Membership

[[2 quotations deleted (George Fox 1648 and 1652)]]

And oh, how sweet and pleasant it is to the truly spiritual eye to see several sorts of believers, several forms of Christians in the school of Christ, every one learning their own lesson, performing their own peculiar service, and knowing, owning, and loving one another in their several places and different performances to their Master, to whom they are to give an account, and not quarrel with one another about their different practices.

Isaac Penington, 1659

The unity of Christians never did nor ever will or can stand in uniformity of thought and opinion, but in Christian love only.

Thomas Story, 1737

The Society [of Friends] from the first to the last has affirmed that the spirit of man is the place of all others in which the spirit of God can shine…. It has always insisted that each individual is responsible for obeying this light, and that the whole of life ought to be brought under the dominion of the Spirit.

William Charles Braithwaite, 1909

There are certain broad principles of belief and conduct that afford a basis for an association in and through which living membership can find expression. In the case of our own Society unity is essential upon the spiritual and practical nature of Christianity—the deep and penetrating reality of worship and the claim of Christ to rule our whole life, both inward and outward.

London Yearly Meeting, 1931

The test for membership should not be doctrinal agreement, nor adherence to certain testimonies, but evidence of sincere seeking and striving for Truth, together with an understanding of the lines along which Friends are seeking that Truth.

Friends World Conference, 1952

The Inward Light is a universal light given to all …. religious consciousness itself being basically the same wherever it is found. Our difficulties come when we try to express it. We cannot express; we can only experience God. Therefore we must always remember tolerance, humility, and tenderness with others whose ways and views may differ from ours.

Pacific Yearly Meeting, 1953

Our membership of this, or any other Christian fellowship, is never based on worthiness…. We none of us are members because we have attained a certain standard of goodness, but rather because, in this matter, we still are all humble learners in the school of Christ. Our membership is of no importance whatever unless it signifies that we are committed to something of far greater and more lasting significance than can adequately
be conveyed by the closest association with any movement or organization. Our membership of the Society of Friends should commit us to the discipleship of the living Christ. When we have made that choice and come under that high compulsion, our membership will have endorsed it.

Edgar G. Dunstan, 1956

[[the following 2 quotations abridged]]

Within this sort of fellowship, as in a family, griefs and joys, fears and hopes, failures and accomplishments are naturally shared, even as individuality and independence are scrupulously respected.

New England Yearly Meeting, 1966

Even at times of great difference of opinion, we have known a sense of living unity, because we have recognised one another as followers of Jesus. We are at different stages along the way. We use different language to speak of him and to express our discipleship. The insistent questioning of the seeker, the fire of the rebel, the reflective contribution of the more cautious thinker—all have a place amongst us. This does not always make life easy. But we have found that we have learned to listen to one another, to respect the sincerity of one another’s opinions, to love and to care for one another. We are enabled to do this because God first loved us. The gospels tell us of the life and teaching of Jesus. The light of Christ, a universal light and known inwardly, is our guide. It is the grace of God which gives us the strength to follow. It is his forgiveness which restores us when we are oppressed by the sense of falling short. These things we know, not as glib phrases, but out of the depths of sometimes agonising experience.

London Yearly Meeting, 1968

The Religious Society of Friends is a community of Faith based on a shared experience of the “Inward Light,” “the Spirit of Christ by which we are guided” (in George Fox’s words). Together Friends worship and grow in the Spirit, remaining ever open and obedient to the Power within and holding the life and teachings of Jesus as an example. Becoming a member is a milestone in the process of seeking Truth, whereby the individual and the community are drawn together in mutual search and understanding. Membership is the outward recognition of an inner experience of the Living God and of unity with other members of the Society. In hearkening to that of God within themselves, Friends have come to recognize “that of God in everyone.”

[[footnote to p. 53 in the 1993 Faith & Practice deleted from the edited chapter since the new Introduction will give more about the terms used to try to indicate the “divine Life at the heart of the universe.”]]

Although regularly enrolled membership, as we know it, was not a feature of the early Society of Friends, a recognized membership did exist. In its first years the Society was a radical and charismatic movement, very much at odds with the civil and religious institutions of its day. Joining with Friends involved rejection by society, as well as the risk of imprisonment, physical abuse, and economic ruin. Only those deeply convinced and committed were willing to face such consequences and be considered Friends and members of the fellowship. Early problems with fanaticism and spiritual irresponsibility led to the practice of disownment. If reconciliation was not successful, those who misrepresented the Society in word or deed were disowned. That is, Friends made a public declaration that the disowned person did not represent them. Such persons were still welcome to worship and fellowship, but were not allowed to participate in the Meeting for Business. Disownment later became greatly abused in enforcing a strict code of Quaker conduct.

Formal membership was not established until the eighteenth century. However, early Friends used the word “member” in their correspondence and drew up lists of those suffering for Truth’s sake. When the Religious Society of Friends had become respectable and some persons came to it solely for material support, lists of members were drawn up to identify those committed to Truth and entitled to such support.
by the Meeting. At the same time the practice of enrolling children of Friends as “birthright members” was also begun. Our Yearly Meeting does not employ birthright membership: we encourage our children to make their own decisions about membership upon reaching adulthood.

