisitorial, as they engage to discern with the prospective member if there is a readiness for this new level of commitment. To ensure that they are prepared for their ministry of discernment, it is advised that the convener confer with the committee members in advance of meeting with the prospective member.

The committee and the prospective member should be prepared to meet as often as necessary to become clear on the issues that may develop in their discussions. It is not unusual for there to be

only one meeting with the prospective member, nor is it unusual for there to be several over a more extended period of time. Space and time should be given for mutual exploration of whatever personal truth manifests in the process.

Discussions of the membership committee and prospective member should be reverently and spontaneously guided by Spirit and carefully avoid a sense of “check off” or comparison to standards. However, the experience of the Meeting has shown that, along with other personal considerations that are unique with each prospective member, a general review of Quaker history and the Quaker decision-making process is an integral part of the membership discernment process.

Once the committee is clear that it has reached a decision or a conclusion to its process, it reports to the Care of the Meeting Committee. The Care of the Meeting Committee brings recommendations for membership to the next Meeting for Business.

March 7, 2020

Appendix

1. Minute on Same-Gender Marriage
2. Testimony on Earthcare
3. Minute on attending to the suffering of others in our community
4. Minute on Engagement to Uproot and Dismantle Racism in Strawberry Creek Friends Meeting

Minute on same-gender marriage

Strawberry Creek Meeting recognizes and affirms the Light in all sincere and loving relationships which are characterized by growth and in which faithfulness and trust, hope and truth abide. We affirm the goodness of committed, loving relationships and offer recognition and support to lifelong partnership based upon it. Friends recognize committed union in a celebration of marriage under the care of the Meeting. After careful consideration in the Light we have been led to decide that from now on the same loving care and consideration will be given to both same-gender and heterosexual requests for marriage, as outlined in Faith and Practice.

November 1992

Testimony On Earthcare

Friends' testimonies on simplicity, equality, peace and community suggest the need for an explicit testimony on Earthcare at this time in our history.

"It would go a long way to caution and direct people in their use of the world, that they were better studied and knowing in the Creation of it. For how could [they] find the confidence to abuse it, while they should see the great Creator stare them in the face, in all and every part of it?" William Penn, 1693

"In the distress of the earth we can hear the calling of God to care, just as in the past we have heard God in the sufferings of the poor...the commonwealth of people and the commonwealth of the earth have become inseparably interrelated and interdependent. Our thinking about God and the world, and the way we live in relation to them, must now give recognition to that fact." Rex Ambler, 1990

Earthcare

We seek to live our lives in reverence for all life on Earth, encompassing right-sharing of the world's resources amongst all people and all species. Friends are called to enter into right relationship with Earth and the community of life it supports.

Friends see that of God within all life. We celebrate the mystery and wonder of our world and the gifts of nature that sustain and support us. At the same time, we see that human actions are

undermining and destroying Earth's capacity to continue to bring forth these gifts. We hold these gifts in deep reverence, respect and gratitude.

Friends recognize that those who suffer most from the destruction of Earth's gifts are the poor and the powerless. The wealthy, industrialized nations bear the greatest responsibility for this condition. We strive to find solutions to environmental damage that include peace and social justice for those people most affected by unequal sharing of the world's resources.

Much like a household that overspends its budget, humans are rapidly depleting Earth's resources with excessive, unwise consumption and a growing population. We are called to modify our daily, personal choices and to work at the local, national and global levels to ensure the resilience of Earth. We feel a sense of urgency to bring our lives into right relationship with the community of life on Earth. We are called to be faithful to continuing revelation in these matters, to be transformed in our habits as our hearts and minds are opened.

Even
The exhausted blade of grass
That breaks through the concrete

Listens
To the Wind's Song
And
Knows that it would be foolish
To do otherwise

Spoken ministry, Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting 2/14/2010

Approved, April 2010, Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends,
Berkeley C

Minute on attending to the suffering of others in our community

In following our leadings, openings and testimonies, especially those on community and equality, Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting unites in supporting the effort of our members who are reaching out to those who are without shelter and food. One of the most important things we are doing as a faith community is to not look away but to engage.

Several members of our meeting have engaged in municipal politics to encourage more compassionate and immediate responses to those who are suffering and who often do not even have basic needs met.

Other members have become actively involved in direct action, shelters, and encampments, in making and offering food, publishing the voices of those on the margins through Youth Spirit Artworks' *Street Spirit*, and in using whatever social services are available to alleviate poverty on all levels, most importantly in housing, nutrition and health care.

We invite members working in this arena to request letters of support (introduction, leading, or ministry) from Meeting.

Approved January, 13, 2019

Minute on Engagement to Uproot and Dismantle Racism in Strawberry Creek Friends Meeting

Strawberry Creek Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends acknowledges the centrality, depth, and pervasiveness of systemic racism in the United States. Continuing revelations of history, experience, and conscience challenge Friends to live up to the Light, increasing awareness of how we, our communities, and our institutions perpetuate the structure of racism. We must help one another discern what Spirit calls us to do individually and corporately.

We utterly reject the racial *status quo*. People are suffering and dying daily as a result of systemic racial bias within and across institutions and economic structures, which reproduces inequity and discrimination for “people of color” and unearned advantage for “others”. We call upon ourselves as Friends to illuminate, uproot, and dismantle white privilege because it is used to maintain white dominance.

Systemic racism creates a barrier to living fully into our deepest Quaker values as reflected in all of our testimonies. We seek to bring about a truly inclusive, compassionate, diverse Religious Society of Friends through which our individual lives speak to our collective belonging to one another and Creation. We commit to the work of healing and transforming to make foundational change in our Meeting. We commit equally to the work of dismantling the political and economic structures of racism and opening to acceptance of real beauty in human difference.

Approved 2/9/20
Berkeley, California