



Yearly Meeting of the
Religious Society of Friends
(Quakers) in Britain

Responses to Meeting for Sufferings on the question of membership

Banbury & Evesham AM

Bournemouth Coastal AM

Brighouse West Yorkshire AM

Minute 23.07.05: Discernment on membership.

In December last year Meeting for Sufferings posed four questions regarding membership of the Society of Friends, and asked Area Meetings to consider these. The questions were: Why do we have membership? What is it for? Is it still necessary? If so, what form(s) could it take? We have received minutes on this from Huddersfield, Halifax, Bradford and Hebden Bridge meetings, which are attached and which were circulated ahead of this meeting.

Having considered the minutes from local meetings, the clerks have identified a number of themes emerging from the local responses, namely:

- Membership as a personal and shared spiritual journey
- Membership as an outer sign of commitment to testimonies and radical causes
- Membership as a tool for governance
- Questioning of the current distinction between member and attender

The following is a summary of our discernment at today's Area Meeting:

Membership as a personal and shared spiritual journey

The process of applying for membership can be a significant part of one's spiritual journey, a rite of passage, a way to say : 'I think I have crossed a threshold'.

'Convincement' is as important now as it was for early Friends, and convincement and the commitment of membership can take place at all stages of life, including as we encourage younger people in their own spiritual journeys . In joining the Quaker family we are part not just of our local meeting, but also the wider family of friends. At

its best a membership visit is a deeply spiritual process for all involved. However, we are reminded that the sharing of aspects of our spiritual journeys need not be restricted to membership visits. we can all – members and attenders – look for increased opportunities for deep sharing.

Membership as an outer sign of commitment to testimonies and radical causes
We live in times when many of our rights to free speech are being eroded. Alongside a wide range of faith bodies as well secular organisations who have a history of ‘speaking truth to power’, identifying as a Quaker can be an important and radical statement, reflecting our corporate witness for a more just, peaceful and loving world. Being a Quaker is an outward sign of our commitment to Quaker testimonies and to the work carried out in our name. The question has been asked: ‘if being a Quaker was banned, would you still join?’

Membership as a tool for governance

All organisations need some form of governance. We need to know who we are, how many we are, including in relation to money, property and charitable status. We noted the importance laid on governance by George Fox, as a way of keeping the Quaker movement from splintering in the early days. Membership can be a cohesive force, reinforcing our shared ethos and values. However, we live in in a fast changing world of online meetings and increased mobility especially among younger people, and we hope that Meeting for Sufferings can look at new and varied ways of recording ‘who’ and ‘where’ we are as Quakers. The importance of equality in all our structures, processes and ethos is a central aspect of who we are as Quakers.

Questioning of the current distinction between member and attender

We have varied views on the formal aspects of membership. For many, membership is at the core of their sense of belonging, whereas others see the spiritual journey as more fluid, a continued process of ‘seeking’. Many of us feel that the distinction between members and attenders is not helpful in its current form. There are long-term attenders who contribute greatly to the life of our meetings through energy, money and spiritual commitment. In seeking to fill roles in our meetings and the wider Society, we should be looking for the ‘best person for the role’, whether member or attender. The meeting is a community encircling all and to which we all bring different gifts. We may be at different stages of our spiritual journeys, and we express our commitment differently. Friends – whether members or attenders - live in a range of financial situations, and many may struggle to commit financially. Money is crucial to the workings of the society and the work done in our name; but money should not be a barrier to anyone applying for membership, and there are a range of ways in which Friends can contribute in service in the Society, as they are able at different times in their lives.

We will forward this minute to Meeting for Sufferings, along with the minutes received from local meetings. We hope that our minute will be helpful to Meeting for Sufferings in their further discernment on the question of membership.

Minutes on membership from local meetings:

Huddersfield LM

Meeting for Sufferings has asked Area Meetings to discern their responses to a number of questions:

- 'Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
If yes, what form could it take?'

We believe that membership gives us the opportunity to make a commitment to Quakers in our own meeting and in the wider Quaker world. It offers us the chance to serve in whatever way- to take responsibility for the Meeting. Holding our membership in Area Meeting allows us to belong to a wider community of Quakers. As we live in a time when many of our rights to free speech are being eroded, for some of us it is even more important to be in formal membership of a peace church with a powerful and inspiring history of speaking truth to power, and witnessing for a more just, peaceful and loving world. The process of application for membership is a significant part of one's spiritual journey.

Qf&p11:01 'Membership is for those who feel at home and in the right place within the Quaker community. Membership is also a way of saying to the meeting, and to the world, that you accept at least the fundamental elements of being a Quaker: the understanding of divine guidance, the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the meeting's business, the practical expression of inward convictions and the equality of all before God. Participation in the process that leads to admission into the community of the meeting is an affirmation of what the meeting stands for and of your willingness to contribute to its life.'

Qf&p11:02 Our membership ... is never based upon 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.

Halifax LM

This discussion was held on Sunday 26th February and approximately a dozen were present, roughly half members and half attenders, including one visiting from another Meeting.

After an introduction during which part of *Qf&p 11.01* was read we discussed and Friends shared based on the questions posed, with active listening.

It soon became clear that some form of membership is necessary on a practical, external, level – with money, property & charitable status. Some shared of their motivation in applying for membership – an outward sign of commitment and identification with the group, a stage on their journey, accepting the challenges that

membership involves. One spoke of a hesitation that got in the way of applying – they felt they are a ‘seeker’ and applying to join the Society might signify to themselves that they had ‘arrived’.

Membership is a cohesive force and helps bind and define the Society. The process of visiting is seen as a two way process of benefit to the Area Meeting family as well as the applicant. A society needs to share practices/common threads so that individual groups do not schism.

Could one call oneself a Quaker if one is an attender? We did not progress to envisaging what membership might look like if we started with a blank sheet of paper.

The Meeting is a worshipping community encircling all and to which we all bring different gifts. We may be in different stages of our spiritual journeys and we express our commitment differently.

Bradford LM

‘Membership is about saying to the Meeting and to the world that you accept at least the fundamental elements of being a Quaker: the understanding of divine* guidance, the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the meeting’s business, the practical expression of inward convictions and the equality of all before God.*

(*Today the terms ‘God’ and ‘divine’ are sometimes described as The Spirit or The Light.) *Qf&p11.01*

We have been asked to express our views on membership of the Society of Friends. We have different views on membership. Some of us put great value on membership as a sense of belonging, it allows us to consider ourselves to be Quakers. There is a sense of community of belonging to the meeting. Others see the spiritual journey as more fluid without the need for such a strong commitment. We are wary of hierarchy or a society where some are in and some are out. Some would wish us to be more flexible where it should be easy to enter into membership and easy to leave as people wish.

Hebden Bridge LM

We were grateful for the helpful notes arising from the 3rd Sunday session on Membership on 18th June 2023.

Initially, those present noted down words they associate with other types of membership and then removed those not appropriate to our involvement with Quakers, and added in other words which did ring true. This produced a rich sharing of words and phrases, which included the following (and many more):

‘Giving meaning to my life; fellowship; ethos, that of God in all; solidarity; taking responsibility to help it work; commitment; conviction; friendship; love; discipline; shared purpose; support; being part of a spiritual and social movement; service;

helping out at U3A and Red Cross; identity; nurture; courage; money and other contributions; community; rite of passage of joining, then the journey; testimonies; seek to know each other in the things which are eternal'.

A period of worship sharing followed, during which Friends shared about how they came to their involvement with Quakers, whether as member or attender, and what it meant to them. This revealed there were diverse routes and timescales before people took the step of becoming members. Some found the process of joining and the visit was very helpful as well as the openness to keep asking questions. Many felt a sense of responsibility to contribute and play a role in the meeting to ensure it didn't disappear, as well as to be able to contribute to other Quaker roles beyond the meeting. Others felt the need for an outward sign of commitment to Quaker identity.

While the group did not specifically follow the Meeting for Sufferings four questions - 'Why do we have membership? What is it for? Is it still necessary? If yes, what form should it take?' - many of the views that were shared are pertinent to those questions. Some valued the membership visit from a spiritual angle, as a rite of passage, as an opportunity to share one's own journey, a way to say: 'I think I've crossed a threshold'. However, one Friend felt that the visit had felt a bit patronising, another that the process could seem like a 'test'; while another Friend – having been made a member without a visit - had felt 'cheated' out of her visit. The sharing of spiritual journeys with other Friends is a valuable resource, and we could do it more in other settings, i.e. with all Friends, attenders as well as members.

'Being a Quaker' as a radical statement also featured, as a way to say who you are, what you believe, and as a way to show your commitment to the testimonies, to Quaker values. The question was asked: 'If being a Quaker was banned, would you still join?'

The importance of 'governance' was also raised, noting the importance laid on governance by George Fox as a way of keeping the Quaker movement from splintering in the early days. We do need some form of structures – now and for the future – ways of knowing who we are, how many we are, etc; but not necessarily the current forms of membership.

Many Friends felt that the current distinction between 'member' and 'attender' was no longer helpful. Some felt it was a false division, some even that it was against the ethos of Quakerism. It was noted that our meeting has many people 'in membership' whom we never see; and on the other hand, long-term attenders who contribute greatly to the life of the meeting through their input of time, money, energy and spiritual commitment.

We reflected on the notes. We noted that commitment and community are important factors but that the word commitment is missing from the index of Quaker Faith and Practice. We also need to clarify what it is we are joining - local, area or national

Quaker bodies - and are there different ways of understanding membership and their relationship to spirit, governance and action on testimonies?

Will forward this minute to Area meeting to help in their discernment.

Bristol AM

Cambridgeshire AM

Central England AM

2023.066 Responses from local meetings and individuals on membership

Further to Minute 2023.040 we have received numerous responses from our local meetings as well as some individuals. Meeting for Sufferings asked us to consider four questions before reporting back to them by the end of July and we have held these questions before us today:

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take.

In our discussion we have mostly concentrated on the first of these questions, seeing it as fundamental. We have been told that it may not be legally necessary to have membership, and this could be clarified, though we may need it for personal reasons. If there is no membership we may find it harder to disavow those who speak as a Quaker or on behalf of Quakers but whose views are not representative. Some members feel that their membership is a demonstration of commitment rather like a marriage. We have heard that some Attenders feel that membership is divisive and they feel outside the Religious Society of Friends even when being comfortable in their Local Meeting.

We need to talk about membership and its meaning more often so that it is properly understood. There are many roles which do not require membership. In the last analysis membership may be a personal matter of saying "In this faith I wish to live and die".

We agree to send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings, along with the accompanying papers.

Responses from Local Meetings and individuals on membership

Barnt Green & Redditch LM

Membership as Central to our Community

Involvement of Children within the AM

- Children joining in some part of Meeting for Worship

- Friends ministering to children – perhaps, if children come in at the end, telling the children about the ministry that has taken place.
- Quaker education of children: how to continue this / teach our principles / values / ethics?
- How do we show them what Quakerism is about / a Quaker life throughout the weeks?
- How to instil the sense of belonging through activities together with adults / e.g. social events / children's party
- Relationship between adults and young people
- Movement from Attendance to Membership
- Attenders feel welcome, included and under no pressure to join
- No-one has felt we are cliquey or two-tier
- Attendees want to learn more about Quakerism before making the decision to join
- Attendees place importance on learning more of our spiritual/religious experience
- It would be helpful to have some Friends who are particularly interested in helping and listening to attenders, since there are those who say 'no-one ever asked me' / 'I hardly knew what membership was'
- Some attenders do not want membership; are not joiners but are happy to play a part at a local level. They do not want to "be joined" as members after attending for a given number of years.

Membership at the level of Organisation

- Early Friends did not have membership.
- The need for membership grew as early Friends were able to identify themselves, especially when help was essential because of persecution.
- However, these days we need membership for legal and financial reasons. Without membership there would be no Religious Society of Friends. We would have no established body and would have to have some sort of structure/secular constitution to enable us to function, especially as a charitable body.
- Members, specifically trustees, carry legal and financial responsibilities for us and need our support behind them.
- In order to carry out certain roles, e.g.: chaplaincy, ecumenical, interfaith groups, membership and approval by the AM for the role is necessary.
- Without our faith structure, we could not hold e.g.: MfW for marriage.
- As an recognised organisation, despite our wide diversity of belief, we know what we stand for in terms of our testimonies, values, witness and work etc. We can do what we do at regional and national levels.

- As a faith group, our recording clerk is therefore able to speak out on our behalf on political issues. We have a very influential presence although we are relatively small in number.

What Form might Membership take?

- The current Quaker Faith and Practice already includes some flexibility in terms of procedures for membership
- Further work needs to be done on this
- We need to give consideration to how we may continue to remain in touch with and involve young people when they leave our Local / Area Meeting to e.g.: go to further study in another area.
- Could membership be with BYM?

Members and attenders, BG&R, Special Meeting for Discussion & Discernment 24th June

Bournville LM

On 4 June 2023, Bournville Local Meeting held a special business meeting (in person/online) at which we considered the topic of membership. We had a period of worship sharing followed by a facilitated discussion.

In the weeks leading up to the special business meeting, co clerks asked Friends in Bournville for written contributions on membership, whether or not they were going to attend. These contributions were collated and sent out to everyone prior to the meeting as preparatory reading.

At the meeting itself, a range of views were expressed, and it was good to have both members and attenders present; altogether, thirteen people took part. It has not been possible to capture in words everything that was shared, but what follows immediately below is a list of contributions made by individuals.

One person felt / thought that:

- Becoming a member was very different to his experience of joining other organisations – for example, signing up to a charity or joining a political party – and had required a bit of resolve and a little anxiety

Another person felt / thought that (and so on):

- Membership is 'sacramental', and that when a new person becomes a member it is an occasion for rejoicing
- If it had been necessary as an attender to go to study events, enquiry weekends etc prior to becoming a member, she probably wouldn't have become one

- The world is big and spirituality a very wide thing. That because the climate crisis requires everyone to work together, to join Quakers might mean him having to also consider joining other faith groups he feels a connection with
- A line repeated three times in a poem by the 15th century French poet, François Villon, spoke to this matter – “In this faith I wish to live and die” – if that is your condition, then membership is for you (acknowledging that some twenty-first century British Quakers might prefer “the Quaker way” for “this faith”)
- It is important to acknowledge that Britain Yearly Meeting is a formally constituted church / charity, and so does need to have some agreed, formal process for those who wish to be a part of it
- Rather than asking the question ‘What do Quakers believe?’, a better question is – ‘is this the “way of life” I want to lead?’
- She is happy with the structure as it is, for example, attenders being able to have roles, and the visiting arrangements when attenders wish to become members
- If you don’t feel a spiritual connection with either your particular local or area meeting but feel you have one with another meeting (i.e. you attend MfW online), perhaps it could be possible to be a member of yearly meeting instead
- Quaker Faith & Practice is more flexible than we think, and that there are different options available in terms of processes, i.e. a LM writing to a long-term attender asking whether they wish to join
- It might be worth YM exploring the option of automatic membership after attending a meeting for a year
- The abandonment of birthright membership is a positive development within yearly meeting
- Membership is about a common, mutual relationship – a common, spiritual relationship – and as such is sacramental, as in a relationship between two individuals in a marriage
- Membership is a deeply personal thing, fundamentally a matter of the heart. That her own journey into membership has been influenced by the welcome she has received in her local meeting and following attendance at a LM ‘awayday’
- The journey into membership may take time – some people may consider it later in life, joining when the ‘time is right’. Like the process of making bread, you have to give time to it: preparation, then waiting for the dough to ‘prove’.