A member is recorded by a Monthly Meeting as an adherent of the Religious Society of Friends. There are those who may be faithful in attendance at worship and diligent in their service to Friends and yet choose not to be recognized as Friends; they are commonly called “attenders.” (See next section.) The choice to become a member is a motion of the heart and leading of the Spirit.

[[Paragraph above is new, to provide basic definitions of “member” and “attender”. Question for NPYM Friends: how would your group define “member” and “attender”?]]

Membership in the Religious Society of Friends involves a continuing commitment. It implies a readiness and desire to join in the common effort of the Society to seek and follow the Inward Light, as well as some experience and understanding of that Spirit as it is known by Friends—a reality which guides and directs, which gives strength to act upon this guidance and which brings unity with the spirit of God. Decision-making by Friends depends upon a common understanding of the guidance of the Spirit as they unite in worship for Meeting for Business. Membership implies a desire to attend meetings for worship and business regularly, to give service through committees and otherwise as the way opens, and to share in financial responsibilities. Because requesting membership is an outward sign of commitment, members are the Friends formally recognized by the larger society. Members bear responsibility for the decisions the Meeting makes. While all associated with a Meeting fall under its loving care, the Meeting is primarily responsible for its members.

[[Question for NPYM Friends: Based on feedback received in working on the chapter on Monthly Meetings, we have provisionally deleted a sentence “Members are the final voices in the meeting for business.” Is it the practice of your group to restrict responsibility for decisions solely to members?]]

[[In addition, we have also provisionally deleted the sentence “When Friends are called to civil disobedience, it is the members who bear the consequences.” How does your group respond when a member or attender commits civil disobedience?]]

The Religious Society of Friends desires to include in its membership all persons who find themselves in unity with its faith and practices or are committed to growing toward that unity. Since the admission of members is the responsibility of the Monthly Meeting, membership, in practice, means that the applicant comes to know the aspirations and ways of a particular Meeting and is prepared to share in the responsibilities, difficulties, and joys of its fellowship. Those who are able to help the Meeting and be helped by it are likely to thrive as members. Usually Friends become members of Monthly Meetings nearby. Under appropriate circumstances, an application for membership may be considered from an applicant living at a distance from the Meeting. Membership in a Monthly Meeting also includes membership in the Quarterly Meeting and the Yearly Meeting of which the Monthly Meeting is a part, and in the world-wide Religious Society of Friends.

Our fellowship with all seekers, and our relationship to a particular Meeting, does not cause us to overlook our identity as Friends. The Meeting ensures that a prospective member has some knowledge of the wider body of Friends, as there is great diversity in the practices and beliefs of the various branches of the Society. It is everyone’s responsibility to be aware that differences do exist and, more importantly, to understand the common faith and experience that unites all Friends, everywhere. A Friend will be open to sensing the presence of God in any Meeting visited, and a Meeting will be comfortable welcoming Friends of all persuasions.

Religious experience is profoundly important to Friends, who allow considerable freedom in describing their common religious life and experience. The Religious Society of Friends is, however, part of the Christian fellowship, as Friends understand Christianity. Friends are aware that religious truth, the encounter with the ground of our being, or the experience of Christ, comes to different persons in different ways. Seekers find themselves in various stages of growth in their experience of Truth and in the
words they use to express this. An open heart and mind and an earnest desire for ever-increasing Light is the chief concern. While readiness for membership implies a degree of religious insight, it does not assume attainment of perfection or an end to development. Participation in the life of the Meeting and living daily by the Spirit results in continuing religious growth.

**Attenders**

The Society values the presence and participation of everyone drawn to Friends. Attenders are welcome to take part in the Meeting for Business. The degree to which attenders share in the responsibility for the life of the Meeting, and for the matters under discussion, gives weight to their discernment during the Meeting for Business. Customarily, regular attenders are listed in the Meeting’s directory.

The Monthly Meeting encourages faithful attenders to seek membership as a part of the further development of their religious lives. The Pastoral Care Committee notices when attenders are approaching readiness for membership as shown by their regular attendance at worship and business meetings, participation in discussions, understanding of the testimonies and willingness to assist with meeting tasks. The Committee offers to discuss the possibility of membership with attenders and encourages attenders considering membership to talk with a member of the Committee and then to write a letter to the Clerk of Monthly Meeting applying for membership.

[[Paragraph “Members have an obligation…” deleted (see current Faith and Practice p. 56); some of the content appears elsewhere. The final sentence of that paragraph reads (concerning Meetings for Business, “Responsibility for decisions, however, remains with members of the Meeting” This is provisionally deleted; see question in previous section]]

**Admission to Membership**

A person who is considering joining the Religious Society of Friends develops a sympathetic understanding of its faith by consistent attendance and study, becoming familiar with its way of worship, its manner of conducting business, and the responsibilities of membership. Children and young adults are welcome to apply for membership as they feel led. It is important for the applicant to become familiar with the Yearly Meeting’s *Faith and Practice*, and with Friends’ history, principles, and testimonies.

