Participation in the Life of the Meeting

[[NOTES: draft ready for YM review 4/1/2007. [[Sources & changes from 1993 F&P: Mostly from pp. 42-43. New intro paragraph. New RSV inclusive language for 1 Cor 12:4-11; new quotes from Romans 12, Patricia Loring, Simeon Shitemi; new sentences in advices re: types of participation, leadership, MM/QM/YM and wider world of Friends. 2 queries moved in from Meetings for Business section, 1 from Religious Education, new queries re: leadership, ministry, advice & support; queries generally broken into smaller pieces and re-ordered.]]

(See also Meeting for Business, Mutual Care, Witness, Worship)

Like other spiritual disciplines, full and centered participation in the life of the Meeting is a way of opening ourselves to the transforming work of the Spirit. Additionally, taking part in the life of the Meeting is a way to “let our lives speak” and contribute to the spiritual health and growth of the community where we worship.

The life of the Meeting depends upon varied gifts, and the Meeting is enriched when all members and attenders participate actively. When we are faithful to these gifts, we all become ministers to each other. The working of the Holy Spirit in our lives is expressed and furthered through prophetic ministry in meeting for worship and in the world, pastoral care for each other, service to the Meeting and the wider community, and the example provided by lives lived in the Light.

The vitality of a Meeting depends on the participation and financial support of all; members of the Society carry a responsibility for this. As attenders grow toward membership, their participation and support will also grow. Membership in a Monthly Meeting brings with it membership in a Quarterly Meeting and the Yearly Meeting as well as connections to Quaker organizations nation- and worldwide. These larger meetings and organizations offer further opportunities for participation in the life of the Religious Society of Friends.

Quotations

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (New Revised Standard Version)

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace
given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

Romans 12:4-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

As meetings became settled, elders performed a variety of functions, according to their gifts and leadings. Some elders were primarily nurturers and companions of ministers. Some had a more discerning role, encouraging and guiding people “young” in the ministry, and discouraging people whose ministry did not seem to come from the Center. Other elders functioned primarily in relation to the meeting as a whole, some taking on various dimensions of pastoral care. Some felt led to nurture the spiritual lives of individual members in ways outside the vocal ministry, perhaps by spiritual counsel, by prayer in and for the meeting, by nurturing the spiritual lives of children, or in other ways. In any case, all gifts and ministries were for building up the spiritual life of the meeting and the Society: directing and re-directing people to the Spirit of God, to the Inward Christ, the Light, the Inward Teacher, the Guide, the one true Priest and Shepherd. It was clearly understood that any member of the meeting might be called to some part of this service, but that some were specifically led by the Spirit at any given time.

Patricia Loring, Listening Spirituality vol. II, 1999

The way to call anyone into fellowship with us is not to offer them service, which is likely to arouse the resistance of their pride, but to ask service of them.

Simeon Shitemi, address to NPYM Annual Session, 1991

Advises

Friends are encouraged, insofar as they are able, to take part in Meeting for Worship regularly and punctually. Friends should consider how their pattern of attendance witnesses to the central place that worship holds in their spiritual lives.

Remember the many other ways to contribute to the life of the Meeting: attending meeting for business with care for the good order of Friends; serving on committees, including committees for care and clearness; offering and accepting eldering and spiritual support as may be needed; joining in activities and projects; giving time and resources to meet the physical, financial, and practical needs of the Meeting; praying for the spiritual strength and health of the Meeting.

When they are called to leadership, Friends are encouraged to consider thoughtfully and prayerfully what gifts of service they are led to provide and how they may grow through this service. Friends are also encouraged to uphold Meeting leaders with love, respect, and care, acknowledging the challenges of leadership in a Quaker community.

Attenders are encouraged to become acquainted with Friends’ ways, to participate in the Meeting community as fully as they can, and to apply for membership when it is evident that the Meeting has become their spiritual home.

Be mindful of those who are unable to participate fully in the life of the Meeting by reason of infirmity, imprisonment, distance, or other stresses in their lives.
Queries

How do we take an active part in the life of our Meeting?

How do we take our share of responsibility in service to the Meeting?

What skills and spiritual gifts do we each bring to the Meeting? How do we recognize and nurture spiritual gifts in ourselves and in others?

Do we provide our children and young adults with a framework for active, ongoing participation in the life of the Meeting? How do we encourage them to participate?

How do we encourage new members and attenders to participate in Meeting activities? Does the Meeting offer them appropriate responsibilities and guidance in carrying them out?

In what ways do we encourage attenders to share in the life of the Meeting and to progress toward membership?

Do we accept the call to service and leadership as a means of giving our talents over to the work of the Spirit?

How do we support and encourage others who have been called to the service and leadership in the Meeting?

Do we minister to each other? Are we willing to offer and to receive advice and support, in a spirit of love and humility?

In what ways are we bringing together members and attenders, young and old, in loving community?

Do we visit one another in our homes and keep in touch with distant members?

How do we make newcomers feel welcome in our midst?