Bull Street LM

In December 2022 Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) agreed a minute, asking members of MfS, both individually and in their Area Meetings, to consider the following questions in prayerful discernment:

- Why do we have membership?

- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

We have considered this matter, and feel that the current arrangements provided in CH. 11 of Quaker Faith and Practice remain appropriate and applicable. We feel that if applicants for membership have visitors who are reminded to follow the guidance provided in Ch. 11, then those applicants will be aware of the commitment and requirements of membership, which remain an awareness of Quaker values and practices enshrined within a broadly Christian perspective. We may return to this matter for further consideration at a future date.

Cotteridge LM

We have gathered together today to respond to the request from Meeting for Sufferings and from our Area meeting to consider the nature of membership in the Religious Society of Friends. As an organisation we need to have clarity about the meaning of membership as well as the appropriate procedures to record it. We have had part of *Qf&p* 11.01 read to us in our opening worship.

We have been asked to consider the following four questions: Why do we have membership? What is it for? Is it still necessary? If so, what form could it take?

The words that we have heard from *Qf&p* Chapter 11 remain true to us today. We affirm that membership is an outward sign of an inner commitment and can be compared with the commitments within a marriage ceremony. The application process is often a formative event in people's spiritual journey, including the discussions around, and consideration of, a commitment to a religious organisation.

1. Why are these questions being asked?
Is it a problem of numbers, or of finding people to serve in roles? But that may not be an issue of membership itself. We may need to encourage those worshipping with us to come to membership and to explore what holds them back individually.
2. Some feel that the distinction between member and attender is divisive, but we have heard today that being an attender may suit some people. It seems many friends have been attenders for quite a long time (20-25years) before becoming a member – a long journey of learning but whilst feeling fully accepted by the meeting.
3. Is it a problem of unattached friends who meet online or who are not identified with a local meeting? We are unsure how to respond to that specific problem. There remains a need for some sort of membership but at present, the link with area meeting may be an additional difficulty. We need to enable a process that is still personal and tested: how can belonging and commitment be fostered?

We know that some friends who have not been with us today would like to respond to the questions asked and we encourage them to send their contributions to our Area Meeting individually.

We send this minute to Area Meeting.

Coventry LM

We have continued our consideration and added to the summary from last meeting.

We ask our clerk to send this minute and the summary to Area Meeting.

Two additional questions were posed by Friends:

- a) What does membership mean to the individual?
- b) What does membership mean to the Religious Society of Friends (RsoF)?

Another point: there is something for many people about applying for and being accepted into membership, that is an important step in their relationship to the RSoF and within themselves – this is not so for all, but for those for whom it is important, it is very significant. More than one of those present agreed that had been their experience.

Moving into membership can be a journey enhancing one's experience – one Friend described having visited all the local meetings in our Area Meeting before applying, and also enjoyed the opportunity to talk about one's faith and journey in the interview.

We appreciate the variety of belief and background, while remaining united in our practice of gathered silent worship, waiting on God. This practice informs our testimonies, our business method and our witness in the world.

From the background papers, we learnt that many people came to Quakers through finding online Meetings for Worship; in our geographically based system of Area and Local Meetings, there isn't a natural place for online-only Friends, and we need to include them. It was suggested that 'International Membership' might be adapted to match this need.

One benefit to the RSoF is that membership may be regarded as some protection for the Society. It gives the Society the space to say 'that view is not representative of us', in cases where someone is expressing a view not generally acceptable to Friends.

We agree that membership is important. We reflected on the historical situations when Quakers were persecuted because of their Membership. Similarly, as Quakers have become accepted in modern times, there have been situations where Membership of Quakers has enabled the taking of a particular position; for example, against conscription without persecution. It is hard to be certain what issues will arise

in the future within society, where standing together as Members of The Religious Society of Friends will be needed. If such circumstances arise it will be important both internally and externally, to know who has made that commitment.

Hall Green LM

1. Why do we have membership?

Historical reasons.

To keep track of people involved in SOF and confer legitimacy on it and individual Friends. Historically, it mattered more in times of persecution and because of rights when persecution ceased.

To enable us to be contacted, to recognize us in the fulfilment of certain roles. To keep the meeting going.

To identify those members who are part of the community and to give a national picture of the strength of the membership. Also, important to count attenders.

For the individual it affirms their spiritual commitment to the RSoF. Corporately it's about welcoming that individual into community, offering them companionship and encouragement for their ongoing faith journey as a Quaker.

Nothing is achieved by membership which would not be achieved by a gathering of like-minded people. If, as QF&P says, membership is not based on worthiness, why is the applicant for membership judged as to whether membership is right for the applicant and the Meeting?

To show commitment to Friends' values

2. What is it for?

As above

Giving our community a working structure

Counting people involved in S of F. Sense of comfort for some that role holders are "proper Quakers"

So names can be recognizable nationally and in the AM.

For the benefit of members and attenders, to be a place of security, strength and mutual support in matters of faith and community.

Not necessary because by example attenders can see and feel what it is all about. If there were no membership there would be more people available to fill roles to the benefit of all.

As above – to show commitment to peace-making, showing love in the world, respect for other human beings and for the natural world, as well as upkeep of Meeting-houses and the well-being of the Society of Friends as a whole

3. Is it still necessary?

Yes

Probably

Yes, for cohesion and continuity

Not for taking roles on local, area and national committees

Yes, as the glue which holds us as a meeting together

Yes. Membership can foster a greater sense of belonging than attending. It represents a deeper level of commitment and sense of responsibility leading to a desire to uphold Quaker values and to contribute to our Society.

Yes

No. It excludes attenders/non-members

Difficult to say as Friends are no longer a completely Christian organization. People who have other religions or none, join Meetings. However most people who are interested in something do join a connected organization.

No need for distinction between members and regular attenders when considering appointments to various roles and functions.

4. If yes, what form(s) should it take?

Happy with it as it is

Compassionate

Current process fine but is it really needed?

Keep the same unless circumstances nudge us to a different form "if it aint broke, don't fix it"

Strip away any unnecessary or outdated rules or bureaucracy to encourage new members according to how a new concept of membership is defined.

Would prefer less regional approach. Maybe an application to join BYM. In practice this wouldn't significantly change the sense of community we feel within our local areas but might encourage us to discover a deeper connection within the wider Quaker community.

Not applicable as answered No, above but CEQ membership directory is useful.

It need only be simple but it could be more formal.

Selly Oak LM

We are grateful to Val Jenner for facilitating this discussion and sending notes of the

discussion to the Clerk of Area Meeting. These notes were sent as an attachment to today's agenda. We agree that these notes are sufficient to send to Area Meeting for a possible discussion at July's Area Meeting. Elders hoped that there might be further opportunities for discussion, in which younger people, in particular, might be included.

Discussion on Meaning of Membership Sunday 21st May 2023

Notes for Selly Oak Elders

This was held in response to requests coming from Meeting for Sufferings to AMs to look at what Membership means to Friends – there were about 14 of us present but no young people. So this is a partial capture of thoughts and you may want to hold another at a different time – perhaps immediately after MfW in Afterwords. We probably need to ask Children's Meeting and Youth Group – they may be on this already.

It did not feel right to take notes as Friends were talking about their feelings and sometimes stories of becoming Quakers so this is my attempt to remember and capture what I heard as the essence of attitudes.

We considered 11. 01 of *Qf&p* and read paragraph 5. We also considered the four questions in minute 2023.040 – a call for discernment by Area Meeting

My understanding is that LMs need to report back before AM in July.

Summary:

- “Membership” gets in the way of fully accepting and valuing everyone and allowing everyone to participate to their fullest capacity- this was widely agreed with
- It leads to a hierarchy
- In what way are the dead hand of “duty” and a living discipline different – and why do they sometimes feel the same?
- Committing to a Quaker way or community feels like giving back
- There is a desire to mark the stage of commitment more fully than it usually is – we should celebrate
- But discipline involves bringing all parts of yourself – all past religions, cultures and identities with you – we always do
- Beyond this there is energy and where we feel comfortable – it is possible to feel at one with several spiritual disciplines at once – and find that energy in many places
- Some of us don't like labels
- Without “Membership” how do you structure the Society to do what needs to be done?
- Membership is a symbol of something that has happened in the heart

- But we should not give too much substance to the symbol
- Don't confuse it with Truth – a truth that involves learning to live in loving community
- This community can help us to take action in the world (but do we need to be “members” to do this?)
- Background colours our attitudes
- Quakerism has Christian roots but this can be off-putting if you've come from too rigid a Christian upbringing and membership may be a symbol too far of that Christian root
- Some older long-term Friends never had to consider this as they were accepted into membership as children – but then might relinquish if they moved away
- Membership can be seen as accepting a different organisation to the hierarchies of larger denominations and the established church.

Reflections by VJ

I hope I haven't missed any different points – I may have or not given them the weight they needed. I have been left with a series of reflections and questions:

Aspects of fluidity are attractive.

Clarification is needed perhaps by some more than others but practically we all need it sometimes.

Rigidity is something none of us want or like and some of us fear it.

Is this a continuum: fluidity-clarification-rigidity? Do we always revert towards rigidity if we don't work at fluidity, or are there certain structural things that promote one over the other?

A false hierarchy seems the most feared and no one wanted it

The hill I stand on provides my view so it depends...

Are there some communities that are more testing than others – do we need a definition of community?

Religion – humanism – activism – what are the similarities and differences of the roots of these – stories of how we come to membership might usefully be set against stories of how we accept or reject ideas of divinity and/or how we came to be an activist.

If this is about fulfilling central BYM roles, is there a minimum time to enable a Friend to understand what Quakers are about – should you have done other roles and is Nominations always reflective of the spread geographic and age related. If not, should nominations be the mechanism that is reworked? And seasoned attenders at AM level take on CEQ roles?

We looked at the history briefly of membership and a question nagged at me that I never articulated – in the first hundred years it was so perilous to be a Quaker that simply turning up to a meeting told you a person was one of your group (spies aside!) Rajan announced after MfW that Quakers were one of the groups acknowledged in what was written about the action in London in support of jury consciences and defendant's rights or lack of. Might it be that a time is coming again when it will be perilous to say you are a Quaker (and there may well be spies)? Will this impact the "Membership" question?

Val Jenner, Selly Oak Learning co-coordinator, 25.5.23

Stourbridge LM

We held a blended meeting at Stourbridge Local Meeting to discuss Central England Quaker's request for Local Meetings to consider our thoughts about members and attenders. This arose from an Area Meeting in April 2023, following a Minute from Meeting for Sufferings, and we read out Minute 2023.040 about Membership. Our meeting was attended by 9 Friends in person and 4 Friends online and consisted of both members and attenders. One Friend emailed her views in advance. We started by reading from 11:01 from Quaker Faith and Practice and considered the four questions asked of us: Why do we have membership? What is it for? Is it still necessary? If yes, what form(s) could it take?

Why do we have membership?

We started by hearing that an early reason for membership was to hold a list of Friends that needed upholding. Membership can create a boundary and a structure for our methods, beliefs and tradition – without it, and records, could Quakerism become too formless? Some roles require that Friends are members, for example Prison Chaplains. A view was expressed that key roles do not necessarily have to be held by members. Some attenders have said that they are wary of coming into membership due to pressure of taking on major roles in the Meeting which may feel onerous. Of course, people can turn down invitations from Nominations to be on committees.

What is it for?

A central theme in our discussion was that membership is an opportunity and a safe place to develop a Friend's spiritual journey. It is a sacred step and as one Friend said: 'it is about entering into a covenant'. It can give one a sense of identity and belonging. It indicates a commitment to the Quaker testimonies, which are cornerstones to our beliefs, and evolve within us as we develop and grow following membership. It is making opportunities for and a commitment to serve. Coming into membership means learning more about the Society and our overall structures, both locally and nationally. Membership can deepen our understanding of Divine guidance. Safeguarding mechanisms are activated around membership.

Is it still necessary?

Some people do not believe in all Quaker principles, for example the Peace Testimony. Some people do not like the formality of memberships.

An attender talked about the concept of 'when' rather than if she will come into membership, of looking at experienced members and reflecting on her own Quaker journey. Another attender said that she hadn't been asked about membership and how she felt content in her position. Does membership create a notion of being an 'insider' or an 'outsider'? A key Quaker testimony is that of equality. As a Society, we are broad in our belief systems and a Friend said, 'if I come into membership, what am I becoming a member of?'

We are a 'loving community', does membership mean one is consciously taking a step in to the 'loving community'? There are some anomalies to this, such as attenders needing to make a request to attend Area Meeting.

We heard of membership being an outward and visible sign of our faith and of our conviction. Membership was referred to as being 'being part of the team', of a 'family', a 'tribe' and of it giving a sense of purpose and meaning to life. Membership is about saying we have shared values.

A question was raised about membership being for life or what happens if people change as can naturally happen on their spiritual life journey. Will it entail a 'divorce'? Some Quakers also draw on other faiths such as Anglicanism, Buddhism or Paganism whilst still being Quakers. Some Friends change Meetings whilst still being members of the Society. Some Friends consider themselves Quakers whilst not involving themselves with Local Meetings.

We agreed to send this Minute to the Clerk of Central England Area Meeting for consideration at July 2023 Area Meeting.

Sutton Coldfield LM

Following minutes from both BYM and CEQ regarding the role and future of membership within the Society we have had an online discussion of the questions raised on 24th May 2023. We have summarised the points as reported by Cathy Khurana and attach her report to these minutes.

Membership discussion on zoom, 24th May 2023

We considered the questions in the MfS document:

1. Why do we have membership?

We had a lot of discussion, but briefly concluded that legal obligations and personal commitment to Quakerism are two reasons for having membership.

2. What's membership for?

1. Group solidarity

2. Giving us a public voice/speaking out in the world
3. To support our structure and recognise our history
4. A statement of commitment
5. Expression of support

3. Is membership necessary?

No unity between the six of us present – we said ‘yes’ ‘definitely’ ‘probably’ ‘possibly not’!

It was noted that some attenders are more committed than members we hardly ever see.

4. What form(s) should membership take?

This one is complicated and needed more time than we had, so no definitive answers!

Important question – what is meant by an attender in good standing?

Warwick LM

Further to Minute 23/26 and the request to Friends to send their views on membership to the Clerk at our last MfWfB. The Clerk has received three additional responses to the request.