The Monthly Meeting makes a decision to admit a person into membership in the Society in a Meeting for Business.

An applicant for membership first writes a letter to the Monthly Meeting expressing a desire to become a member, including reasons for wanting to join. The letter is given to the Clerk of the Meeting who promptly acknowledges receipt of the letter and forwards it to the Clerk of the Pastoral Care Committee. The letter is read to the Meeting for Business either at the first meeting following its receipt or at the time the Committee reports on the application.

[[Question for NPYM Friends: Which is your practice, to read the applicant’s letter at the first meeting after it is received, or to wait until the Clearness Committee has met and the Pastoral Care Committee is ready to recommend acceptance? If the former, how do you handle the sensitivity of a situation when the eventual recommendation is to delay or deny membership?]]

The Pastoral Care Committee appoints a Clearness Committee of two or three Friends, at least one of whom is a member of the Pastoral Care Committee, to meet with the applicant. This Clearness Committee, after making sure that the applicant has a copy of *Faith and Practice* and has become familiar with it, arranges for a time and place for one or more visits with the applicant. (See Clearness Committees in chapter __, “The Monthly Meeting.”)

[[Question for NPYM Friends: Is it your group’s practice to appoint only members of the Religious Society of Friends to Clearness Committees regarding membership?]]
Membership Queries

- What brings you to apply for membership now?
- Are you familiar with Friends’ testimonies on simplicity, peace, integrity, community, and equality? In what ways do you find the testimonies helpful? Not helpful? How closely are you in harmony with Friends’ testimonies?
- What attracted you to Friends’ beliefs and practices? Are there some that you find puzzling or disturbing?
- How would you describe the spiritual journey which has led you to seek membership in the Society of Friends?
- What do you see as the responsibilities of membership?
- Are you aware of the responsibilities of members in a community without hierarchy? What gifts do you bring to enrich the life of the Meeting?
- Do you understand the relationship among the Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings? Are you aware of the programs, services, and facilities at these three levels of our organizational structure?
- Are you comfortable with our spiritual and theological diversity? Where might it be a source of strength for you and the Society of Friends? Where might it cause problems?
- Are you comfortable with an unprogrammed Meeting for Worship based on expectant waiting? Are you familiar with the source of vocal ministry? Are you able to discern between messages that are intended for yourself and messages that are meant for the Meeting as a whole?
- What are some milestones in your spiritual journey? How do you expect membership in the Meeting to help you on this journey?
- Are you familiar with the way in which Friends conduct their Meetings for Business? What has been your experience with Meeting for Business?
- Are there problems that you would like to share, or should share, that might be of concern to the Meeting as they pertain to our resources and our ability to help you?
- How will your membership affect your family relationships?
- How are you prepared to support the Meeting’s nurturing and religious education of its children?
- Is the application for membership procedure clear to you?
- Do you have any questions?

These visits serve to determine the readiness of the applicant and the Meeting for this membership by providing an opportunity (1) for the visiting Friends to become acquainted with the applicant on a deeper level, (2) for the applicant to ask questions, and (3) for the visiting Friends to provide any help needed to prepare the applicant and the Meeting for this new membership. The topics below, many of which will arise naturally in the course of conversation, may serve as guidelines for the committee. The questions are not meant as an examination nor is it expected that there are “right” or “wrong” answers. Their value lies in what they may reveal of the experience of both the counseling Friends and the applicant in seeking and discovering Truth. The questions can be adapted to different circumstances, for example for a young person who has grown up in a Friends Meeting. Sufficient time is allowed to ensure mutual understanding and trust. The visits take place in the spirit of a common search.

[[New sentence added about adapting the questions, especially for the example of a young person who grew up in Meeting.]]

1. Motive for Applying: The applicant is naturally interested in this subject and may wish to speak at length about it. Pursuing its implications may take considerable time, and this is taken into consideration as plans are made for the visit(s). It is helpful to look both at the long-range and more immediate reasons for the application.

2. Responsibilities of Membership: Membership involves both spiritual and practical considerations. The applicant is brought to understand the importance to the Meeting of regular and prompt attendance at meetings for worship and business and of being sensitive to contributing to the quality of the silence and spoken ministry. A discussion of the applicant’s potential contributions to the work and finances of the Meeting is essential. The applicant will understand that a member is expected to support the Meeting financially when possible. The committee makes sure that the applicant knows how this is done.

3. Membership of Children: An applicant with minor children may request junior membership for them. (See Children, Youth, and Membership, below.) Older children may apply for full membership. The Committee encourages questions from children who wonder about the Religious Society of Friends, offers information, and assures them of the Meeting’s love and concern.

