

Glossary of Quakerisms

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Glossary

Note: Some of the terms that follow are in common usage, but Friends have given them a particular meaning. Others are essentially limited to Quaker usage.

Advices: Extracts from minutes and epistles of early Friends intended to supply guidance, caution and counsel to monthly meetings and their members on various aspects of daily life. The collection of such extracts prepared for the previous edition of Faith and Practice is included at the beginning of the Section of Extracts. The word Advices is also sometimes used to encompass the whole of a Friends book of discipline (See also Preface).

Affirmation: A legal declaration provided for Friends and others who conscientiously refuse to take (or swear) judicial oaths.

Allowed or Indulged Meeting: A worship group of Friends under the care of an organized body of Friends, usually at quarterly or monthly meeting level, but less formally organized than a preparative meeting. This term has been applied to Friends from various monthly meetings who gather at a common vacation site during the summer, or to the occasional use of an historic Friends meetinghouse.

Birthright Friend: In early practice, an individual whose parents were both members of a Friends Meeting was automatically registered at birth as a member of that Meeting. Such automatic registration has generally been replaced by a system which requires a definite decision on the part of the parent or parents regarding the membership status of a newborn child.

Book of Discipline: A book describing a yearly meeting's history, structures, and procedures, including advices, queries, and often quotations, or extracts, from the experience of Friends. Faith and Practice is a Book of Discipline. The word discipline comes from the root word disciple.

Breaking Meeting: The act of bringing a meeting for worship to a close by shaking hands. Usually, an individual has been designated to initiate this process.

Called Session: A meeting of the monthly, quarterly, or yearly meeting specially called by its clerk to address some concern or item of business. In a called meeting for business, decisions are recorded

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as in a regular meeting for business.

Centering/Centering Down: The initial stage of worship when Friends clear their minds and settle down to achieve a spiritual focus.

Clearness: Confidence that an action is consistent with the divine will.

Clerk: The person responsible for the administration of a Friends body and sensitive to the guidance of the Spirit in the conduct of the business of that body. This includes preparation, leadership, and follow up of meetings for business.

Concern: A quickening sense of the need to do something about a situation or issue in response to what is felt to be a direct intimation of God's will.

Conscientious Objection: A principled refusal to participate in certain social or political practices; commonly applied to the refusal to undertake military service or pay war taxes.

Conservative Friends: Three unaffiliated yearly meetings—Iowa, North Carolina and Ohio—call themselves Conservative. Historically, they share John Wilbur's objections to the pastoral system; at the same time, they are more explicitly Christ-centered than most meetings in Friends General Conference.

Continuing Revelation: A central Quaker belief that the revelation of God's will is an ongoing process.

Convinced Friend: A person who, after deciding that the Religious Society of Friends provides the most promising home for spiritual enlightenment and growth, becomes a member of a monthly meeting. Traditionally distinguished from a birthright Friend.

Elder: The verb to elder is used for the exercise of spiritual leadership either to support and encourage members or attenders in their ministry or to question or discourage an individual whose behavior is deemed inappropriate. The noun elder is occasionally used to designate individuals recognized as having significant spiritual gifts and expected to exercise special oversight of the spiritual life of the meeting and its members. In the past, such individuals were specifically recorded by a monthly meeting, and their names were then reported to the quarterly meeting, and yearly meeting; this practice was discontinued in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting by 1962.

Epistle: A public letter of greeting and ministry. Such letters are

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sent from a Friends meeting or organization to other Friends groups, to supply information, spiritual insight, and encouragement.

Evangelical Friends International, North American Region (EFI NAR): Six yearly meetings in the United States constitute this group. Through their deep concern for mission, they have parented groups of Friends in Latin America, Africa, and India; many have now become independent yearly meetings. Their worship is programmed and their theology is evangelical, with a strong scriptural base. Like other Friends, they hold testimonies of peace, simplicity, and equality.

Experiential Religion: A religion in which personal spiritual experience is the foundation for belief and practice. The word experimental was used by early Friends with this meaning.

Facing Benches: In older Friends meetinghouses, rising tiers of benches facing the meeting, traditionally occupied by recognized ministers and elders. Metaphorically, the group of leaders occupying those benches.

First Day School: Friends' designation for the Sunday religious education program provided by a monthly meeting for children and adults.