The following minute, incorporating the additional comments, was agreed by the Meeting and will be sent to Area Meeting by the Clerk.

We have considered this matter with care. Friends in membership expressed their appreciation of the process of becoming a member and the value for them of the Quaker community. This process is an important part of Friends’ spiritual journey. It encourages a feeling of belonging and of making a commitment to the Society. Membership has been described as a rock, something deep and precious that is a guide and compass to try to live by. Some Friends have indicated they find deep inspiration in the combined wisdom of Friend’s writings, both old and modern insights.

We wondered if membership might be considered separately to the need for some roles or nominations to be restricted to those in membership. We considered alternative mechanisms to support nominations. The possibility of a different type of membership could be considered for regular attenders or attenders of ‘good standing’.

Membership is currently held at Area Meeting. The number of Members and Attenders is important for statistical reasons, to quantify the number of people who are commitment to the Society. We considered possible structural revisions to dis-associating membership with place / Area Meetings. Would a structural change in the way membership is held better support Friends who move often for work or

education? Alternatively, could self-declaring as a Quaker be an option for consideration?

We have heard that some Friends may need a prolonged period of time to feel able to consider becoming a member or to see it as a helpful part of their spiritual development. We need to be mindful of the words we use and the process of becoming a member to ensure these are encouraging, inclusive, accepting and welcoming and not seen as a test.

Responses from individuals

Response 1.

Commitment to Quaker values:

The fundamental tenet of Quakerism is 'there is there is that of God in everyone'. We may use different terms: the Divine, the Light, Seed, Ultimate Reality and so on.

The MfW is the bedrock of our expression of the seeking of the presence of the Divine

In membership we make a commitment to each other to uphold our common understanding.

Our testimonies are driven by our conviction that there is that of God in everyone

Is it necessary to have certain criteria for admission to the Religious Society of Friends? If so, what should these be? We call ourselves 'seekers'. We may ask that applicants come with a minimum of heart and mind open to the possibility of experience of the presence of the Divine. What other basic criteria?

The individual level of commitment – the individual becomes included in the spiritual community and, in doing so, accepts responsibilities to enable the organisation to flourish

The individual makes that commitment of his/her own freewill

We like the idea that Young Friends are considered to be Members of Young Friends if they have attended regularly for, let's say, 2 years. We ask that these Young Friends then make a decided commitment if they wish to join the RSoF as full members

We do not agree to the automatic conferral of membership to other adult attendees who have attended our MfW for many years. Although we, as a Religious Society welcome them into our community wholeheartedly, the commitment cannot effectively be one-sided. We ask that these attendees demonstrate their commitment to us by applying for membership.

We must decide on the principles of membership

We then decide varying processes, according to circumstance

Response 2.

My understanding is that membership is designed to safeguard the Quaker approach to worship and business, and is intended to engender a sense of community.

I think the distinction between members and attenders can be divisive, and does not always assist the building of community.

It was decades before I applied for membership, partly because I mistakenly thought of it as an end and not a beginning, and I didn't feel qualified. I now regard membership as a statement of intent to 'let my life speak' and to share with others the search for deeper understanding. I don't feel it has much to do with specific local or area meetings, or with the holding of particular roles.

Response 3:

I woke up in the night last night and knew what I must say, which is very simple.

There is a wonderful 15th century French poem which the poet François Villon wrote for his illiterate mother so that she could learn it and use it to pray to the Virgin Mary.

There are three verses – the last line of all three verses is the same.

“In this faith I wish to live and to die”.

If that is your condition, then membership is for you.

Personally, I think my case rests here.

Response 4:

When a Quaker is reported doing something in the press, they will often be referred to as “a Quaker”. This does not happen if they are an Anglican, Methodist or Baptist, for example. In other words, Quakers are perceived as being particularly distinctive. And Quakers like to think they are distinctive in their thought, though presumably all denominations do.

Although Quakers say their faith is deeply rooted in Christianity, it also seems to include atheists (like Mr Bolton who often seems to be writing to The Friend). This perplexes me. A broad church is one thing, though one so broad that it includes the opposite to its core is not natural.

Christianity claims it represents the only true route to salvation, particularly the Roman Catholic Church (which does not allow any deviation from its set of beliefs). But, so do Islam and Judaism. However, all three are Abrahamic faiths and believe in the same God. So just as people belong to different cultures on this planet Earth, why can't people have different ways of worshipping the same God? Before the Crusades, Muslims and Christians shared the same building for worship (e.g. in Syria, which I have seen): they were happy to live alongside and tolerate each other.

Why can't we do the same today? So, if the majority worship the same God, do we need identifying membership? On the other hand, having a moniker like Quakerism is useful for immediately identifying someone's particular stance.

I am a Birthright Quaker, going to Meeting since I was a boy, so this has always been my focus. If there was no membership then, presumably, there would be no Friends' House on the Euston Road in London. That would surely be a loss - for gatherings, the library, the shop and eating together.

Response 5:

To me, membership seems largely symbolic. I like the fluidity which can make you feel welcome and included whether a member or not. To me this reflects the truth fluidity of life itself. Things can feel brittle, constricted and artificial to me if they stray too far from fluidity. What are the minimal practical steps that need to be taken in order to protect and 'frame' this fluidity?

Response 6:

I am a Member, but then I like 'joining' things. Having said that when I did feel led to become a Member it was because for me it would make me feel part of something, that I had made a commitment. I don't believe that you have to become a Member if you don't want to. It should be up to the individual, as they feel led - it will be different for everyone.

I feel the process should be as simple and straightforward as possible, everyone seems so busy.

Response 7:

My background was Christian (Sunday school etc) but attendance at any church seemed just talk and irrelevant to everyday life. I didn't like being told what to think. I enjoyed attending Junior Young Friends etc in my teenage years but always found MfW difficult, being a fidget and shallow thinker. Over the years, it never occurred to me that I had the right attributes or thoughts to become a Quaker although I had a lot of respect for members and was happy to be involved in a practical way in Friends' activities.

Retirement was a major event and gave me time to re-evaluate my life and future. It suddenly seemed just right to ask to join and show commitment to all aspects of the society.

Response 8:

Like many things about Quakers, membership is both deeply muddled and inspirational. In any Quaker meeting, there are people deeply committed to the meeting in terms of practical/organisational help, and/or upholding the community in worshipful prayer and ministry. These are as likely to be attenders as they are members. However, when attenders cease to 'attend' after a short while they are removed from our lists, but on the other hand, members who never or rarely attend,

or who live nowhere near the meeting, who never participate in the like of the community, are kept on the books sometimes for decades.

So, inspection of the organism called the Meeting provides no answers. We tend to get irritated when those heavily involved with its life and structure do not apply for membership: there is a sense of frustration – why do they not wish to join us 'properly'? And behind that there is the fact that because all our AMs are charities, legally our trustees must be members, and we also only consider that roles such as clerks and Elders – (not so much pastoral friends, possibly a residue of Elders conforming to a masculine principle and therefore taken more seriously, more 'spiritually') – should only be taken by members – so we are hampered by our own rules in having to discount very suitable people for roles on the grounds that they are not members.

I became a member in my 30s about 4 years after going to my local meeting, with a patchy faith background in the Church of England. I didn't realise I wasn't a member until I was asked if I had thought of joining, and having gone through the process of Anglican confirmation the Quaker process seemed almost ludicrously simple - write a letter – to whom? the clerk...who's that? – Oh, ok, then what? - 2 people will visit you oh right (better clear up!) ...they see if you are ready, write a report, take it to a business meeting, then the meeting accepts you into membership (usually!) So, I did, and I was, and then spent the rest of my life learning about Quakers!

I do feel that we should take membership more seriously in having more learning around it. We should provide regular pathways through using the learning materials that we have, and by befriending those who come through our doors, not just at the first encounter but consistently. We should encourage people to help unofficially as well as on committees. We could fund e.g. 2 places for Britain Yearly Meeting for those new to our ways. It is difficult when Birmingham Quakers are split into so many worshipping groups, but we could probably manage a regular programme for attenders and enquirers if we worked together and pooled our efforts and resources, instead of all working separately. We do have different routes to membership (QF&P ch.11) and we should make more use of those.

Children who grow up in the meeting instead of, or as well as formally applying, could show their 'CV' of Quaker involvement over the years. We could appoint representatives to YFGM and pay for them. (So many things we could do!)

Response 9:

I respond positively to what our Friend has written about, which is that there could be a more structured, explicit process in becoming a member, e.g. enquirer/attender weekends, meetings for learning, retreats etc. Personally, I find it really helps to have times set aside when you can gently feel and touch life and perhaps see a direction you might take. At the same time, I would want formal membership to be

acknowledged as just one of a number of ways in the Society in which you might express your commitment to a spiritual life.

Response 10:

I am particularly fond of Advices 6 & 7 which encourage us to be 'open to new light from whatever source it may come' while at the same time 'remaining faithful to Quaker insights' and, as you know, I have recently become a member of a Zen Buddhist order, the Order of Interbeing. Practising mindful meditation whilst seeking to follow the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh has opened a door for me to ministry at our meetings. I have gained from it and I know that the Order of Interbeing has much respect for Quaker practice and beliefs.

Our Friend is right when she speaks of the value of membership and of accepting the associated responsibilities but I think that 'membership' is more than a commitment to a set of 'rights and responsibilities.' I think that it is also a symbol both to oneself and to the wider community of a deep sense of commitment and volition which is creative, upholding and which can generate compassion and self-learning.

Response 11:

Meeting for Sufferings is consulting on what it is to be a Quaker member and attender. Whatever it is we come up with there will be some essentials common to any organisations and especially to churches: it is to belong to a community of Friends, to have common spiritual, moral and ethical values, to feel some responsibility for the maintenance of the Society and much more.

It has had me wondering about the process of becoming a member. In the early years, Friends were "convinced", whilst others grew up in a Quaker family and became known as birth-right Friends. Today, most Friends have come from a secular background or from other churches; they don't have to declare their conviction but do need to feel they belong and share the value referred to above.

The process of becoming is very simple. After attending a meeting for a couple of years, an attender can ask to become a member. Two Friends visit the attender and a report is made, signed by all three. Area Meeting is asked whether this attender should become a member and usually this happens. Although this has long tradition, I am not convinced this is still fit for purpose. I would like to suggest a very different approach.

I am a member of the Iona Community (IC) – an ecumenical Christian organisation embracing reformed and Anglican, Catholic and Quaker traditions. Unlike Quakers, there is no shortage of those wishing to join. An associate wishing to join is asked to join a Family Group of members who meet monthly. There are three plenaries in the year which new members should go to, if able. One of these is a week on the island of Iona. The week prior to this, they go to Camas, an adventure camp on the Ross of Mull with very basic facilities. Through this process of meeting in person and online,

the groups bond (with years one and two meeting together). Discussions talk about why they want to join, about the Rule of the IC and the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commitment – the latter being similar to our Testimonies.

I remember going to my first Quaker meeting on the 11 November in the 1990s and felt, as many do, a sense of coming home. In August the following year, the couple who were organising the Enquirers Weekend in Scotland asked me if I would do a session on the Quaker Testimonies. I was quite taken aback being asked, but for some reason I said yes and then spent the next six doing a lot of swatting. Although I can't remember much about it, it happened and was okay. Baptism by fire best describes the occasion. Then some months later I was describing Quakers to someone I knew and used the word "we" rather than "they", at which point I applied for membership.

It seems to me that perhaps a similar process could work for us. After an initial visit with the attender, it is recommended they attend a series of meetings for learning (perhaps run by Woodbrooke) covering Quaker history, Quaker theology and spirituality, testimonies, structures within BYM and including our association with Quakers around the world, and Quaker business method. Every Area Meeting or groups of AMs would? have an annual Enquirers Weekend. The attender would be asked to this weekend. At the end of this, a second visit would take place at which time the recommendation is the attender should become a member.

One of the difficulties we have is there are a number of Friends who are unattached to both a local meeting and an area meeting. These are often young Friends who very much consider themselves Quakers but don't attend a local meeting for a variety of reasons. Many "belong" to the Young Friends General Meeting. They communicate through social media and once a year meet together in-person. Many would feel they are as much a Quaker as those who regularly attend meeting for worship. I would suggest they could participate as outlined above and would become recognised as members. YFGM applies to Friends up to the age of 30. I would suggest thereafter, they be asked to attach themselves of an AM. As such, YFGM would have the same "status" as any AM and would be incorporated in the structures, enabling more effectively to have their voice heard.

Response 12:

As my parents were both Quakers when I was born, I automatically became a Quaker Member. Birthright Membership stopped in the late 1940s so I am very much in a minority now.*

Being a birthright Member has absolved me of the necessity of the decision of whether to join or not but also not given me the obvious way of actually going through the mental process of questioning myself and my thoughts and feelings associated with the act of joining voluntarily. Yes, I could resign and re-join but I have not had the resolve needed for that step.

I think that Membership is important as it makes the applicant really consider the implications both for themselves and for the Area Meeting and to discuss this thoroughly with the visitors who are part of the application process. Maybe the process needs revision but I think it is also important that the option of simply remaining an Attender, for years or even for life, continues.

The question of allowing non-members to be part of our various roles and Committees is difficult. Non-members could potentially steer an LM or even AM along un-Quakerly ways although this is unlikely. Maybe there should simply be guidance on retaining a majority of Members on each body.

(* Our Friend has added to this contribution: "I am a Birthright Quaker, born in the late 1940s, but so are our sons, born in the 1970s ... confirmed some time ago ... and we have a letter to that effect.")

Response 13:

Taking the membership path required quite a bit of resolve & a little anxiety. I'd joined many organisations before & none of them required the process of being assessed in any way. But then none of them included any kind of spiritual element. I was very pleased to take advantage of a 'becoming Friends' course. Only during this process was I able to commit to being guided by a deeper spirituality rather than just by ethics & logic. A new sense of searching for meaning and purpose that needed a supportive community to help me grow spiritually.

Becoming a member brought me closer to the Quaker way, fired my passion & helped me to start contributing time, energy & money towards the work of the Meeting. It's enabled me to try harder to let my life speak.

Response 14:

Here are some thoughts about the question of Membership. I have been attending Quaker Meetings for Worship for barely a few months, so the following is said with some humility.

A quote from Faith and Practice: "There is a principle which... is pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, is confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from anywhere the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows...they become brethren."

It seems to me that accepting this personal responsibility to look 'deep and inward' is a spiritual journey and making a commitment to that must surely come from careful thought and process. Membership could be seen as primarily something that embodies, nurtures and protects this spiritual commitment.

However, the message of Quaker Testimony and the power of Quaker values are available to those at many different points along the spiritual journey, including those who are not yet at the point of considering Membership in the above sense, which would include myself.

But the frequent nurturing joy I find in the gathered silence of worship, the living sense of connection with something greater than myself, the calm space and time for reflection and thought, are all of profound value for me and inspire me to try to live a Quakerly life.