4. Spiritual and Theological Matters: The applicant is reminded of Friends’ emphasis on personal experience, rather than on formal creeds. This concept may become clear after discussion of the prospective member’s own spiritual experience. The applicant needs to be aware that Friends’ Meeting for Worship is more than a collection of people independently meditating.
and seeking their own “light within.” The Light—whether spoken of as the Inner or Inward Light or as the Light of Christ—is a mystical concept signifying direct communion with God, available to each person—not possessed by them but rather shared by them. The Light may inwardly illuminate each person so as to be led in spiritual ways and to be seen by others as faithfully following that Guide. Since this concept is a mystical one, it may be perceived differently by different Friends, yet it is ultimately the same. Discussion during the visits will reveal the applicant’s degree of comfort with the varied theological perceptions among Friends.

5. **Friends’ Practices**: The committee ensures that the applicant is familiar with Friends’ literature, such as Howard Brinton’s *A Guide to Quaker Practice* and *Friends for 350 Years* and the writings of other Friends (see Bibliography). These will help the applicant understand the spirit behind the practice of unprogrammed worship, the absence of a paid ministry, the conduct of marriage and memorial services, and the absence of outward sacraments. Special attention is given to the decision-making process and the importance of the Spirit in Meetings for Business.

6. **Friends’ Testimonies**: The committee discusses with the applicant the role of the Quaker testimonies in her life. “For Friends the most important consideration is not the right action in itself but a right inward state out of which right action will arise. Given the right inward state, right action is inevitable. Inward state and outward action are component parts of a single whole” (Howard Brinton, 1943). (See the chapter on Testimonies.)

7. **Relationship to Other Friends**: Becoming a member of a Monthly Meeting means becoming a member of the whole Religious Society of Friends. The committee clarifies the relationships among Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings and describes the other Quaker Meetings in the area and elsewhere, and how North Pacific Yearly Meeting relates to them. Such consideration might lead to a discussion of Friends’ organizations, study centers, schools, publications, and internet resources.

8. **Relationship to Christianity and Other Religions**: The applicant will recognize the historic basis of the Religious Society of Friends in Christianity, as well as the significant place of Jesus and the Bible in the spiritual life of many Friends. Likewise it is important to understand that there are Friends who sometimes find traditional Christian language difficult and those who find spiritual meaning and inspiration from non-Christian sources. The committee and the applicant discuss his attitude toward other Christians and other religions.

9. **Membership and Personal Problems**: The applicant may bring up past or present actions, involvements, or obligations which may make particular demands upon the Meeting. The Clearness Committee encourages frank discussion of any burdens the applicant may be carrying, pointing out the Meeting’s resources and the limitations in helping with these problems.

10. **Education**: The committee asks what aspects of Quaker faith and practice the applicant is led to learn more about, and describes the Meeting’s resources for the lifelong spiritual growth of members of all ages, with particular care and responsibility for the nurture of children.

11. **Membership Procedure**: The committee makes certain that the applicant understands the procedure the Meeting will follow in acting on her application for membership.

[[The following 4 paragraphs are reordered for clarity.]]

If the Clearness Committee feels the applicant is not yet ready for membership, it encourages a wider exposure to Friends’ beliefs and practices. It may recommend additional reading, suggest that the applicant discusses Quakerism with more members of the Meeting, and arrange additional visits with the applicant. The Pastoral Care Committee is kept informed and does not forward the application to the Meeting for Business until this is recommended by the Clearness Committee. There may be times when, during this further exploration, it becomes clear to either the applicant or the Clearness Committee that membership is not advisable. In this case, the applicant can withdraw the request for membership or the Clearness Committee can recommend to the Pastoral Care Committee that the request be set aside.
The Clearness Committee reports to the Pastoral Care Committee about its meetings with the applicant. If the Clearness Committee recommends going forward and the Pastoral Care Committee is satisfied with the applicant’s sincerity and readiness to become a Friend, it recommends to the Meeting for Business that the applicant be accepted into membership. Final action on the recommendation is delayed until the next Meeting for Business to allow Friends and the prospective member to become better acquainted with each other and to give Friends who have questions or reservations about the applicant an opportunity to explore these with the Pastoral Care Committee.

It is customary for the applicant to withdraw from the Meeting for Business during deliberations about her membership. A member of the Pastoral Care Committee who did not serve on the Clearness Committee accompanies her out of the room at this time.

At the time when the Pastoral Care Committee takes an application to the Monthly Meeting, if there are Friends with reservations and the Meeting does not feel able to accept the recommendation of the Pastoral Care Committee, the application is returned to that committee. The Pastoral Care Committee contacts the applicant about the delay, consults with the Friends who have reservations and explores ways of resolving the situation. It may then decide to recommend that the Monthly Meeting accept the application or that the applicant withdraw the request for membership.

[[Question to NPYM Friends: Would it be useful for Faith and Practice to include reasons for postponing or cautions about admitting someone into membership? Reasons for postponement might include: little or no familiarity with Friends’ beliefs and practices; unusually short time of attendance; has not attended any Meetings for Business. Cautions might include: attends another church much of the time; seems unable to accept the discipline of Meeting for Worship; behaves in ways that run counter to Friends’ testimonies.]]

