New Gatherings of Friends

North Pacific Yearly Meeting seeks to foster occasions for worship after the manner of Friends, and in particular to encourage the development of informal or home meetings, Worship Groups, Preparative Meetings, and Monthly Meetings.

Informal Meetings – Sowing the Seeds

Wherever seekers gather, there may be a spark for a new meeting. To this end, the Yearly Meeting encourages the formation of discussion groups, book groups, non-violent social action groups, meditation groups, and other informal gatherings, as places where the desire to worship may form. Yearly Meeting also encourages home meetings – periodic or mid-week meetings for worship that take place in the homes of those who already belong to a Monthly Meeting, often when the meetinghouse is distant from a group of worshippers. Informal groups arise most commonly when the Monthly Meeting encompasses a broad geographic area or is very large.

These gatherings may result in questions about how to start a Worship Group, and in the seeking of answers from Quaker websites, literature and meetings. Members of Monthly Meetings may visit or belong to such groups and thus be ready sources of information about Quaker worship.

Worship Groups

A Worship Group is a gathering of people that meets regularly for worship after the manner of Friends and that is led to unite with Quaker principles and practices. A Worship Group may organize independently, but usually comes under the care of a Monthly Meeting. The group may first need to contact, and gain information, advice, or other support from established Friends’ groups. Individuals seeking information on how to form a Worship Group may contact North Pacific Yearly Meeting by viewing its website. Similarly, individuals may contact the regional or Quarterly Meeting. The group is encouraged to ask one or two members of the Committee on Ministry and Oversight of the Quarterly Meeting, or of a Monthly Meeting, to visit and help them with the discernment process.

Monthly Meetings remain alert to groups of isolated individuals who are seeking to worship as
Quakers and provide assistance according to the needs of the groups. If requested, a Monthly Meeting may establish a committee to help seekers develop a structure and practice for worship. The Monthly Meeting may provide helpful books and pamphlets, speakers and the presence of Friends at the group’s worship. The Monthly Meeting actively discerns the level of ongoing support it can provide.

[[Questions for NPYM Friends: We have added language about the process of becoming a Worship Group and how Monthly Meetings can assist. Do we need to add more references or details about what to do? What is Friends’ experience in this area?]]

When a Worship Group comes under its care, the Monthly Meeting may designate a standing committee or other form of support for it. Members of the standing committee usually include a member of the Monthly Meeting’s committee for worship and ministry. The standing committee is available to give help and guidance to the Worship Group. The standing committee meets with the Worship Group as often as necessary to discern what the group’s spiritual and practical needs are and how the Monthly Meeting can best help the group. In situations where the Worship Group is isolated geographically, the standing committee and the Worship Group work to find creative ways of lessening the isolation, perhaps by finding joint meeting places, establishing travel funding, or seeking visitation and support from the Yearly and Quarterly Meeting, or other Quaker organizations.

A Worship Group usually names a person to serve as the convener and correspondent of the group. Monthly and regional meetings and other Friends’ groups or organizations address their communications to this correspondent, who is responsible for sharing these with the entire group. When the Worship Group chooses a new correspondent, the name of that new person should be forwarded to these other Quaker groups.

There is no hard and fast path of development for Worship Groups. Worship Groups may find meeting for worship their only activity, and it is acceptable to continue in this fashion for an indefinite time. If there is a sponsoring Monthly Meeting, it avoids encouraging the Worship Group to develop committees and other meeting structures unless the group is ready to do so. It may be sufficient initially to simply establish an official relationship with the Religious Society of Friends and provide an avenue for membership, which comes only through a Monthly Meeting. However, some Worship Groups are large and well-structured from the beginning. These groups often undertake activities such as shared meals, reading groups, study groups, discussion groups, service projects, religious education, public witness, or worship-sharing groups.

Although a Worship Group need organize only to the degree which is right for it at a particular time, it does not avoid whatever organization is needed to nurture the interests and concerns of its participants, including children, and to provide an avenue for contacts with other Friends’ groups and with the wider body of the Society of Friends, both of which can enrich the life of a Worship Group. A Worship Group is limited insofar as it may not receive members, hold weddings, or otherwise act formally as an established meeting. Such actions must be carried out through the sponsoring Monthly Meeting. Attendees of a Worship Group who seek to become members of the Religious Society of Friends, or who seek to marry after the manner of Friends, must apply to the sponsoring Monthly Meeting.

It is important that those who start a Worship Group be dedicated to the leadings of the Light and that the group be devoted to the growth of the Spirit among them. This goal will help the group through discouragements and setbacks which are bound to occur. Groups suffer through periods when they are weakened by departures of participants or in other ways—when their very existence seems threatened and when it is hard to remember that a meeting’s life is based on the quality of the Spirit. There may be times when only one or two meet for worship at the appointed hour. It is worthwhile to persevere at these times, not only for those few in attendance but for those unable to attend, that they may be upheld in the Light and that all may come to know the comfort of an ongoing meeting. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20).