I find the local Meeting extremely welcoming and I would be happy to undertake such practical, administrative or organisational tasks that might be appropriate to my skills, and to do so in a way that embodies Quaker values and practice. There may not always be a hard distinction between in some way contributing to the management of the Religious Society of Friends and contributing to its spiritual life, but until such time as I feel able to make the spiritual commitment of Membership, I would be happy to contribute to the former.

Response 15:

I think that if people are new to the Society of Friends, they should be encouraged to do a "Becoming Friends" course, or something similar. Before someone is accepted into membership, they need to be aware of what they are joining - some understanding of our Testimonies, our use of discernment - especially in business meetings, but also in knowing when to stand up in Meeting to give Vocal Ministry.

They need to realise that becoming a member brings responsibilities: see Advice 12: "...Remember that we are all responsible for the MfW whether our ministry is in silence or through the spoken word." In addition, they should understand about our structures (LMs, AMs, BYM etc), and know a little of our history.

Membership can mean that we feel we belong somewhere, it can mean we find a group of friends with whom we can be open and honest in our shared search for spiritual nurture & guidance. We can uphold each other and look out for each other. Long-time regular attenders who already "get" all of the above, need to become members - bearing in mind that it is perfectly acceptable to be a member of other religious organisations concurrently.

So, it may be an idea to have an interim category: an analogy: if you want to get a driving licence, you have to train. While you're training, you are classed as a "learner", until you pass your test. I'm not suggesting that attenders wear "L" plates or pay for a test, but there needs to be some checks (the job of the Visitors) so that the applicant understands that becoming a member requires a certain amount of commitment to the Society, and that we all help with "Keeping the whole Show on the Road", whether that be by doing the washing up, supporting other Friends, helping to run the Yearly Meeting, contributing to shared worship, or whatever.

Response 16:

Q1, Q2 and Q3. All these questions are similar, and I answer them together.

I am split 50 50 on whether we need Membership. There are Pros and Cons. The biggest Pro is that individuals have to think seriously if this is appropriate for them,

and if they say YES it will be a multitude of reasons (probably) which will differ from person to person. I think I can remember why this was the case for me in 2011 after 25 years attending Cotteridge, but I am sure these will be different reasons from anyone else.

I think the biggest CON is that there is no overarching reason as to what Membership is for, what it means, and therefore why it is necessary. Another major CON is that it puts a lot of young people off, especially if they are geographically mobile with changing employment and jobs in their 20s and 30s. Another CON is that the current system is incredibly bureaucratic, time consuming, and in my opinion far too open (reports read out at the next AM to all and sundry) when this should be a private decision by one individual.

It is also a myth that membership implies financial commitment to the Society if Friends. Having been Treasurer at Cotteridge LM from 2012 to 2017 and now starting a second term from March 2023, I can say it just does not work like that ; some Attenders give a lot of money, some Members give very little.

On balance I think Membership is just about worth keeping going in some shape or form, but I would not be heartbroken if it was scrapped. If it is kept, a system must be set up that Membership cannot be taken over by anarchists (see below)

Q4. I feel much more strongly about this question, and how one is 'admitted' into Membership. The current system should be scrapped, it is not fit for purpose in the 21st century, and the Society should start again from a blank piece of paper. I think Membership should be to Britain Yearly Meeting, and is nothing to do with their Area Meeting. I think it just needs a private discussion between the individual and 1 or 2 Members of his/her Local Meeting, a very short report is written, and this is sent to somebody at BYM in Leeds or London. This then negates the need to transfer between AMs when a person moves (as is currently the case).

Perhaps the individual needs to have been coming to Quaker meetings in a semi regular basis for somewhere between 1 and 3 years? (To stop the anarchist takeover issue. See what might happen with the National Trust if recent years are any guide.)

Perhaps also a system should be set up by BYM that everybody is asked every 3 to 5 years whether they wish to remain on the national Membership list? (Priorities change as people age and they navigate their spiritual journey ...) To me, it seems wrong and illogical that once you are admitted, you are there for life (as is the current system)

As far as I know, there is no financial 'incentive' to have a large number of Members within an Area Meeting. To quote hypothetical numbers, does it matter if Central England AM has 150 members, but the North of Scotland AM has only 15? I am fairly sure the answer is NO. So why are we obsessed about application for

Membership to an Area Meeting, other than that is what has happened for the last 100+ years?

From what I know about how Area Meetings operate, removing Membership from their remit ticks the 'Simplicity' box, removes a huge amount of unnecessary hours of effort by many layers of people, but make no difference at all to how the AM works as a religious charity. In the past, individuals had time to spend on such activities. In 2023, that is no longer the case.

Central Yorkshire AM

Chilterns AM

Minute on Membership CAQM 29.07.23 (amended following post-AM consultation)

We live at a time of great global challenges – climate change, wars, historical injustices, etc. As a Society we believe we have something important to contribute to enable us to tackle these challenges. We need therefore to organise ourselves to be maximally effective. This includes having clear ways of discerning what we need to say and do as part of our Quaker witness. An aspect of this process is our membership arrangements.

- Becoming a member can be transformational for the individual.
- It demonstrates publicly one's commitment to the Society and its values.
- There is a reciprocal arrangement that implies acceptance of responsibilities by the individual and the Quaker community.

Membership is not a simple directory of names, but a reciprocal spiritual commitment among groups of Friends who know each other in matters of the spirit. We believe such a concept of membership is important to the continued existence and integrity of the Society. However, membership in its current form is not working for everyone. It is clear from the survey carried out by Meeting for Sufferings that:

- many Local and Area Meetings are not following the guidance in QF&P regarding membership and roles because they cannot find suitable members to fill them.
- others are apparently put off by misapprehension as to what application for membership entails.
- at the same time, our current Membership procedures are putting up barriers to Young Friends who are passionately and energetically committed, but whose connection with the Society is not rooted in a particular Local or Area Meeting.

We suggest that, for example, Young Friends groups could be offered the opportunity to devise their own procedures so that membership would be of that group and not be based geographically to an Area Meeting.

In 2019 Chilterns Area revised their membership procedure aiming to simplify the process; it includes offering an applicant a choice in their path to membership. They can choose between having the traditional visit or simply having a conversation with Elders. In either case, a record of the visit or conversation is passed to Area Meeting. The applicant has full control over what details of their spiritual life are shared at the Area Meeting when their application is under consideration.

Friends should consider how the process could be made more flexible, creative, simple, streamlined and not off-putting whilst remaining true to our existing concept of membership. Such a form might mostly be grounded in Area Meetings, but also extended to other Quaker bodies such as Young Friends General Meeting.

Cornwall AM

8. Responses to the Membership Questions for Meeting for Sufferings

We have received in advance of this Meeting collated responses from Local Meetings in response to the questions about membership asked by Meeting for Sufferings in January.

We note, with little surprise, that there is a wide range of thought. We found it difficult to separate out questions 1 & 2 particularly.

We ask our clerks to forward this minute, along with the collated responses received today, to Meeting for Sufferings by August, as they requested.

We thank Rachel Bennett for her work collating the many responses.

For Cornwall Area Meeting 9.07.2023.

Some responses – with some collation - from our Local Meetings on the questions from Meeting for Sufferings about Membership.

Collated by the clerk to last Area Meeting - see CAM 13.05.2023 minute 5

As might be expected, there was divergence on responses to these questions among Friends in our Local Meetings and we have not tried to find unity on any overall response to each question.

In our discussions, we have found it hard to separate out responses to the four questions – they are interlinked, especially 1&2, (so our responses have been amalgamated).

1. Why do we have membership? 2. What is it for?

Personal

- To allow individuals to make a commitment along their spiritual path, and to make clear the responsibilities involved in that commitment.
- There is a commitment to 'see it through' – a bit like marriage.

- To give opportunity to connect one's inner spiritual life with the outer and be recognisable and bear witness.
- To feel and show that we belong (other denominations have baptism and confirmation)
- To provide a home base during our continued spiritual journeys, to provide some stability.
- Membership is a process of becoming and evolving.
- The process of moving attenders into membership is not always fully understood or followed.
- To allow attenders to get all they want from Meeting and feel a sense of belonging without feeling that they have to take on a role.
- Membership does not mean that you are a 'better' Quaker.

As an organisation

- To define a group who have a shared understanding of core Quaker practice in relation to Meeting for Worship, the business method and discernment, our Testimonies, and commitment and responsibility, although spiritual beliefs may vary widely
- To prevent Quakerism being just an idea, without substance or grounding.
- Some disquiet about seeming 'pronouncements' from BYM about the form our Faith in Action should take – Advices and Queries is so helpful in stressing the responsibility to think for ourselves.
- To allow Quakers to speak to the 'outside' world with a collective voice

It should help in giving a statement about our 'strength' (e.g. when speaking with other groups), although attenders are included in statistics too – and there are many passive members.

- Heritage – originally for support when persecuted
- To filter out people for whom the Society of Friends is not the right place to be.
- At Area Meeting, we record the deaths of members, in part for our records (and those of BYM) but this can feel divisive.

3. Is it still necessary? (this needs to be seen alongside the responses to Q1&2 above)

- Membership should not be a requirement for holding Quaker roles, as long as the role holder understands the principles of Quaker practice and has the skills needed.
- What is the alternative? – without membership, anyone could say that they are a Quaker and that this is what we believe.
- Membership involves acceptance of all our testimonies and letting our whole lives speak, not just our particular interests.

- Some people prefer to be involved but 'on the edge'.
- These days, people feel able to self-identify and many chose to do that as Quakers.
- The idea of the responsibilities of membership in terms of service (and workload) may put some people off. But more tasks and roles are now taken by attenders and those attenders who wish to serve should be welcomed. There will still be discernment about whether they are suited to take on the service.
- There is an expectation of financial contribution from members, but this can be difficult.
- It can produce a sense of 'us and them' - a two-tier feeling, which can be divisive and not in keeping with our testament to equality
- In many ways within Local Meetings, attenders are no different to members.
- We do use the term 'Friends' to cover both members and attenders, although some use Friends.
- The term 'attender in good standing' (as opposed to 'member') is difficult to discern.

4. If yes, what forms could it take?

- Membership can continue to evolve and support a wider constituency of Friends.
- Originally, organisation on an area basis made sense, but communication opportunities are now very different.
- At present membership of the Society of Friends in Britain is based on location, i.e. membership of an Area Meeting, but there is the model of FWCC's [International Membership Programme](#) which acts as a support for both isolated Friends and newly-established worship groups where there is no established monthly or yearly meeting.

Given the time constraints and geographical mobility of many younger people, we discussed the possibility of a different kind of membership in addition to the traditional form. A membership along the lines of international membership might be considered, with the same kind of application procedure as outlined on the International Membership Programme website, i.e. a letter of application and a 'visit' which may be online. This might be linked to an online introductory programme which covers the Quaker basics. This route into membership could be publicised through, for example, Woodbrooke online courses or through the many existing Zoom worshipping groups. Once accepted into membership, the individual might be linked to a virtual 'home meeting' to provide an ongoing sense of community and support.

- Membership of one Area Meeting can preclude involvement with other AMs which might be nearer and more accessible.

- Should we consider attenders as those on the way to membership?
- We need to welcome attenders to Meetings for Worship for Business at Local and Area Meetings. Asking attenders to identify themselves to the clerk may be off-putting.
- Those in membership and who wish to retain that membership but who do not relate in any way to a Local or Area Meeting are hard to support and include administratively.

Craven & Keighley AM

2023/31 Membership

We have been asked by Meeting for Sufferings to consider the issue of membership – why do we have it? What is it for? Is it still needed?

We are a community united by our spiritual experiences and within that context all are equal. Doing things with and for each other within that community and out into the world is an expression of that spiritual experience.

It may be felt that the distinction between attender and member has very little significance at local meeting level. However in its absence we might need much deeper discernment about whom to trust with our outward affairs.

Yet there is something inherent in the formation of human groups with their shared experiences, history and ways of doing things that naturally leads to membership as a necessity. Membership can then be seen as an acceptance of those spiritual insights and practices that make up the Quaker way.

We also acknowledge that, for some, having a process for becoming a member is a spiritually significant step in their journey.

We send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings.

Cumberland AM

23/30 Consideration of the questions about membership

We agree the minute below and ask the Clerk to send it to Meeting for Sufferings.

We feel that yes, the Society of Friends does need membership. If we did not have membership we would not have representation on non-Quaker bodies. We would also be vulnerable to people turning up with their own agenda and describing themselves as Quakers.

Concern was raised about Young Friends and others who move around a lot and are not attached to a particular Local or Area Meeting, and also those who only attend Meeting for Worship virtually. We thought it might make more sense for all members to be recorded as members of Britain Yearly Meeting rather than separate Area

Meetings, though the application process would still need to be managed by the Area Meeting.

The application process needs to be made more inclusive and more joyous!

We accept that there are some attenders who do not wish to become a member, on principle. However others may be unclear or nervous about the process and these people should be informed and encouraged. It is not essential to follow the traditional role with an official visit, alternative procedures are acceptable where they seem appropriate. If visitors are appointed they need to be well-informed about the process. The applicant should be reassured that it is not an exam but a discussion and a chance for them to ask questions.

We need to talk to attenders more about Quakerism and about how and why to apply for membership.

Crynwyr Cymru - Quakers in Wales (CCQW) CYFAN Network

The CYFAN network (Cyfan means 'whole or complete' in Welsh and is the Children, Youth and Families All-age network in Wales) has asked the clerking team of Crynwyr Cymru - Quakers in Wales to forward on you their attached minute, for consideration in the membership item at October's MfS.

We will minute this at CCQW's meeting on 28.10.23 as done on a between-meetings-basis due to the timescale.

The clerking team can confirm that we will also be sending you CCQW's report and presentation for MfS in October and hope to get those documents to you shortly

Minute to MfS re membership and Belonging for Children and Young People on behalf of CYFAN

CYFAN is a national peer support network of those involved in and passionate about work with Children and Young People in Wales to replace the traditional system of Area Meeting appointed Children and Young People's Work Advocates. Its formation arose from the recognition that young people associated with Quakerism, often do not have a strong sense of connection to an Area Meeting. Typically, young people feel most connected to a community of those with shared interests or experience and younger children to their local meeting.

Some years ago, 2 parents from one of our local meetings applied for membership together and in their letter to the AM clerk they asked if their young children could also become members. Following conversation with the children, it was felt that because the children did not have any experience of AM or understanding of the wider Quaker context, it would not be in right ordering to accept a membership application on their behalf from their parents. However, they were very regular and faithful attenders of the LM and had a strong sense of belonging and connection to the local Quaker community and an age-appropriate understanding of Quaker values. The LM felt strongly that we should celebrate and acknowledge them as

"members' of the worshipping community, particularly as they had started coming to meeting at the same time as their parents some years before when they were already of school age, so there had never been a 'baby welcoming'. Thus, an All Age Worship to celebrate belonging and connection was devised, which included giving each child a certificate, reminiscent of the Quaker marriage certificate, which all Friends present were asked to sign after the meeting as witnesses pledging their commitment to support the children as valued members of the community.