Upon approval of the application, the Meeting minutes its acceptance of the new member, appoints a committee of two or more to provide a warm welcome into the Meeting fellowship, and arranges for the completion and filing of the Membership Record. The welcoming visit also gives the new member an opportunity to ask questions which may have occurred to him after he met with the Clearness Committee. The Welcoming Committee is often responsible for arranging for a Quaker book or periodical as the Meeting’s welcoming gift; it reports to the Meeting when its assignment has been completed.

Applicants from Preparative Meetings and Worship Groups

The usual procedure for applications for membership is followed as possible when the application is from an attender of a Preparative Meeting or a Worship Group under the care of a Monthly or Quarterly Meeting. This process may be modified when the local group is a considerable distance from the sponsoring Meeting. The application can be an occasion for fellowship between the two groups.

In the early development of a local group, most of the responsibility for membership applications lies with the sponsoring Meeting. As the group grows and when it has several attenders who are members of the Religious Society of Friends, the degree of its responsibility will increase in all matters. (See chapter __, “New Gatherings of Friends.”) Communication and consultation between the two groups is vital. The application process is as follows:

1. The attender of the local group sends a letter of application to the Clerk of the sponsoring Meeting, also informing the appropriate person in the local group. The Clerk of the sponsoring Meeting acknowledges the letter promptly and gives it to the Pastoral Care Committee.

2. The Pastoral Care Committee appoints a Clearness Committee of two or more members of the sponsoring Meeting and one or more members from the local group. It is important that this committee arrange sufficient time for a satisfactory visit with the applicant, even though it may not be immediately possible. The Clearness Committee keeps in mind the several possibilities for meeting with an applicant other than a visit arranged solely for that purpose: at the Annual Session of Yearly Meeting, at a Quarterly Meeting, during a visit of the committee sponsoring the local group, or when the applicant is in the area of the sponsoring Meeting for some other purpose. Correspondence and
telecommunications can also have a role in the process. The committee consults with the local group as well as with the applicant in determining the readiness of both for this membership, before reporting back to the Pastoral Care Committee.

3. When a membership is accepted, in the manner described above, a Monthly Meeting records it; the new member then bears some responsibility to that Meeting. Since only a few members of the Monthly Meeting may know the new member, it is important for it to have faith in the wisdom of the Clearness Committee and the local group for their part in the process.

4. The Clerk of the Monthly Meeting promptly notifies the new member and the appropriate clerk or convener of the local group regarding the action of the Meeting. Cooperation of the local group may be solicited in providing a suitable welcome to the new member.

As a Preparative Meeting grows and approaches Monthly Meeting status, the Pastoral Care Committee of the sponsoring Meeting may ask the Pastoral Care Committee of the Preparative Meeting to deal with membership applications (appointing the Clearness Committee, etc.) and to report to it when the time comes to bring the application to the Monthly Meeting for acceptance.

**Isolated Applicants**

Isolated individuals who are interested in membership but have no regular contact with a Friends group are encouraged to follow, whenever possible, the usual procedure and send their letter of application to a Monthly Meeting.

[[Question for NPYM Friends: In past years there has been discussion about other ways of holding membership, not only through a Monthly Meeting. (In 1995-96, for example, Steering Committee considered other ways for Isolated individuals to become members, and decided to continue the present guidelines as described in Faith and Practice.) Do you see a place for membership based outside a Monthly Meeting?]]

**Children, Youth, and Membership**

[[This section renamed (from “Membership of Young People—Junior Membership”) and revised to better match current practice.]]

Monthly Meetings are committed to nurturing all the children in their fellowship, who from birth are considered their responsibility and under their care. Children and youth have a particular claim upon the meeting, which earnestly seeks their spiritual well-being and development. Our Yearly Meeting does not have “birthright membership,” since we affirm that children and youth are able to make their own choice about their religious life upon reaching maturity.

**Junior Membership.** Youth under the age of 16 may be registered as “junior members” upon written request to the Monthly Meeting from their parents or guardians, if one or both are members of the Religious Society of Friends. The Meeting records its acceptance in the minutes. Junior membership ends at age 21. (*Junior members* should not be confused with *Junior Friends*, who are young people of high-school age. See chapter __, “The Yearly Meeting,” for the definitions of age groups NPYM uses.)

[[Question for NPYM Friends: does your group use junior membership as a separate category for some children and youth? Is the name “junior membership” appropriate, or would there be some better way to designate it?]]

**Membership.** As young people approach maturity, which varies by individuals, Friends in the Meeting let them know that the Meeting would welcome their applications for membership. The Pastoral Care Committee has a continuing responsibility to stay in contact with all the youth of the Meeting and, when they seem ready, to invite them to request membership. The Meeting considers such requests according to the usual procedures, adapting the Clearness Committee topics for each young person’s particular situation.

As youth move into their adult lives, the Pastoral Care Committee and others stay in touch with them
to assure them of the Meeting’s continuing care and interest and to clarify their relationship with the Meeting. When young people reach age 21 and have not indicated a desired for membership, the Meeting asks them whether they would like to be listed as attenders or to be removed from the Meeting’s directory list.