Friends General Conference (FGC): An association of yearly meetings and other bodies of Friends in North America. Its purpose is to nurture their members by developing and providing resources and opportunities for spiritual growth. Those meetings belonging to FGC tend to be liberal in theology and to have an unprogrammed form of worship.

Friends United Meeting (FUM): A confederation of yearly meetings whose pattern of worship is largely programmed and led by pastors. While FUM Friends make a corporate faith commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ, their social testimonies are similar to FGC. FUM has member Meetings in Cuba, Jamaica, and East Africa, as well as North America. Some of its Meetings also belong to FGC.

Gathered Meeting: A meeting for worship or for business in which those present feel deeply united in the divine presence.

Good Order: Those procedures for the conduct of Friends business and witness that encourage a meeting to carry out its corporate activities under divine leading. The term rightly ordered is also used in this sense.

Gospel Order: A term used by George Fox and others to describe the

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new covenant order of the church under the headship of Christ. It concerns how we live faithfully in relationship with God and with each other. This term is coming into renewed use among Friends.

Hold in the Light: To desire that divine guidance and healing will be present to an individual who is in distress or faces a difficult situation; also, to give prayerful consideration to an idea.

Inner Light/Inward Light/The Light Within: Terms which represent for Friends the direct, unmediated experience of the Divine. Some other equivalent terms often found in Quaker writings are: the Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the Divine Principle, the Seed, the Guide, the Christ Within, the Inward Teacher, that of God in every person.

Integrity: One of the basic practical principles or testimonies of Friends. It involves both a wholeness and harmony of the various aspects of one's life, and truthfulness in whatever one says and does. Friends commonly link this principle with the testimony of simplicity.

Interim Meeting: In Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, a broadly representative body meeting to conduct the business of the yearly meeting between its annual sessions. (Formerly called Representative Meeting.)

Laying Down: A decision to discontinue a committee when its work is complete; occasionally, a decision to discontinue a Meeting or other Friends organization when it is no longer viable.

Laying Over: To postpone the discussion of an issue or the presentation of a report from one meeting for business to another.

Leading: A sense of being called by God to undertake a specific course of action. A leading often arises from a concern.

Lift Up: To emphasize or make explicit a particular point or concern.

Meeting for Worship: A gathering of individuals in quiet waiting upon the enlightening and empowering presence of the Divine; the central focus of the corporate life of the Religious Society of Friends.

Meeting for Worship for Business: A meeting for worship during which the corporate business of the meeting is conducted—often referred to as meeting for business.

Mind the Light: An admonition to attend to the Light Within for guidance in one's life. It means both active obedience to divine leadings and careful nurturing of one's openness to the Light.

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- Ministry:** Sharing or acting upon one's gifts, whether in service to individuals, to the meeting, or to the larger community. [See also Vocal ministry]
- Minute:** The record of a corporate decision reached during a meeting for worship for business. More broadly, the account of a single transaction in the written record of a meeting for business or other body.
- Minute of Exercise:** An expression of a clerk's insights and concerns at the close of a meeting for business. Historically, a closing summary of vocal ministry and spiritual concerns expressed during yearly meeting sessions.
- Monthly Meeting:** 1] A congregation of Friends who meet regularly for worship and to conduct corporate business. 2] A monthly gathering of such a body for worship and business.
- Opening:** A term often used by early Friends to designate a spiritual opportunity or leading.
- Overseers:** Those members who are appointed by the Meeting to give pastoral care and nurture to all members and attenders.
- Pacifist:** A person who renounces war and any use of violence and seeks to resolve conflicts peacefully.
- Passing Meeting:** Acceptance by a monthly meeting of a written request, usually for membership or for marriage under its care.
- Pastoral Meeting:** See Programmed Meeting.
- Peace Testimony:** The corporate commitment of Friends to pacifism and nonviolence.
- Plain Dress/Plain Speech:** The witness of early Friends to the testimonies of equality and integrity by dressing and speaking simply. These served into the 20th century as outward symbols and reminders of our distinctive beliefs.
- Preparative Meeting:** An organized group of members of an established monthly meeting which ordinarily gathers for worship at another place.
- Proceed As Way Opens:** To undertake a service or course of action without prior clarity about all the details but with confidence that divine guidance will make these apparent and assure an appropriate outcome.
- Programmed Meeting:** A Friends meeting under the leadership of a pastor, with an arranged order of worship that usually includes a period of silent worship. [See also Unprogrammed Meeting].
- Quaker:** Originally, a derogatory term applied to Friends because their excitement of spirit when led to speak in a meeting for

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worship was sometimes expressed in a shaking or quaking motion. Now this term is simply an alternative designation for a member of the Religious Society of Friends.