When a Worship Group feels it is ready to organize and conduct business in the manner of an
established meeting, it may, but is not required, to ask its sponsoring Monthly Meeting to recognize it as a
Preparative Meeting. Occasionally a Worship Group develops in its organization to the point where it is
acting as a Preparative Meeting even though it has never asked to be so recognized. In such a situation it
may be appropriate to apply for Monthly Meeting status without first becoming a Preparative Meeting.

Occasionally a Worship Group does not change or grow over time and the group determines that it
will remain a Worship Group. There is no barrier to its continuing in that fashion, but it is helpful at some
point to discuss what additional help its sponsoring Monthly Meeting will provide, so as not to overtax
the Meeting. Occasionally a Worship Group loses its attenders or agrees that it is no longer a functioning
group. The Worship Group’s correspondent should notify its sponsoring Meeting of the group’s desire to
lay itself down and work with the Meeting to make sure the process unfolds in good order.

[[Language added in this section to clarify the role of the sponsoring Monthly Meeting, provide
suggestions for how such a meeting can support Worship Groups, and to clarify some aspects of
our practice regarding Worship Groups; also for the process of laying down a Worship Group.]]

[[Questions for NPYM Friends: What is the relationship of an isolated Worship Group to Monthly
Meetings, Quarterly Meetings, and Yearly Meeting? Are there other examples of ways to lessen
the isolation of some Worship Groups? In MGOF how do isolated groups relate to the larger
group(s)?]]

Preparative Meetings

A Preparative Meeting is a meeting for worship and for business which is under the care of, and
reports regularly to, a sponsoring Monthly Meeting, and which ordinarily looks forward to becoming a
Monthly Meeting. If a Worship Group is ready to be recognized as a Preparative Meeting, it asks its
sponsoring Monthly Meeting for this recognition. As a Preparative Meeting, it continues to receive care
and counsel from its Monthly Meeting.

A Preparative Meeting has officers and committees as needed, after the manner of a Monthly
Meeting, holds a meeting for business once a month, and may receive and distribute funds on its own
behalf. It regularly sends a copy of the minutes of its meeting for business to the Monthly Meeting
standing committee. A Preparative Meeting may not receive members, hold weddings, or otherwise act
formally as an established meeting; such actions are brought to and carried out through its sponsoring
Monthly Meeting. Friends participating in a Preparative Meeting customarily hold their membership in
the sponsoring Monthly Meeting.

Preparative Meetings look forward to such growth and development as may enable them to become
Monthly Meetings, though this process depends upon many factors and there may be great differences in
the time required. Some Preparative Meetings remain so for a prolonged time. It is important for a long-
term Preparative Meeting and its sponsoring Meeting to discern whether the group will remain a
Preparative Meeting or revert to a Worship Group. When the Preparative Meeting discerns whether it will
continue, or lay itself down, it works with its sponsoring Meeting to determine what level of continued
support is needed. If the decision is to lay itself down, this may involve the winding down of the group’s
finances and the notification of other Quaker groups about its dissolution.

[[Language added about reversion to Worship Group or laying down a Preparative Meeting;
language also changed to reflect less of an orientation to “status”.]]

[[Question for NPYM Friends, especially in MGoF: How do you understand the term “Preparative”
Meeting?]}

Recognition of New Gatherings by Quarterly Meetings

Ordinarily a sponsoring Monthly Meeting is charged with recognizing a Worship Group or
Preparative Meeting. Occasionally circumstances exist that may cause a Worship Group or Preparative
Meeting to apply directly to the appropriate Quarterly Meeting for recognition. Either the Quarterly
Meeting Committee on Ministry and Oversight acts as a Committee of Support for the developing group or it appoints a separate Committee of Support. Recognition directly through Quarterly Meetings is logistically difficult and is used only when there is no alternative.

**Establishment of Monthly Meetings**

In order to become an independent Monthly Meeting, a Preparative Meeting, or in some cases, a Worship Group, usually consults first with the standing committee appointed by the sponsoring Monthly Meeting. If the way opens, the Preparative Meeting sends a letter to the clerk of the sponsoring Monthly Meeting asking that its request be forwarded to the Quarterly Meeting. The letter tells why the Preparative Meeting seeks to become a Monthly Meeting and why it feels it is ready to do so. If the Monthly Meeting concurs, it forwards this request to the Committee on Ministry and Oversight of the Quarterly Meeting. If the latter committee feels it right and timely, it recommends recognition of the new Monthly Meeting to the Quarterly Meeting and asks for the appointment of a Visiting Committee.

[[Is this Friends’ experience?]]