Transfer of Membership

All Meetings need a functioning membership and all members need an available Meeting. Therefore, a member who moves beyond the limits of her Monthly Meeting is advised to find a Meeting in the new vicinity and, after coming to know that Meeting, have her membership transferred. Membership in two Monthly Meetings at the same time is discouraged because it suggests divided interest. Since membership in one Monthly Meeting includes membership in the whole Religious Society of Friends, transfer of membership is usually a relatively easy matter.

When a Friend moves to the vicinity of another Monthly Meeting, the clerk of the Pastoral Care Committee of the original Meeting writes promptly to the Clerk of the new Meeting commending the member to their fellowship. Transfer of membership to the new Meeting without undue delay is encouraged; so as soon as the member feels at home, he sends a request for Certificate of Transfer to the Clerk of his Monthly Meeting. At the same time the member writes a letter informing the Clerk of the new Meeting that application for a transfer has been made.

[Question for NPYM Friends: Is it your practice to notify another meeting that a member has moved into their vicinity?]

When the Clerk of the member’s old Meeting receives a request for transfer, she gives it to that Meeting’s Pastoral Care Committee which, if everything is in order, recommends approval to the Meeting for Business. Following Meeting approval, the Clerk of the old Meeting prepares a Certificate of Transfer and sends it, with information from the membership records, to the Clerk of the new Monthly Meeting. (See sample letters and forms at end of chapter.) The latter acknowledges receipt of the documents and gives them to the new Meeting’s Pastoral Care Committee. As soon as it knows about the request for transfer, the new Meeting’s Pastoral Care Committee appoints a small committee to visit the Friend or family of Friends. At least one member of this Visiting Committee is a member of the Pastoral Care Committee. The Visiting Committee makes certain that the transferring Friend has become acquainted with the new Meeting and feels comfortable with any differences between the two Meetings.

Meetings can vary considerably and there may be differences in the interpretation of what membership means. This, however, is not to be construed as license for imposing additional requirements for membership or setting aside those contained in Faith and Practice. Should the Visiting Committee have grounds for serious question about accepting the transfer, consultation between the Pastoral Care Committees of both Meetings is in order, after which, if there remains serious objection, the new Meeting returns the Certificate of Transfer to the old Meeting, explaining its basis for this action.

When the Visiting Committee reports that it finds no obstruction, the Pastoral Care Committee recommends that the Monthly Meeting accept the Certificate of Transfer. If the Meeting for Business approves, it records the Friend as a member without additional waiting. The Clerk furnishes the member with a copy of the approving minute and sends an Acceptance of Transfer (see examples) to the member’s former Meeting, where the membership has remained in the interim. The new Monthly Meeting appoints one or more Friends to visit the new member and provide a warm welcome. If there are objections to the transfer and the Meeting is unable to go forward with approval, the procedure outlined under Admission to Membership is followed.

[Question for NPYM Friends: What is your group’s experience with denying a request for transfer?]

An applicant for membership who presents a transfer or letter of recommendation from another religious body, also includes a personal letter stating why he wishes to become a Friend. Both of these documents are referred to the Pastoral Care Committee, which sends acknowledgment of the
communications to the individual and to the religious body and then follows the usual procedure for admission to membership. When the applicant has been accepted by the Monthly Meeting, the Clerk notifies the other denomination of this action.

[[Question for NPYM Friends: What is your experience with accepting a new member from another religious organization by means of transfer?]]

When a Friend requests a transfer of membership to some other religious denomination, the procedure outlined under Resignation of Membership is followed.

**Isolated Friends.** When Friends who have lived close to a Monthly Meeting move and find themselves at such a distance from the nearest Monthly Meeting that active participation is not possible, it may not be possible to follow the transfer process outlined above. Friends in this situation typically hold their membership in the old Meeting. They can maintain contact with Friends by participating in Quarterly and Yearly Meeting activities, staying in touch with the NPYM Outreach & Visitation Committee, and corresponding with the Friends World Committee on Consultation Section of the Americas. Isolated Friends may also be able to help create new worship groups in their communities.

[[Paragraph above expanded to describe possible ways to maintain contact with Friends. Question for NPYM Friends: Is this enough? If not, what would you add?]]

**Sojourning Membership**

It is generally best for a Friend and for the Society if membership is in the Meeting near her place of residence. Members who expect to stay in the area of another Meeting for a limited period of time, so that a transfer is not appropriate, are encouraged to write a letter to the Clerk of their home Meeting requesting a minute of sojourn. If the Meeting is clear that this request is in order, it prepares the minute and the Clerk sends it to the Meeting specified, with a copy to the Friend.

The Clerk of the Meeting receiving such a minute of sojourn acknowledges it promptly and presents it to the Monthly Meeting, which, unless some objection appears, accepts it and welcomes the Friend into the fellowship of the Meeting. This action is reported to the home Meeting. Sojourning members are considered fully participating members and may serve the Meeting in whatever ways are fitting. The sojourning Friend’s primary financial responsibility and her membership records remain with the home Meeting.