This experience highlighted to us in CYFAN, that young children attending meeting regularly can have a profound sense of belonging and commitment, which current AM membership arrangements cannot acknowledge, and which is very different from what the Society of Friends used to have in 'birth right' membership. Unlike the dilemma for older young Friends, who are 'disenfranchised', because their attachment to Quakerism is not geographically based, these children can also be 'disenfranchised', because they have a sense of belonging and connection to a local meeting and local Friends, which is not recognised in current membership arrangements.

We feel strongly that in considering changes in membership arrangements, BYM should be mindful of the need to celebrate and recognise the sense of belonging, connection and commitment to Quakerism of young children and young people.

CERTIFICATE OF BELONGING and FRIENDSHIP

Name _____

Date _____

This certificate is to mark and celebrate the mutual sense of belonging and commitment between this Friend and others in Penarth Quaker Meeting.

We the undersigned affirm the important place that this Friend has in our meeting and make a commitment to celebrate their joys and to provide them with support when it is needed.

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Devon AM

Minute 50/2023 Consideration of DAM response to BYM on Membership

Ref DAM minute 07/2023

We have received minutes from several of our LMs and we are aware of the diversity of views and opinions that exist within DAM.

We began the afternoon session with Worship during which part of Quaker Faith and Practice 11.01 was read and have had small group discussions on the Meeting for Sufferings questions which have been posed to us all.

After a time of sharing, we have welcomed points that have arisen and ask that they are collated by the Clerks.

We ask that the Clerks send a copy of the notes to Meeting for Sufferings for consideration.

Notes and Minutes from Local Meetings and some personal perspectives were posted with agenda papers before the meeting. They included historical background, views on personal spiritual journey and belonging as well as points on pragmatic organisational needs. They continue to be collected on Devon AM intranet and can be viewed via this link. <https://quaker.link/KHA83Z>

Collation of notes from afternoon groups and Worship held at Devon AM 15 July 2023

Why Membership? It's important; significant; gives identity personally and cohesion to Society of Friends

Two aspects, both important: - Inner - spiritual, a deep connection and meaning and Outer - pragmatic and organizational. If membership done away with, it will threaten the integrity of our collective understanding of Quakerism. An antidote to accusations of Quaker 'wooliness'. "How can we be organised? Without membership it would be very difficult."

Public witness: Experience from 1980s of attender speaking "as a Quaker" yet not in alignment with Quaker values nor understanding them. Membership process may help discern that understanding is there, though it still may not be the case!

However, when Quakers are lobbying, numbers can count and it's relevant and affirming to say Quakers include members and attenders. (Although noting we discern and don't vote on issues)

Appreciate International role that Quakers play and hence identity we have in the world e.g. QUNO well respected and in a gentle way able to look for nonviolent solutions to conflict.

Boundaries and Thresholds: Analogy of a cell with a membrane - the membrane being the membership requirement. In the right environment the cell doesn't need protecting, things can move back and forth and there is no risk to the body of the cell. However, as a Yearly Meeting and a body of Quakers, we do need a level of protection and so a cell membrane is essential.

Becoming a member: A personal commitment; a matter of identity; a personal decision; enables us to recognise ourselves; "being a Quaker not just about attending a Quaker Meeting"; a 24/7 thing about values, testimonies and living your faith; "by identifying, committing and standing up for our testimonies, one has a clear identity"; "to signify something tangible to self, and to others of a commitment."; bearing in mind it's a do- it-together religion so need commitment.

Applying for membership: "Like a conversion"; "something clicked"; "nailing your colours to the mast". Can seem daunting and taking the plunge can require courage, but gives increased meaning which is valued. It gives security, identifying with core beliefs of the Society. "Joined Society of Friends so I could resign if I really disagreed with something & I'm still a member!"

- A right of passage, which is lacking for those who became members at birth.
- All Quakers are on a journey of exploration though becoming a member is like crossing a threshold
- Attendership as a process of learning, the end product is membership."

- Ensures that the crucial importance of spirituality remains within Quakers. When attenders apply for membership the spirituality of the prospective member can be taken into account.
- Not about belief but practice. Core is about the inner light but we don't have a monopoly on that!
- Some welcome keeping the religion of their family or culture as well as being a Quaker.
- Important that a person coming into membership knows what Quakers are about, what we do. A vital consideration, without which we are diluted .
- If no boundary about who calls themselves Quaker and we simply self-identify -then how do we maintain our understanding of the Quaker Way and worship? Risk a slow decay of discipline
- Told by several attenders that they value the concept of Membership even if feel it is not yet for them.
- Others dislike the formality or bureaucracy or feel that being a member brings "oughts" about attending or taking on roles. Yet we try to say joining is about understanding Quaker values not oughts.

Belonging to worshipping community meaningful

- May become meaningless in outer sense, if the person does not identify with any community and in habit of attending a Meeting for Worship. Aware of members who've drifted away without resigning. LM/AMs don't have common approach on how much to make that explicit.
- "At our Local meeting whether someone is attender or member isn't obvious, a distinction seldom thought about. Nevertheless, membership does seem necessary - not sure why."
- "I don't feel that membership is necessary because attenders are playing a full part in Local Meetings. If members and attenders are the same. What is the role of membership?"
- Value in us being a group, and having a process of accepting Friends into a group. It can't be too woolly as everyone needs clarity about what it is for and what it entails.
- Need to recognise the contribution of those who don't chose to become members. Soft boundaries can appear welcoming and inclusive or blurry and unhelpful? Both members and attenders can have strong sense of belonging and commitment to Local Meeting Community and worship. What form should the process take?
- It is seen to be valuable in its present form by most who have joined. ▫ How we treat attenders is not useful. Our system is too rigid and structured. It is seen by some as restrictive and judgmental.
- "Nervous about visits" ▫ We welcome the option for a LM to recommend Membership rather than requiring a visit. Heartily support process by which a

Local Meeting is able to bring forward a name of a longer-term attender, as happened in Devon AM today.

- On other hand, visits often appreciated by both visitors and applicant as opportunity to share about spiritual path – maybe we could all do with a visit every 5 years or so?!

National Membership?

Realise this would necessitate changes, but coming to favour this idea. e.g. the AM (or other worshipping body) could bring names forward for a central register. They would be a member of the YM not the AM. Takes into account a more mobile population and the variety of ways we worship now ... Someone could a "member of BYM", worshipping with X (and Y) community

Perhaps a small membership fee simply to fund the record-keeping - with contributions to the running of LM, AM and BYM separated clearly from that? Perhaps collecting membership fee a mechanism of identifying continued existence and so people were not lost track of if they weren't attached to a community? If Friends were lost track of, 'getting your name back on the list' should not be as difficult as getting accepted on the list in the first place.

Can we look to the USA or other Yearly meetings and learn anything from any of their arrangements?

Dorset & South Wiltshire AM

23.40 Membership Consultation from Meeting for Sufferings

We have heard responses from all our Local Meetings to the questions on membership from Meeting for Sufferings. These are attached to the Minutes and will be sent with the Area Meeting Minute to Meeting for Sufferings.

Friends recognise that formal membership is important as a personal commitment to some and is a legal requirement for our Area Meeting charitable organisation. However the process of becoming a member puts off some and the perceived expectations of membership put off others. We feel that it would be appropriate to either drop the requirement for membership from many if not all roles, or to make the process of acquiring and terminated membership much simpler, based on local Friends' acceptance of a person into their own worshipping community e.g. onto address lists, but subject to Area Meeting approval.

Responses from Local Meetings within Dorset and South Wiltshire Area Meeting

1. Bridport Local Meeting

Answered by Bridport Friends in a listening circle after MfW and using a questionnaire

Why do we have membership?

Many Friends appreciated the inward and outward identity of commitment to Quaker testimonies and to the work of Friends; “the backbone of my life” ; “ I AM a Quaker”

They identify a feeling of belonging that membership brings, as if to a family,” wherever I go” , “even when I cannot be there”

Others felt that it may put people off who feel it implies obligation to contribute, however many attenders also take on important roles.

What is it for?

Membership can be an important personal choice and should not be used as a judgement of individual importance.

Membership allows the Society of Friends to maintain a stable structure fundamental character and an understanding of the nature of Quakerism including its shared values and testimonies.

It can be useful to show commitment in an individual for Quaker work. To show “a willingness to be part of the crew, not just a passenger“

It can be necessary for a Charitable organisation in legal terms and useful in administrative organisation.

Is it necessary?

Many Friends felt the answer was “yes”

Membership enables open careful conversations, where our testimonies are taken as read.

Some cited the importance of discouraging those without understanding of Quakerism to abuse their connection with Quakers.

A few Friends felt that the” vetting” was divisive in a Society committed to equality introducing a “them and us”.

What form should it take?

Most Friends felt the current path to membership was good and confidential.

One suggested it should have 2/3 Friends approval and be provisional.

A few Friends felt membership should be for all who wished it , identifying people as either attenders or enquirers if labels were needed.

2. Dorchester Local Meeting

We had consulted with Friends beforehand and this is the result of those responses and the discussion on the day:

We agreed that our representatives should convey the following minute to Area Meeting with respect to membership of the Society of Friends:

We have listened to each other and discussed this matter creatively. We feel that our current practice with respect to our meeting's address list could be a template here; if people have attended Meeting for a time and are happy to be included in the address list, then they are. Similarly, when they no longer wish to be included, they are not.

Our membership might work in a similar way. Under this approach, individuals would ask, or be invited to become members if they feel they have found a spiritual home in the Quaker way of doing things. On this view, our membership process is a proactive support to the health of the meeting. Visiting would still have a role in this process, and membership would remain, as now, with Area Meeting.

3. Lyme Local Meeting

Membership should be kept as an option for those who want to formalise their commitment to the Society and support for the meeting.

One advantage of having membership is that it provides a solid 'core' of people who attend Local Meetings.

We are aware that it can be a problematic issue in some meetings for two main reasons: creating a division of two different 'classes' of people who regularly attend meetings; and in filling Local and Area Meeting roles where eligibility is determined by membership. Neither of these are, or have been, problems for this Local Meeting.

We are also aware that some regular attenders are deterred from applying as they worry that they will be asked to take on specific roles or a regular financial commitment if they join.

Rather than asking what we should do about the issue of membership, maybe we need to instead address the real problem – why people do not want to take on roles or attend business meetings.

4. Salisbury Local Meeting

Salisbury Local Meeting's response to a question about the significance of membership was discussed at our E&PC meeting and is attached to these minutes (see below). Friends agree that it is acceptable and that it should go forward as representing the views of the whole Meeting.

We view formal membership of the Religious Society of Friends as a visible commitment to Quakers and to a way of life. It is a public acknowledgment that an individual feels they belong in a Quaker Meeting and wishes to be identified as a Quaker and also that the Local and Area Meetings recognise an individual as part of their Quaker community. Members are expected to be familiar with Quaker practice and tradition and to take responsibility for the running of the Local and Area Meetings, including making a financial commitment. It provides a clear measure of numbers in our meetings.

However we feel that over time the distinction between members and regular attenders has become blurred, so much so that in our local meeting it has become more or less irrelevant. For many years, the level of commitment shown by an individual has not corresponded with whether they are in membership or not. We have members who play no real part in the life of our meeting and rarely, if ever, attend Meeting for Worship and this has been by largely choice rather than infirmity. This is becoming rarer as fewer people decide to join in the first place. We have attenders who not only come frequently to Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Worship for Business and participate in other Quaker activities such as our looplet groups but also have taken on roles in the Meeting, even those normally reserved for members such as treasurer, eldership and pastoral care convenor and being part of our clerking team. We have come to question why we ask people to apply for membership. Is it only so that we can appoint them to certain roles? There has certainly been more of a reluctance to encourage attenders to apply for membership in very recent years for this reason. We have long term regular attenders who have not applied for membership even when encouraged to do so. Reasons include not feeling ready and not wanting to go through the process but also not feeling they need to.

While we cannot see any significant benefit in retaining formal membership in terms of the functioning of our Local Meeting, we are aware that there may be a requirement in the constitution of our Area Meeting, the legal entity to which we all belong (at least those of us who are members!), for us to have a recognised membership. We can also appreciate that being in membership is an aid for nominations when an individual is not well known to the nominating or appointing body. On the very rare occasions when Quakers want to dissociate themselves from the comments or actions of an individual, it can be helpful to be clear that that person is not a member or to terminate their membership. The number of members in a Meeting gives an indication of its size but it is not a good measure and is increasingly less meaningful. However we do not have any other standard, clear measure of the size of our meetings.

5. Shaftesbury Local Meeting

Below are responses from individuals in Shaftesbury Quakers

'I'm not a great fan of having membership; some of our long term attenders are more active members of the Meeting than some of our members and we value them greatly. Also I know that for some the thought of applying for membership is off-putting and others apply but feel the experience was not good. However, others welcome the chance to share their life journey and explore links with Area Meeting and the wider world of Quakerism.....

I feel that we do need some form of 'gate-keeping' though, to safeguard what is valuable about our Meetings from any new arrival who would like to divert us in some

other direction. Also being a member gives one a greater feeling of responsibility for the Meeting, including for its finances.

A few years ago the system was made more flexible and enabled us to offer the applicant some choice in the process. I assume that this is still the case.'

I am fully in agreement with the Salisbury response and think it mirrors my own feelings completely (this is not verbatim from one Friend but it is the gist of his message)

'Any changes to the current system are on a slippery slope. Only God can decide who should be a member'

Friends at Shaftesbury BM on Sept 3rd felt that the first response above was an excellent summary of how many of us felt.

East Cheshire AM

Why do we have Membership and what is it for?

Generally, membership implies 'commitment', 'responsibility' and 'belonging'. It has both a nurturing and challenging role in our spiritual journeys and can be a meaningful force for good in the world. Membership helps us to speak out to one another and to the wider world about what it means to be Quaker and is also about sharing our joys and our sorrows with one another.

As in Qf&p11.01: "Membership is for those who feel at home and in the right place within the Quaker community." 'I feel those in worship and in service alongside those of us in formal membership are 'members' too, in my heart and mind for the time they are with us'.

We have a large group of active attenders at Disley meeting who are fully involved and committed both within the meeting and beyond it. Whilst membership is important to us we welcome our attenders taking on roles within and beyond the local meeting.

Is it still necessary?

Membership is still important, because of the challenge of upholding our faith in the world, because we are a charity and because of our legal obligations through the work of Trustees. Of more importance is the psychological value of membership, as in Qf&p 11.04: "It is the outward acknowledgement of an inward growth of commitment or a sense of belonging to the Religious Society of Friends."

What form(s) could it take?

The Membership 'process' at present is quite simple with clear steps involving the applicant at each stage but perhaps there is room for more flexibility in the process. For some the letter of application and visit can be quite stressful. Another idea might

be a simple invitation from elders & pastoral friends to become a member because 'we value you'.