Quarterly Meeting: A regional gathering of members of constituent monthly meetings, traditionally on four occasions each year. Some quarterly meetings also oversee the operations of institutions.

Queries: A set of questions, based on Friends' practices and testimonies, which are considered by Meetings and individuals as a way of both guiding and examining individual and corporate lives and actions. As such, they are a means of self examination. Queries to be considered regularly are included in Faith and Practice; others may be formulated by a committee or Meeting that seeks to clarify for itself an issue it needs to address.

Recorder: The person appointed by a Meeting to maintain statistics of the members and attenders of that Meeting.

Recording Clerk: The person appointed to take minutes at regular and called meetings for business of a Meeting or other Friends body.

Released Friend: A Friend whose leading to carry out a particular course of action has met with approval from a Meeting which then promises to provide such support as would enable the Friend to follow that leading.

Sense of the Meeting: An expression of the unity of a meeting for worship for business on some issue or concern; the general recognition, articulated by the clerk or some other person, that a given decision is in accordance with the divine will.

Simplicity: One of the traditional Quaker testimonies that is closely associated with integrity, equality, and stewardship. Essentially, to limit the material circumstances of one's life in a way that allows/enables one to follow divine leadings.

Sojourning Friend: A member of a monthly meeting who may temporarily reside at some distance from that Meeting, but close to another monthly meeting, and upon formal request is accepted by the latter as an active member without financial obligations.

Speaking to My/One's Condition: The conviction that a message, whether directly from God or through the words or actions of another, meets one's own deepest needs and purposes.

Standing Aside: An action taken by an individual who has genuine

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reservations about a particular decision, but who also recognizes that the decision is clearly supported by the weight of the Meeting. The action of standing aside allows the Meeting to reach unity.

Stewardship: For Friends, stewardship is an element of integrity. Good stewardship directs Friends' investment of time and money in sustainable and renewable resources and in work that supports Quaker values and beliefs.

Stop/Stop in the Mind: A clear uneasiness in the face of a proposed decision or action, and an unwillingness to follow it.

Testimony: A guiding principle of conduct that bears witness to the presence of God in the world and in our lives. Though there is no official list of such testimonies, Friends have traditionally identified peace and nonviolence, equality, simplicity, stewardship, community, and integrity as their practical principles.

Threshing Session: A gathering of Friends to consider in depth a controversial issue but in a way that is free from the necessity of reaching a decision.

Truth: The revealed will of God, as experienced in communion with the Inner Light or Inward Christ. Early Quakers called themselves the Religious Society of Friends of the Truth.

Under the Care Of: Describes an activity, program, or event for which a Meeting takes responsibility and to which it gives oversight: thus, a marriage, a preparative meeting, and a school might all be said to be under the care of a monthly meeting.

Under the Weight Of: Giving high priority to an issue arising from a deep feeling of concern. Said of an individual or Meeting that is struggling to reach an appropriate decision about such an item of business.

Unity: The spiritual oneness and harmony whose realization is a primary objective of a meeting for worship or a meeting for business.

Unprogrammed Meeting: A Friends meeting whose worship is based on quiet waiting for the presence of God revealed through spirit-led vocal ministry and the gathered communion; sometimes called open worship. [cf., Programmed Meeting]

Vocal Ministry: The sharing of a message or prayer during a meeting for worship.

Weighty Friend: An informal term for a Friend who is respected for spiritual depth, wisdom, and long service to the Religious

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Society of Friends.

Worship Group: A group of worshipers who meet regularly, but who may or may not have established a formal affiliation with an established meeting.

Worship Sharing: A modern group practice in which participants share personal and spiritual experiences, thoughts, and feelings, often in response to a prearranged theme or questions, and in a manner that acknowledges the presence of God.

Yearly Meeting: Those Friends from a geographically extended area who gather in annual session to worship and conduct business together. This term is also used to denote the total membership of the constituent monthly meetings of a designated yearly meeting.