A sojourning membership closes when the Friend leaves the area of the Meeting, at which time the Clerk notifies the home Meeting by returning the minute of sojourn after adding a brief message about the sojourning Friend’s visit.

**Resignation or Termination of Membership**

A Monthly Meeting may release a Friend from membership by action minuted at a Meeting for Business. Release from membership may occur either when a Friend resigns or when the Monthly Meeting initiates action to terminate the membership. Meetings consider seriously whether to initiate the termination of a membership. Attempts to contact and discuss outstanding issues with the member are essential. Meeting preserves confidentiality throughout the process. The Meeting understands that some Friends may go through periods, sometimes prolonged, when their association with the life of the Meeting is tenuous; however, continuing membership on the basis of nostalgia or status alone is not appropriate.

Meetings keep copies of all letters and other documents relating to resignations and terminations (including postal receipts and any mailings returned “addressee unknown”) in the membership records.

[[New paragraph added based on Intermountain YM’s Faith and Practice.]]

**Resignation**

When a member is no longer in unity with the beliefs and practices of Friends, she consults with the
Pastoral Care Committee, or with others in the Meeting in whom she has trust and confidence, to discern her way forward. If her lack of unity appears permanent, she writes a letter to the Clerk of the Monthly Meeting asking to be released from membership.

When the Clerk receives such a letter of resignation, he gives it to the Pastoral Care Committee. After discernment, that committee may appoint a committee of two or three persons, including one of its members, to visit the Friend in loving concern and to inquire more deeply into the reasons for the resignation. If fitting, the Friend is encouraged to reconsider the request and to continue in the fellowship of the Meeting. If the member’s intention remains unchanged, this is reported to the Pastoral Care Committee, which in turn recommends to the Meeting for Business that it grant the request for release. The Meeting minutes the release of the Friend, stating that it is at the member’s request. The Clerk of the Meeting sends a letter to the resigning member, by registered mail with return receipt requested. The letter includes a copy of the Meeting minute which states that the individual is no longer a member of the Religious Society of Friends and expresses the affectionate regard of the Meeting. The Meeting remains open to renewed application from this person, which it would handle according to the usual procedure for new members.

When the circumstances regarding the resignation and the person are already well known to the Pastoral Care Committee and they are satisfied that the member’s decision is clear, the Committee may make its recommendation to the Monthly Meeting without the appointment of a visiting committee.

If a member wishes to resign in order to join another religious body, the Monthly Meeting grants the request with a minute stating that the individual has been released from the Religious Society of Friends. The Clerk notifies the individual in writing of the Meeting’s action and writes an appropriate letter to the religious body named by the applicant, by registered mail with return receipt requested.

**Termination**

A Monthly Meeting may initiate the release from membership if the member shows no interest in the Religious Society of Friends over a prolonged period or exhibits repeated disregard of Friends’ principles.

If a Friend shows neither interest in the Religious Society of Friends nor concern for the responsibilities of membership, she is contacted by a member of the Pastoral Care Committee or by a small committee, usually of its members, either by a visit or by correspondence. The purpose of this communication is to clarify the relationship between the member and the Society. The Meeting may attempt to restore the member’s interest in the Society. This process may require an extended period of time. If continued efforts for five or more years are of no avail, the Pastoral Care Committee notifies the member of its intention to recommend to the Monthly Meeting at a specified Meeting for Business that the individual’s membership be terminated. If the Meeting concurs with the recommendation, it minutes the circumstances and records the termination of the membership. The Clerk of the Meeting promptly sends a kindly written notice of this action to the individual, by registered mail with return receipt requested.

When a Meeting learns that a member has united with another religious organization without resigning from the Religious Society of Friends, it takes steps to confirm that this is true, then minutes the individual’s release from membership. The Clerk informs the individual of this action by registered mail with return receipt requested.

[[Question for NPYM Friends: Does your group automatically release someone from membership if you learn and confirm that he or she has become a member of another religious body?]]

When the address of a member has been unknown for five or more years and continued efforts of the Pastoral Care Committee to locate the member are fruitless, the Committee recommends that the Meeting drop the individual from its membership roll and the Meeting minutes such action.

When a Friend by conduct or publicly expressed views appears to be denying the beliefs and principles of the Religious Society of Friends or to be misrepresenting Friends, so that the Meeting or its
undertakings are being harmed by the person’s membership, the Pastoral Care Committee appoints a small committee of its members to meet with the Friend. In a spirit of loving concern this committee counsels with the member, seeking to understand the member’s views and actions and endeavoring to effect a change in the relationship with the Meeting.

If there appears to be no hope of restoring unity between the member and the Meeting, and the member does not resign, the Pastoral Care Committee reports that to the Meeting for Business and recommends release from membership. The Meeting may wish to appoint a special committee to confer further with the Friend before taking action. If there is still no hope of reconciliation, the Meeting notifies the member in writing of its intention to consider release from membership at a specified Meeting for Business. If the Meeting agrees that the membership should be terminated, it minutes that decision. The Clerk notifies the individual notified of the action by registered mail with return receipt requested.