Alternatively, a mixture of the traditional visit by two appointed friends, informal approaches by pastoral friends and a suggestion, if wished, for a discussion about membership. Then encouragement to apply to Area meeting, including a question on the willingness, or not, to undertake responsible roles, etc. without expecting an immediate commitment.

Finally, there is a concern in The Society of Friends about falling numbers and a need to turn outwards through outreach, to remind people that we exist and that we are a meaningful force for good in the world, at both grass roots and national levels.

'It might be good to understand better why long-standing Attenders do not come into Membership. There's a bunch of folklore around it but it would be good to have some evidence. It's not necessarily a goal to "convert" Attenders to Members, but we may learn something useful.'

23.07.14: After lunch we considered the subject of membership as requested by Meeting for Sufferings.

This was facilitated by Hilary Topp our Local Development Worker. We discussed new and creative ways of considering membership and attendance as well as acknowledging the historic reasons for membership, and how we all have had different pathways towards becoming Quakers and different reasons for taking membership or remaining as an attender.

We thank Hilary for joining us today.

We discussed the following questions:

- What are your dreams for membership and belonging to the RSoF?
- How would it be if our RsoF was truly inclusive?
- How could membership "enhance our experience of being Quaker"?

This is the beginning of an ongoing journey into our eventual decisions about membership.

The Clerk will forward this minute to MfS.

We ask Local Meetings to discuss these questions

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

and feed back to Area Meeting for forwarding to Meeting for Sufferings by the end of August.

Crewe and Nantwich LM

Having a discussion after Meeting for Worship about membership prompted some very interesting insights.

Firstly, it revealed how little we talk about the subject. I know I am always wary of approaching the question of joining uninvited, in case people feel that after a certain time there might be a pressure to join, which may have the opposite effect. We don't have any more general chats about it either, and as there was a lot of interest this time, we have decided to have more regular slots after Meeting, in the small room for anyone who has any questions or would like any more information.

Secondly, those who are already Members were very positive, and talked about it being a commitment to a way of life that was important to them. They were also positive about the responsibility to uphold this by taking on roles that they felt able to, to ensure that it could continue.

Thirdly, the actual process of joining seems shrouded in mystery for many attenders, probably due to not talking about it very much, as mentioned already. Attenders were worried that they may not meet the required standards, and one who had been considering joining a different Meeting quite a long time ago was concerned that she would not be able to learn enough about Quaker history, which had been mandatory in that Meeting at the time. There were also questions of what the benefits of joining might be, as opposed to continuing as an attender, and what the first steps might be.

When the process was explained, it did seem a little daunting to some, especially having what sounded a bit like a report written about you.

Fourthly, nobody expressed any criticisms of how Membership is currently framed, or made any alternative suggestions, either on the day or in response to the email outlining the four questions. The discussion was very centred on the existing process, so a further discussion might be required if we need to explore this in more detail.

Disley LM

Generally, membership implies 'commitment', 'responsibility' and 'belonging'. It has both a nurturing and challenging role in our spiritual journeys and can be a meaningful force for good in the world. Membership helps us to speak out to one another and to the wider world about what it means to be Quaker and is also about sharing our joys and our sorrows with one another.

As in *Qf&p11.01*: "Membership is for those who feel at home and in the right place within the Quaker community." 'I feel those in worship and in service alongside those of us in formal membership are 'members' too, in my heart and mind for the time they are with us'.

We have a large group of active attenders at Disley meeting who are fully involved and committed both within the meeting and beyond it. Whilst membership is important to us we welcome our attenders taking on roles within and beyond the local meeting.

Is it still necessary?

Membership is still important, because of the challenge of upholding our faith in the world, because we are a charity and because of our legal obligations through the work of Trustees. Of more importance is the psychological value of membership, as in Qf&p 11.04: "It is

the outward acknowledgement of an inward growth of commitment or a sense of belonging to the Religious Society of Friends."

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Alternatively, a mixture of the traditional visit by two appointed friends, informal approaches by pastoral friends and a suggestion, if wished, for a discussion about membership. Then encouragement to apply to Area meeting, including a question on the willingness, or not, to undertake responsible roles, etc. without expecting an immediate commitment.

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'It might be good to understand better why long-standing Attenders do not come into Membership. There's a bunch of folklore around it but it would be good to have some evidence. It's not necessarily a goal to "convert" Attenders to Members, but we may learn something useful.'

Stockport LM

Why do we have membership?

There are some legal reasons. Trustees have to be in membership according to the Charity Commissioners. Although there are ways round that.

Membership can prevent a takeover by people who want to influence the Society's actions, change its direction or take over its property. This can happen to groups who open membership to anyone who pays a subscription.

Some Friends think that membership reflects a desire to be an exclusive society.

Some Friends think it fulfils an ancient need to have a statement of who they decide to belong to.

What is it for?

- A rite of passage
- A commitment to myself
- A way of staying focussed
- A profoundly important spiritual thing
- A way of putting myself under the guidance of Quaker principles
- A commitment to take an active role
- A statement of where I want to be
- A feeling of being upheld by the RSF and individual Friends
- A way of stating that I am where I am meant to be
- An anchor

Is it still necessary?

Reasons to have membership

Many Friends value it very highly for the reasons given above and find it necessary for them personally. These Friends would be distressed at losing an element which is of great importance to them.

“Not all things regarded as old fashioned are bad and not all change is good”

Reasons not to have membership

Meeting for Worship is equally important whether those present are members or not

Quakers take part in all activities without any reference to who is a member and who is an Attender.

There are people who do not “do joining” and value not being put under any pressure to join and remaining a valued member of the Meeting without formal membership.

Many people, often young people do not find a need to put labels on themselves and are unlikely to apply for membership.

If yes, what form(s) could it take?

Young Friends General Meeting could be given the same status as Area Meetings for receiving Friends into membership.

Some Friends have a need to have a statement that they belong and some do not need that. Each individual could decide whether to make a formal statement of some kind in the way they wished to do it and celebrate their commitment to Friends in the way which seems right to them.

Wilmslow LM

From Area Meeting Minute 23.07.14 we have been asked at Local Meeting to discuss these questions:-

1. Why do we have membership?
2. What is it for?
3. Is it still necessary?
4. If yes, what form(s) could it take?

We have discussed the above questions and we ask the Clerks to draw together the points made and send this minute and the comments to Area Meeting.

Why do we have membership? Membership is a personal declaration of commitment to the Religious Society of Friends, Quakers, and our sense of belonging to our Quaker community. It is a statement of conviction that Quaker testimonies are central to our understanding of how to lead our lives. The Quaker community is strengthened by this commitment. However, the current process for becoming a member is not for everyone and that should not prevent others from feeling a sense of belonging or contributing to their Quaker community

What is it for? It shows a commitment to leading our lives according to Quaker values and serves as a means of outreach. It is a willingness to serve in ways that will support our Local, Area and Central Committees. It also strengthens our Quaker communities in their shared values, feelings of acceptance and belonging, making them more cohesive.

Membership numbers allow contributions to Area Meetings and BYM to be calculated fairly.

Is it still necessary? As a charitable organisation, registered with the Charities Commission, membership has legal implications. We do not have a paid priesthood so the majority of tasks have to be carried out by committed Friends, in membership.

It would have a considerable impact on the many for whom their Quaker membership is important, if this was removed.

If yes, what form should it take? The current process for applying for membership can deter some faithful attenders. Could we be more flexible in our approach? Many other organisations do have membership but without such formal processes. We are told to let our lives speak; actions can speak louder than words. Often faithful friends, not in membership, are integral to our Meetings. When the time is judged right could they be approached perhaps by Elders and Pastoral Friends, asking them to take up membership? The option could then be open to them if they also wished to meet up with LM or AM friends to discuss this further, or not, if they felt it unnecessary.

Discomfort was expressed at the term 'unattached' Friends and it was hoped that for those Friends where membership of an Area meeting was not appropriate, attachment centrally to BYM could offer a better solution.

East Kent AM

1. Membership

Friends have welcomed the prompt from Meeting for Sufferings and responded in a variety of ways. We feel our discussions have generated some richly diverse thoughts and experiences from amongst both members and attenders that have started us on ongoing discernment of membership both individually and as meetings.

For many members, the experience of applying for membership holds a deep personal and external significance. For others, the practice of membership has become a barrier to a more equal and inclusive society. We feel that commitment to Quakers is not determined by whether or not we are in membership.

We recognise the value of having membership and acknowledge it is timely to rethink the model. We are aware that having membership attached to Area Meetings excludes certain friends such as those who frequently move, associate with other groups such as Young Friends or worship mainly on-line. We would welcome a model of membership that would include all those identifying as Friends.

We question in our local practices whether we make it too difficult for attenders to apply for membership, and hope we can improve the route. Should there be a time period of learning and worshipping that helps attenders grow into membership? Are we providing appropriate support and positive encouragement for attenders to join or has this reduced in recent years perhaps because increasingly we don't distinguish between attenders and members? We believe our own Area Meeting might need a more energetic approach and wonder if this is reflected in other Area Meetings.

We support removing barriers to regular attenders serving meeting through specific roles. This would help us to develop those willing people for each role, alongside our journey towards Simpler Meetings.

We agree to forward this minute to Meeting for Sufferings.

East Scotland AM

23.08.06 Reflection on membership

In October 2022 MfS took a request from Central Nominations regarding the appointment of non-members to central committees. MfS rejected the proposal to permit this, wishing to look at membership in a wider context.

Membership has a central place in our structures but it is being questioned by our nominations committees and there are broader questions to ask.

In December 2022 MfS agreed a minute asking Area Meetings to consider the following questions:

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form or forms should it take?

We considered membership and were reminded of *Quaker faith and practice*, 11.01, that membership, 'does require a sincerity of purpose' and a commitment to Quaker ways and practices, the process not only about seeking but also about finding.

We heard strong feelings about the value of membership: the commitment to serve; the importance of how we live the Quaker way and about being Quaker in every aspect of life. We heard however of the need to respect other people's journeys and where they are, of the value and the commitment of attenders and how Friends' welcome to newcomers, without putting pressure on them, was appreciated.

We hope that attenders who show commitment and understand Quaker values can be invited for appointments when suitable, however we acknowledge that important decisions need to be made by those grounded in the Quaker way.

Gloucestershire AM

Minute 23/28. The nature and meaning of membership:

23/20 Meeting for Sufferings has asked Area Meetings for discernment on the nature and meaning of membership by the end of August 2023, focussing on the following four questions; Why do we have membership? What is it for? Is it still necessary? If yes, what form(s) could it take? LMs are asked to have their responses ready for inclusion on the next AM agenda, July 8th.

Today at Nailsworth we have before us an introductory paper about the matter obtained by our Friend John Miles from the BYM staff; as well of each of the Minutes or Notes from Local Meetings and a gathering of Elders and Pastoral Friends 3 April 20223. The collected Local Meeting Minutes are attached to this AM Minute and most of them have been in circulation on line prior to today's gathering.

In our discernment process here, we have first spent time in small groups. We then gathered as a whole assembly to discern what messages we wished to return to Meeting for Sufferings.

We noted that Membership signifies engagement and commitment along the spiritual journey. We celebrate that we also have Attenders who are willing to play a full part in our communities.

In this Area Meeting we have developed a particular process where the applicant for membership works together with Supporting Friends to express their own journey. We commend this process to Meeting for Sufferings.

For the person making the journey into membership, this is an important rite of passage –but that different people work with this differently, whether quickly or slowly.

Membership is a valuable form of making a commitment both in the sense of affirming our religious faith as Quaker and, also to the practical ways of doing Quakerism. That journey signifies we are accountable to our community and responsible for its further development.

We need to make better account of how more and more people are not themselves anchored in one spot to a single Quaker meeting – but may have multiple connections to Quakers in more than one setting. We need our sense of membership to work flexibly with these different associations. Non-geographical membership needs to be able to accommodate young people sometimes being in a family home and sometimes, living, studying or working elsewhere.

We ask our Clerks to send copies of this Minute and its attached papers to Meeting for Sufferings by the end of August 2023 as requested. Meeting for Sufferings hopes to return to this matter at its October 2023 residential meeting.

Yearly Meeting (YM) and Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) are asking for views

LM views on Membership before the end of August 2023.

John Miles writes

“Some weeks ago I asked Friends House for the background to the MfS request and received the email reply below. It reproduces various YM and MfS minutes over the past 10 years. I am circulating it now in response to Hugh's request. This may be far too much information for us to take on board at Area meeting in July but it provides useful background for those, like me, who are interested.

When reviewing the YM and MfS minutes I think there are three main themes that stand out.

First, there are the fundamental questions that were asked at YMG in 2014: is membership just a pragmatic arrangement to enable us to operate as a corporate body; is it part of a process of coming to belong; or is it first and foremost a spiritual experience, the beginning of a new way of being and a new set of relationships?

Next is the question of how we include young adult Friends and others, whose life circumstances may preclude them from being committed to a local or area meeting. The development since the pandemic of Quaker communities of all ages that meet regularly on line (and perhaps only on-line) adds another dimension.

Thirdly, there is the question of our worshipping communities, both large and small, and how we sustain them. How do we define and recognise membership of these communities? How does this differ from membership of the Society of Friends? And

when we come to consider who we ask to take on certain roles in the community (like trustee, elder, clerk or pastoral friend) is it important to distinguish between those who we recognise as members and other attenders?

I think it's very relevant that in 2014 Area Meetings were encouraged to explore and make full use of the flexibility around the membership procedures as set out in Chapter 11 of Qf&p. Indeed, Gloucestershire AM does do this. The Supporting Friends membership procedures that we currently follow are unusual. To my knowledge most AMs still follow the long-established practice of appointing visitors who simply report to the AM on the attender's application.

I feel certain that an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of Friends who have come into membership after following the Gloucestershire procedures will yield some important insights on the meaning of membership. We should also ask our attenders who have not taken the step of applying for membership for their opinions.

Cheltenham LM

Further to minute 2023/03, Area Meeting has asked each of its constituent local meetings to prepare for July's meeting by considering Meeting for Sufferings' call for prayerful discernment: Why do we have membership? What is it for? Is it still necessary? If yes, what form(s) could it take?

We have heard that membership is required legally for certain aspects of our life together, but we would welcome the opportunity to give time to discuss the spiritual value of membership. We agree to hold the next meeting for learning on 18th June on the topic of the spirit of membership, to be led by Rowland Carson and Seren Wildwood.

Draft on Membership discussions by Cirencester Meeting, for submission to Area Meeting

The four questions from MfS have been circulated to all our Members and Attenders:-

1. Why do we have membership?
2. What is it for?
3. Is it still necessary?
4. if yes, what form(s) should it take?

What, then, is our understanding of membership and our reflections on the four questions?

On membership generally, see QFP 11.01ff.

In our considerations we noted that at least part of the answer to question 1 is the legacy of our Quaker history and we have reflected on those historical origins and the circumstances which led to that original decision.