The Quarterly Meeting’s Visiting Committee consists of four or five Friends, including one or two members of the Monthly Meeting standing committee, and one or two others who have not been associated with the Preparative Meeting. The Visiting Committee meets with the prospective Monthly Meeting, making sure its members are aware of the responsibilities of a Monthly Meeting and giving all possible guidance. Great tenderness, care, and deliberation at this stage may prevent complications later. The Visiting Committee attends Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Business and visits with members and attenders of the Preparative Meeting. During this time, if not beforehand, the Preparative Meeting addresses the following:

1. **Spiritual Condition.** Does the meeting function under divine guidance? Is the Meeting for Worship the center of the life of the meeting? What is the vitality of the Meetings for Worship? Are they held in the spirit of expectant waiting and communion with God? How does the Preparative Meeting nurture the spiritual growth of its members?

2. **History and experience.** How long has the group been meeting? What relations does it have with other local and regional meetings, and with other Quaker organizations? What geographical area does it serve? Where and when is its meeting for worship? What is the usual attendance? How many Friends, other attenders, and children are there in the Meeting? Of those taking responsibility for the Meeting, how many appear well settled in the area? What are the Meeting’s social concerns?

3. **Evidence of good order.** Has the meeting studied *Faith and Practice* of North Pacific Yearly Meeting? Does it hold a Meeting for Business once a month? How are minutes taken and approved? How are the functions of clerk and other officers understood? What committees does it have? How are the functions of the committees on ministry and worship and pastoral care being carried out? How are financial matters being handled? How does it handle the selection of the Meeting’s officers and committees and of a nominating committee? How are children cared for by the Meeting? Does the Meeting understand the importance of religious education programs for children and adults?

4. **Other information.** Other questions or issues may arise which either the Visiting Committee or the Preparative Meeting need to address.

[[Original #1“Application” has been folded into 1st paragraph of this section. Some additional queries included.]]

If the Visiting Committee agrees that the Preparative Meeting is ready to become a Monthly Meeting, it prepares a written report. The report refers to the Preparative Meeting’s responses to the questions above. The Visiting Committee presents this report at the next business meeting of the Quarterly Meeting, with a recommendation for action. The Quarterly Meeting is the body which recognizes new Monthly Meetings.
After Quarterly Meeting recognizes the new Monthly Meeting, the Visiting Committee continues to assist both it and the sponsoring Monthly Meeting with the process of separation and transition. The transition process may involve transfers of membership and property, and may also require changes in financial responsibilities. When the transition is complete, usually within a year of the Quarterly Meeting’s recognition, the sponsoring Monthly Meeting’s standing committee is laid down. During this year, members of the Visiting Committee may attend the new Monthly Meeting’s Meetings for Worship and Business and give whatever support is requested.

[[This section is expanded from the original.]]

Should the Quarterly Meeting decline to recognize the Preparative Meeting as a Monthly Meeting, it proceeds tenderly to give its basis for doing so. The Quarterly Meeting may then establish a committee to help the requesting group address any obstacles to its application.

[[This paragraph new to Faith and Practice]]

Upon recognition, the clerk of the Quarterly Meeting forwards the minute of recognition to the Yearly Meeting Coordinating Committee and presiding clerk. The Yearly Meeting records the membership of the new Monthly Meeting. The Coordinating Committee minutes the recognition of the new Monthly Meeting as part of North Pacific Yearly Meeting. The new Monthly Meeting functions as a Monthly Meeting as soon as its status is approved by the Quarterly Meeting, although its transition away from the sponsoring Monthly Meeting may take place gradually over the year following recognition.

[[Question for NPYM Friends: Does this paragraph reflect how Yearly Meeting understands its role re: new Monthly Meetings?]]

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**Some questions for discussion around *New Gatherings of Friends* in NPYM’s Faith & Practice**

*From NPYM Friends and the Committee on the Discipline*

- What was your group’s experience in becoming a Worship Group? In becoming a Preparative Meeting? In becoming a Monthly Meeting? Is that experience reflected here?
- This revision attempts to address the following points raised by Friends to the Committee on the Discipline, as well as an effort to make the tone less “hierarchical” or “status-driven” than the existing text. Have we done enough? Do we need to do more (or less) along these lines?
  - Practicalities of forming a new Worship Group
  - More detail on Monthly Meeting’s responsibility for care of Worship Groups and Preparative Meetings
    - Relationship with Worship Groups and with isolated Friends
    - Bridging the geographical and spiritual distances between MM and WG
  - Appropriate continuing care for PMs and WGs that remain in that status “permanently”
  - How MMs or PMs can revert to WG status
  - How Meetings or WGs lay themselves down
• What structures/practices help support small Worship Groups (or small Meetings) help them take advantage of opportunities, etc.
• Worship Groups under the care of Meetings