In any consideration of termination of membership, if there are problems which do not seem resolvable at the Monthly Meeting level, the individual or the Meeting may approach the Quarterly Meeting Committee on Ministry and Oversight for help. In all cases the Meeting and individuals concerned should seek constantly to act in a spirit of continuing love.

[[Question for NPYM Friends: Do the processes for release from membership described here match your group’s practice? If not, what is your practice around resignations and terminations?]]
Sample Letters and Forms

North Pacific Yearly Meeting Certificate of Transfer

To __________ Monthly Meeting of Friends

Dear Friends:

__________, [a member/members] of this Monthly Meeting, having moved with [his/her/their] minor [child/children], ____________, [has/have] requested a transfer of membership to your Meeting. Consideration has been given to this and there appears to be no obstruction to granting the request. We, therefore, recommend [him/her/them] to your loving care and remain, in love, your friends.

Signed on behalf of __________ Monthly Meeting of Friends, held at __________ on __________, 20__. 
____________
Clerk

North Pacific Yearly Meeting Acceptance of Transfer

To __________ Monthly Meeting of Friends

Dear Friends:

We have received your Certificate of Transfer dated __________, 20__, and have accepted __________ into membership with us.

Signed on behalf of __________ Monthly Meeting of Friends, held at __________ on __________, 20__. 
____________
Clerk

North Pacific Yearly Meeting Information From Membership Record

To __________ Monthly Meeting of Friends

Name________________________________
Street________________________________
City_________________________________
State_________________________________
Date of Birth_______________________
Place of Birth_______________________
How admitted_______________________
By application? By transfer (if so, from what Meeting)?
Father’s Name________________________
Mother’s Name________________________
Married: to whom____________________
When
Where

If the partner is a member of Meeting and where

Birth name of partner’s mother

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<th>Children’s Names</th>
<th>When Born</th>
<th>State whether member or not; if so, where</th>
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From Monthly Meeting of Friends

Date

_______
Some questions for discussion around Membership in NPYM’s Faith & Practice

From NPYM Friends and the Committee on the Discipline

1. What does “membership” mean to you? How do you define “member” and “attender”?

2. Based on feedback received in working on the chapter on Monthly Meetings, we have provisionally deleted a sentence (p. 54) “Members are the final voices in the meeting for business.” Is it the practice of your group to restrict responsibility for decisions solely to members? What about for decisions specifically about memberships?

3. We have also provisionally deleted the sentence (p. 55) “When Friends are called to civil disobedience, it is the members who bear the consequences.” How does your group respond when a member or attender commits civil disobedience?

4. In the current Faith and Practice (p. 56), a paragraph begins “Members have an obligation to attend and take part in meetings for worship and for business.” Does your group consider that members are obliged to attend? Encouraged to attend? Invited? What verb would you use?

5. Which is your practice: to read an applicant’s letter at the first meeting after it is received, or to wait until the Clearness Committee has met and the Pastoral Care Committee is ready to recommend acceptance? If the former, how do you handle the sensitivity of a situation when the eventual recommendation is to delay or deny membership?

6. Is it your group’s practice to appoint only members of the Religious Society of Friends to Clearness Committees regarding membership?

7. Would it be useful for Faith and Practice to include reasons for postponing or cautions about admitting someone into membership? Reasons for postponement might include: little or no familiarity with Friends’ beliefs and practices; unusually short time of attendance; has not attended any Meetings for Business. Cautions might include: attends another church much of the time; seems unable to accept the discipline of Meeting for Worship; behaves in ways that run counter to Friends’ testimonies.

8. Is there enough in this draft chapter about membership for Isolated Friends? If not, what would you add?

9. In past years there has been discussion about other ways of holding membership, not only through a Monthly Meeting. (In 1995-96, for example, Steering Committee considered other ways for Isolated individuals to become members, and decided to continue the present guidelines as described in Faith and Practice.) Do you see a place for membership based outside a Monthly Meeting?

10. Does the draft section on Children, Youth, and Membership reflect your experience? If not, what would you add or subtract?

11. Does your group use “junior membership” as a separate category for some children and youth? Is the name “junior membership” appropriate, or would there be some better way to designate it?

12. Does your group permit dual or multiple memberships? That is, do you allow someone to hold membership in your meeting and at the same time in

- Another Monthly Meeting in NPYM
Another Monthly Meeting in another YM of unprogrammed Friends
A Friends Church
Another religious body

13. Is it your group’s practice to notify another meeting that one of your members has moved into their vicinity?

14. What is your experience with accepting a new member from another religious organization by means of transfer?

15. Does your group automatically release someone from membership if you learn and confirm that he or she has become a member of another religious body?

16. Do the processes for release from membership described here match your group’s practice? If not, what is your practice around resignations and terminations?

17. Is there anything missing from this draft chapter that you think should be included?

18. Is there anything in this draft chapter that you think belongs elsewhere in *Faith and Practice*?