It was commented that Quakers still stand in that dissenting tradition - witness our testimonies!

In answer to questions 2 and 3: there are manifold practical implications in being both a religious society and a charitable organisation, e.g. responsibilities to the Charity Commissioners, Safeguarding legislation, financial affairs and oversight of legacies, care and repair of Meeting Houses, especially listed ones. If we were to cease to be a legally registered religious charity, how would these concerns be met or would they no longer apply?

On a personal level, some Friends felt membership gave them a clear sense of identity and commitment, although we fully recognised the equal commitment of many attenders too.

At the local level of our own Meeting, we felt that whether folk are members or attenders makes little if any difference; we simply worship and work together in looking after the day-to-day care of our Meeting and all our folk and our responsibilities to the wider community.

We are also aware that, as in other Meetings/Church congregations, for many people it is the local fellowship and support they can experience which is their primary concern. There may be no great interest in larger affairs, or being part of a national or international religious organisation.

We feel that question 4 simply raises many further questions, not least as to the Religious Society of Friends' core identity - as it has been understood in the past and how it might be (re)defined now and for the foreseeable future.

We discussed the comparison with secular societies, where one embraces the aims and ethos of the organisation concerned, pays an annual subscription and is thereby automatically a member.

Another point made was why the status of a person coming to Quakers from another Christian tradition should not simply be regarded as a transfer into membership from one denomination to another.

We do therefore feel that membership is still necessary in some form or another, but needs much further discernment to see a clear way forward.

Forest of Dean LM

The meaning and purpose of membership: Attenders in our Local Meeting make major contributions and fill many roles. Moving into membership is ideally a two-way exploration 'Am I right for Quakers and are they right for me? This process is hopefully a loving exploration. For some, it is a step further on a spiritual journey, showing commitment and is a form of discipleship. Membership is a way of strengthening the sense of belonging to our local worshipping group, also a recognition that we are part of a wider organisation that we are all clergy and all

need to take part. We acknowledge that some find the process of membership intimidating.

As a Religious Society of Friends, we need to keep the right balance between holding to ways that have served us and being open to necessary change. For that, a membership process is probably necessary. How do we include the people connecting to Quakers online, via Zoom and other forums?

Do we need to rethink how we admit people into membership? Are we getting this right?

Could we just accept Friends into membership by their agreement to accept the criteria in Q&P after a period of regular attendance at a Local Meeting?

We would welcome Meetings for Learning specifically for enquirers to learn what is involved in membership.

Gloucester LM

We are all Attenders in our Local Quaker Meetings where we find a sense of belonging and trust among a relatively small group. Membership acknowledges we are part of something much bigger.

Membership requires commitment and understanding of the structures and values underpinning our lives, and which inform our responsibilities as members of the Religious Society of Friends.

Commitment to Membership has 'weight' as has commitment to marriage. It has spiritual understanding. Friends have valued the opportunity to talk with 'seasoned friends' about membership. They remember with affection the warmth of their welcome into membership.

'As a member, separated, and unable to zoom, joined by Friends I do not know, meeting for Worship remains MY Meeting, treasured, and held in the Light'.

For some roles, and for legal reasons, appointments must be members of the Society of Friends. Trustees must be members under charity law, and membership required by the Ministry of Justice for Quaker Prison Chaplains. Other roles we believe depend upon the job. However, those working on Resources and on Legal requirements e.g. Safeguarding require a Quaker understanding. Could this be through the commitment to membership?

Might this apply to those 'Speaking for Quakers'?

Additions

A concern was expressed that Attenders might feel marginalised.

However, an Attender in our midst testified to the joy he felt to be welcomed to our Meeting.

To be an Attender, to be welcomed into this space as an Attender without any preconceptions or expectations.

We are alive to the corruption membership of an institution may bring. Quakers are not immune.

Nailsworth LM

This note summarises the discussions held after Meeting at Nailsworth Quaker Meeting House on Sunday 18th June, 2023. About 25 Members and Attenders (no precise record was kept) participated in four groups, a few people changing groups midway. The focus of discussion was, in brief, Membership: why? What is it for? Is it working? Do we still need it? Groups approached the questions in different ways, discussion ranging across the issues.

Do Members value Membership and why?

Most Members clearly felt that Membership offered them something they valued. This included one person in transition to Membership. Membership offers:

A clear sense of identity and belonging to a community (widely felt)

A statement of personal values which can be applied in personal and professional life

An acceptance of shared responsibility and accountability

Recognition of the needs of the charity for continuity and an identifiable base of members

A way to give back something to the Society for the spiritual and social home

a supportive and helpful mentoring process (in Gloucestershire)

Conversely, a few Members said they might not become Members if they were to have their time again, because of the kind of reservations below

What do Attenders feel about Membership?

Attenders were much more equivocal about the value of Membership, both in terms of their personal needs and the needs of the Society:

Some felt that Membership can create a barrier, cutting people off

Others that Membership would mean more responsibility than they wanted

Others that they were not 'ready' for Membership, and had worries that Membership meant 'signing up' for something that was unclear, for example in terms of what extra commitment it meant, especially given that in practice Attenders and Members were normally treated much the same

Some were simply happy to be Attenders, feeling they had as much commitment as Members and felt no need for more. One comment was that NQM ascribes roles flexibly according to each individual Friend's spiritual path

Alternatively, for some a sense that long term, open-ended commitment was not for them

Should we still have Membership?

It is clear that membership of some kind is important, both for personal and institutional reasons.

However, questions were raised about the form and nature of membership:

Should Members and Attenders become just one category, without distinction?

If we retain the separation, then consider changing the name 'Attender', which rather implies casual participation, when many attenders are as devoted as Members

Given that some Members are inactive, and do not contribute in person or financially, should there be a regular, conscious renewal of Membership

Is the process of becoming a Member appropriate?

Assuming the Member/Attender distinction is retained, there were many points made about the mechanisms and structures which affect the transition to Membership:

A feeling that the Society is overburdened with bureaucracy and structure

Recognition that Gloucestershire Friends have a different and more supportive process for becoming a Member than many Area Meetings, where it is perceived the decision system can be intimidating

The Glos. process leaves the decision largely in the hands of the individual, after advice and support from two Members, one from a different Meeting, and this was welcomed

Should prospective Members have to do a course in what it means to be a Quaker?

One group raised questions about whether the SoF is a specifically Christian body or more generally about ethics and behaviour

Given the mobility of people these days, should Membership be less geographically based?

Maybe just join BYM?

How welcoming is the Society?

Conversations in some groups veered in this direction, stimulated by the questions raised about processes and religious beliefs:

How do we ensure our beliefs and identity are clear to those potentially interested, given the recognised tension in the Society between those who profess a Christian faith and those who consider themselves agnostic? Is Quakerism moving towards a version of Humanism?

How do we become more open and welcoming?

Have our traditional Quaker words and phrases become exclusionary? One group tended to feel 'yes'

A new participant in Meeting felt mentoring for newcomers would be valuable, otherwise it's in at the deep end! Twice annual programmed discussions by elders or others with those who want it might be an answer.

Based on material from the four meeting recorders: Martin Large, Martin Woodhead, Meg Walker and Hugh Barton

Painswick LM

While becoming a member was a strong, positive experience for me and so I would recommend it, I can also see that for others there is no need for the formal process to feel committed. Is it a bit like marriage? those who choose it really rate it, while other couples choose to be committed but don't need that formality? Both are valid. It is about belonging, being part of the community, something like joining a family. The Supporting friend process sometimes seems a bit weak, and based on instinct. The attender may be regarded as still exploring. The Member may be regarded as having learnt enough to be able to decide that Quakers fit for her, or him, as a spiritual community that they wish to commit to. I do wonder if Membership is relevant to us now. As far as I can see it just involves making a financial commitment. It is good to feel you belong though, and the supporting friends can be just that - support. There used to be the ceremony of being given The Books, *Qf&p* and another I can't remember what, but it was quite a solemn moment. I wonder if this could be reintroduced maybe after a Meeting for Worship? I think it helps for a Meeting to know how many people are actually likely to continue to attend. I question the value of membership and wonder if it just creates artificial divisions between members and attenders, and indeed divisions between Quakers and members of other Christian churches. However, I confess that I have never been a very active member although I do attend the local meeting on a regular basis. The most important thing to me is the hour of silent worship rather than political campaigning for good causes.

Nailsworth LM

The following notes are summaries, representing my understanding, and do not attempt to replicate exactly what was said. In the opening reading, Rowland noted the concept of membership as associated with the well-being of one's spiritual home. Questions to consider:

1. 1 Why membership?

2. 2 What is it for?
3. 3 Is it still necessary?
4. 4 If so, what forms could it take?

Mary: would we still be a “church” if we did not have membership? Nick: How long have we had membership? Colin: Have BYM approached the Charity Commission about the need for membership? Peter: Membership emerged in 1st half of 18th C; this then permitted the disciplinary procedure of removing people from membership. Virginia: Jo Teakle has told me that membership arose in the very early days of persecution, and was a requirement (e.g.) to allow the spouse of one imprisoned to qualify for Poor Law relief. Mary: Appointments are now made as much based on who is good at the job as on their membership status. John: I am unhappy with the term “job”; I would prefer “rôle”. We all have responsibility for the functioning of the RSoF, and should not be tempted to think “that is someone else's job”

Wendy: Difficulties have arisen when (paid) appointees, not in membership, do not understand the Quaker Business Method. There are opportunities for deep conversations in all our processes, and a person being considered for a rôle should be subject to the same checks, whether member or attender.

Nick: Attenders provide much support to Meetings and they should be acknowledged more.

Someone (Nick or Liz?): “Unattached Friend” seems a very unpleasant term for a person who is not in membership.

Dorothy: To clarify, “Unattached Friend” means a member who is not associated with a particular Area Meeting; a person not in membership is an attender.

Liz: (passionately) I feel I am a Quaker and that is what I say if asked. I not want to go through the rigmarole of the membership process. Why can I not just declare that I am a Quaker?

Colin (and echoed by others): I do not see the membership process as a rigmarole, but a joyful way to know more about each other’s spiritual path. Rowland: I feel it would be dangerous for anyone to be able to declare themselves a Quaker without some sort of approval by the community. In a former meeting we had an attender with mental health issues who made very derogatory public statements about others in the Meeting while purporting to be a Quaker. We were able to tell the local paper that he was not a Quaker, although that did not get as much published prominence as his original assertions.

Oliver: The (GAQM) membership process seems a bit antiquated and long-winded, involving several meetings with Supporting Friends. Nick: If a person attending does not wish to be a (full) member, could they become some sort of associate member? On the other hand, some attenders only appear at Meeting perhaps once a year and do not contribute to the life of the Meeting.

Virginia: Could we just have a form to fill in for membership application (like any common-interest club or society)? Colin: Association with a worshipping community is not quite the same sort of thing as joining a cricket club; it has deeper implications for both the applicant and the group to which they aspire.

Rowland: If we took Liz's statement of her feelings and position as her membership application, would she be prepared to accept membership? Liz: Yes! Dorothy: There is an impression that membership in the RSoF is decreasing while the number of attenders is static or increasing, but that is incorrect. The number of attenders is also decreasing, so we should not imagine that there is a large pool of non-members upon which to call when seeking role -holders. Judy: Filling in a form is a rather mechanical process and does not seem appropriate to such an important decision. Application for membership is a very personal thing, different for each person.

Hampshire & Islands AM

2023/63: Considering Membership

Minute 2023/18 of our February Area meeting asked Local Meetings to respond to the Call for Discernment by Area Meetings on Membership issued by Meeting for Sufferings with Area Meeting's response to be submitted by the end of August.

To date, responses to the consultation's four questions have been received from Alton, Jersey, Southampton, Portsmouth and Winchester.

The importance of the information given to new members while maintaining the role of Area Meetings and ensuring that contact with Members is kept active if involvement diminishes were all recognised.

We heard the view that although the fact that all our Meetings wanted to retain Membership is encouraging our Membership arrangements were no longer fit for purpose and need to be changed to ensure a more welcoming engagement of people showing interest in joining more fully in local and area meetings with particular emphasis on the life of the local meeting.

We were reminded that the Charitable framework locates membership at Area Meeting level and we were encouraged to consider opening up the Unattached List (those not attached to a particular Local Meeting) to the choice of individual Members.

We have been urged to consider the possibility of child membership.

The importance of Membership being a lively and developing experience for all with mutual encouragement and support ongoing throughout was emphasised. Membership should reflect the joyous experience of a shared community.

We agreed to send this Minute and the Minutes from our Local Meetings to Meeting for Sufferings, stressing the importance of retaining Membership.

Responses from local meetings in Hampshire & Islands AM

Membership of the Society of Friends.

Alton LM

Following discussion at Preparative Meeting on 2nd July 2023.

Why do we have membership?

As a sign of commitment for the continuation of the Society.

To accept responsibility for the working of the Society.

To join with people who share our values and testimonies.

Membership means that we have recognised people who can speak for us as Quakers both locally and nationally.

As a process of commitment and welcome to the Society. "A special event". Quakers welcome people of wide and differing views but agreement on fundamentals remain the basis.

What is it for?

As above.

Is it still necessary?

A resounding "yes".

It shows spiritual commitment.

Membership gives a clear description of the practicalities and spiritual values and testimonies that we are showing a choice to commit to.

It is important as we have finite assets and significant responsibilities that have to be fulfilled.

If so what form should it take?

Annual schedule contributions are affected by the number of members and attenders we have at each Meeting. As we may not see some of our members for considerable lengths of time we wonder if this system should be reviewed.

Could membership applications be considered at local level and endorsed at Area Meeting?

NB. We would have found it helpful to have received briefing papers in advance to help inform our discussion.

Isle of Wight LM

he notes below are each set out beneath the most relevant of the questions to which we have been asked to respond, though of course there is some overlap. The points are as provided by the various sub-groups.

1. Why do we have Membership?

- To live in a 'Quakerly' way – being a Member is not just about attending but also what we do the rest of the week

- To provide the Religious Society of Friends with information about engagement and financial position, which sets the parameters for what can be done
- Required for perceptions of external bodies or individuals
- For legal purposes [as noted below]
- For organisational functions and responsibilities (financial and practical)
- Enables disparate groups around the country to have a focus for coming together
- Allows an individual to make a commitment
- Distinction between Members and Attenders because it speaks to the different needs of each group

2. What is it for?

- To cover the financial cost of The Religious Society of Friends – the suggested amount differs between Members and Attenders
- To meet the legal requirements for recognition as a charity
- For other legal reasons, for example relating to affirmation instead of swearing an oath
- To enable a focus for Quakers across the country to come together
- For individual commitment and sense of belonging, which strengthens the whole organisation
- For the benefit of meetings being available – as part of a wider organisation - especially when you need it or when travelling to a different location
- To give a sense of valued belonging to individuals, spiritual belief
- For officially recognised religious status [?]

3. Is it still necessary?

- Membership speaks to the needs of some, whereas Attendership speaks to the needs of others
- Still needed for:
 - Practical, financial and legal reasons
 - Charitable status*
- Yes – it gives value for belonging individually
- Yes – to continue to exist
- Yes – because we value more what challenges us
- Yes – it makes individuals feel valued
- Yes, for the reasons given above to Q1 and Q2

*though it is not clear why Quakers require Membership while other religious organisations require (for example) only a congregation, to hold charitable status.

4. If 'YES', what form(s) could it take?

- Questions over whether admission to Membership processes should be centred on Local and not Area or Yearly meetings [but see below]

- Unattached Members should all be better supported than the current structures allow
- Inactive Members should also be better supported, with more contact where appropriate
- New forms of Membership are needed. Perhaps through Membership of BYM rather than Local or Area. This should include those attending online meetings and young people.
- The category of unattached Members should be widened to include Members who haven't been connected with a meeting for, say, 5 years.
- Existing definitions should be retained, but Attenders should be allowed to take on roles
- There should be fewer hurdles to becoming a Member
- Attenders should be encouraged to consider Membership
- The process of Membership – should be by invitation and/or by choice?
- Conversations should be with both known and unknown Quakers, during the Membership application process. This does bring benefits
- It is unclear what the three paths to Membership are and why there need be any differences
- Attenders should also be made to feel that they 'belong'
- Financial contribution should not be an obligation
- Concerns that 'suggested' contributions may be unaffordable for the local meetings – budgets need to be set on what can be contributed and not include inactive/non-contributing Members

Jersey LM

Below is the Minute taken from our business Meeting on Sunday 25th June 2023 under the heading 'Area Meeting', regarding the consultation on membership:

The Meeting discussed the issue of Membership and it is felt that Membership is a further commitment with benefits and responsibilities, beyond attendance. In one sense it is not necessary as we all share the same light, however a stronger bond and joy in being a member is worth consideration by attenders. Some concern was raised about younger Friends who are not connected to a Local Meeting, and therefore not linked with Area Meeting, who may benefit from belonging to a group such as Young Friends.

Portsmouth LM

In February, area meeting asked local meetings to consider this matter for submission to the BYM consultation. There are four questions:

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

We agree that membership is important as it demonstrates commitment, although we know that this can be made in other ways too - a Friend can be very committed to Quaker values and their local community without being a member. Our commitment reminds us of what drew us to Quakerism in the first place.

The process of becoming a member is useful, whichever method is used, as it helps us clarify our thoughts and is a way of sharing spiritual experiences.

There are times when membership seems perhaps premature. Discernment needs to involve both the individual and the community. Particular care is needed when children wish to apply.

We acknowledge that, important though local ties are, there may be a need for non-geographical membership, especially in view of the on-line communities that have recently been formed. Might there be an alternative to area meeting membership?

We agree to send this minute to AM.

Southampton LM

Why do we have membership?

We reminded ourselves of historical reasons for membership. Eg To help fellow Quakers in practical ways, supporting financially as well as spiritually. Friends spoke of their individual reasons for being Quakers and confirming this by becoming members. Conviction, commitment, responsibility, upholding Quaker values and practices, a feeling of belonging and working together were some of the reasons shared.

What is it for?

Individually it is a way of saying that you “accept at least the fundamental elements of being a Quaker- the understanding of divine guidance, the manner of corporate worship, the ordering of the meetings's business, the practical expression of inward convictions and the equality of all before God” (QF and P ch.11)

As an organisation: We have a shared identity and can speak and act together. A strong membership gives Quakers a voice. The recording clerk and those supporting him/her can say to the press and the media they are speaking for Quakers as a whole. We are responsible collectively for our Meeting Houses.

Is it still necessary?

Overall it was felt to be still necessary. To ensure that our commitment to truth and integrity and our values and practices were not “watered down” We value the skills and experience of committed attenders and wonder whether there are roles that can fulfilled by those who are not members. Pastoral Care was one example. It was felt that the roles of clerk and treasurer should be covered by those in membership to ensure our Business practices are followed. We note that there are many ways of being Quaker and these can be expressed in different ways. In the Britain Yearly

meeting there are many opportunities to link with others who want to explore their spirituality and be open to new light.

If so what form(s) should it take?

Currently an application for membership is brought to area meeting and either visitors are appointed or the more informal process of having supportive friends who will be alongside and then write a letter of application. For some the formal method is seen as intrusive

It is important to nurture everyone in our local meeting, to answer questions and support spiritually, practically and emotionally. Not to pressure or bully but to be aware of people's needs at the time. Young people especially tend to move their locality and to be tied to a particular local or area meeting can be seen as a barrier. They could be encouraged to link with Young Friends general meeting and /or to listen to blogs and podcasts put out by Quakers in Britain.

It was suggested that members be identified as belonging to BYM and not to local meeting or area meeting. This would cut down on administration of creating certificates out and in when people move. Still need to be "vetted" in some way.

Financial commitment is hoped for but needs to be handled sensitively

If someone resigns membership the reasons need to be understood and addressed if possible.

Winchester LM

In December 2022, Meeting for Sufferings (an executive committee of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) the body which acts on behalf of members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Great Britain between meetings of BYM) agreed a minute, asking Area Meetings, to consider the following questions in prayerful discernment:

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

Our Area Meeting has asked local meetings to consider these questions and feedback to allow Area Meeting to develop its response. In Winchester we plan to hold a workshop to explore these questions and our response to them.

In order to find out about all of our attenders' and members' understanding of membership we have conducted a survey on the topic. Its purpose was to gather as many individual experiences of /views on membership within our Meeting as possible. This will help inform us all on the range of feeling about membership. In addition, it will provide material for the workshop.

This report will summarise the responses and include some of the answers given to the open questions. Where very similar answers were given these have been combined to one overall response with the number of respondents stated. For many questions respondents included more than one point in their answers so the numbers raising different points will not match the number of respondents.

Where there are a variety of answers these are given in full - minor edits to spelling have been made and in a couple of cases details that might have made the author identifiable have been removed if doing so doesn't detract from the point being made.

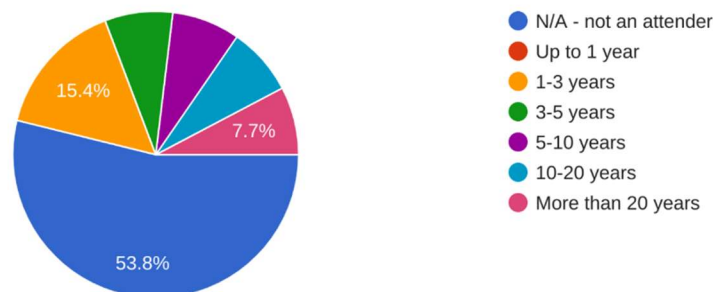
Respondents

There were 22 responses, including 5 attendars and 17 members. The attendars have been attending for a variety of time periods from 1-3 years to over 10 years and similarly the members had been attendars for a similar variety of time periods before applying for membership (including some who had been attending for more than 20 years).

Over half of the members have been members for more than 20 years, with the others having been members for a range of time periods.

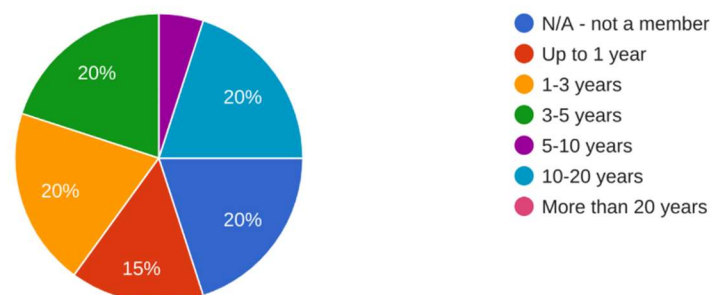
2a. If you are an attender: For how long have you been an attender?

13 responses



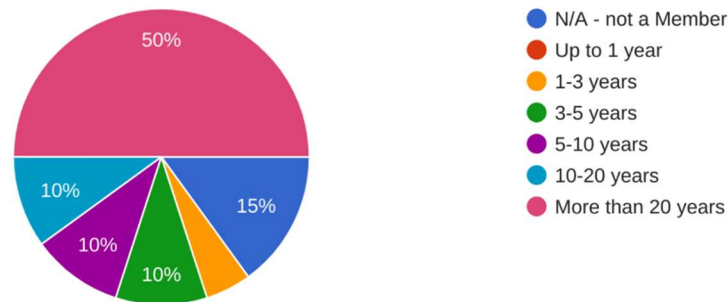
2b. If you are a member: For how long were you an attender before you applied for membership?

20 responses



3. If you are a member: For how long have you been a member?

20 responses



Reasons to apply for membership or for deciding not to

Of 11 responses to the question “If you are a member/currently applying for membership: What prompted you to apply for membership?”:

- 3 mentioned having been asked/invited to apply
- 4 mentioned feeling at home and/or wanting to express belonging to/fully joining Quakers
- 2 were brought up as Quakers
- There were also specific prompts: “When I discovered that I would be liable for national service.” and “the need to fill in the “religion” box on a formal document, and knowing the only thing I could write was “Quaker”.”
- One attender wants to improve their understanding of Quakers before joining.

Of the 4 responses to the question “If you are an attender and intend to remain an attender: Why have you made this choice?:

- Two mentioned identifying as another religion/culture as well as valuing Quakerism
- Three mentioned concerns about what the commitment involves and having the time required for the tasks involved.

In response to the question “What if anything is holding you back/originally held you back from applying for membership?”:

- The attenders referred to their answers to the previous question
- Five didn’t answer the question and a further five said indicated they had nothing to say here
- Two had been taking time to learn more about Quakers
- Two didn’t feel it was necessary
- Not being sure if it was the right place was mentioned.

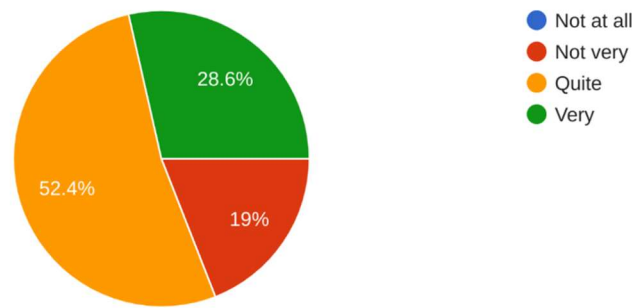
- “Dislike of 'labels'. I wasn't sure that I could / wanted to say I was a Quaker. In particular the possible implication that 'we are right' and others have got it wrong.”
- Lack of knowledge and attending in more than one area were also mentioned.

Importance of membership

The survey questions asked about the importance of membership, first at an individual level and secondly for the organisation, with follow up questions about why the answers were given. For the follow up questions there were a wide variety of answers so these are given in full.

6a. How important is it to you (as an individual) that the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain continues to have membership?

21 responses



The members were more likely to say Very than the attenders.

The reasons for those who put Not very were:

- To be honest I don't know what membership involves.
- I love the sense of community I get from Winchester meetings, and also the silent support and healing I have experienced. So far I have not felt that I have had a lesser experience of this through not being a member, but of course I may be wrong!
- There seems no difference in commitment between members and regular attenders
- Because I am not sure
- The reasons for those who put Quite were:
The concept of membership implies that there is a process whereby an individual is invited to examine what s/he believes. It helps to deepen the religious experience for ourselves and others.
- I think it could help cohesiveness & togetherness!!
- It allows me to feel connected to others
- Because I feel more comfortable to say I'm a Quaker, having gone through the membership process. Previously, I was quite shy about “admitting” that I

was attending Quakers, now I'm not. I like that it feels I have made a commitment.

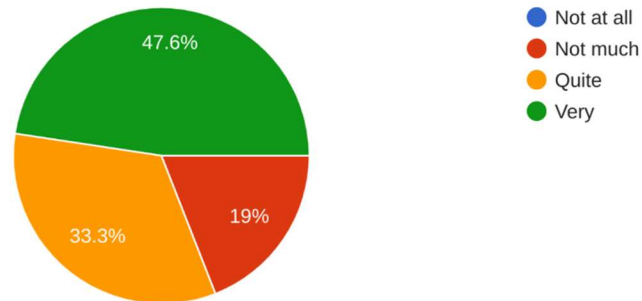
- Commitment and visibility
- Because I feel we need some friends who have both committed to a general Q ethos and who understand the processes + have “tested” themselves/ and been “tested” by others with working things out trying to use the principles.
- It is or can be an important landmark to think through what the basic values and teachings mean to me or other individuals and to make a commitment.
- Also my present understanding is that Government/ State recognise membership in a Church as a way of seeing that groups of people are an official legally recognised body. This is very important. Legally recognised Organizations have then also to abide by the laws of the land ie if the laws are helping or protecting the wider society. Non official faith groups can also much more easily veer seriously off course into say cults, due to misuse of power. That was one of my main reasons for becoming a Quaker as the organization was reducing in size and this was something every one more person committing could help preserve.
- For the individual, the positive commitment marks a stage in their spiritual life which matters. For BYM, it gives a data baseline from which the state of BYM can be assessed. But at the level of what goes on in a Local Meeting, its worship and organisation, it matters little - hence my flaky response
- It increases my sense of belonging
- To me personally it did make a difference on the long run: knowing which community of faith I made my main home. But in our local meeting I am not too aware of who is a member and who is not. It's not so important to me on an individual level.
- Membership suggests/signifies commitment.

The reasons for those who put Very were:

- It's a simple way of making a commitment to our corporate work together, and show to others that the RSOF matters to me.
- A membership structure denotes a relationship between the individual and the wider religious community. It is the Quaker equivalent to a democratic structure.
- Without commitment, we are merely a social group
- Don't see how we can have an organisation like ours without membership. There is an issue in society about commitment.
- So we can continue to make the corporate contributions /declarations which give us our identity
- Why take this away? Its important for both meeting and individual.

7a. From your point of view how important is it for the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain as an organisation that we continue to have membership?

21 responses



Most respondents gave the same answer as they had for the importance to them as an individual, four had moved from saying Quite to Very.

The reasons for those who put Not much were:

- I wouldn't like to feel that members were somehow the elite and superior to mere attenders.
- I don't think I know about the consequences of abandoning membership. I feel it is for current members to have an opinion on that.
- If membership is retained it should be national with LMs making their own arrangements
- In the absence of formal membership an informal and variable pattern of association would develop

The reasons for those who put Quite were:

- It ensures that the administrative side is able to continue.
- "I do feel that a few roles (eg. Clerk, Treasurer, perhaps Elder) should be reserved for committed members, to ensure that important tasks are handled appropriately. I feel the membership process adds something positive to the discernment for these appointments, especially in a "church" with no professional clergy.
- I feel that the process of becoming a member was valuable in reviewing, with help, how I got here, and what my current beliefs are."
- I think established members is the main way we maintain some kind of continuity of ethos even though that might develop according to the times- some thread is woven although it might be refined. Many elderly friends embody the Q ethos which is very difficult to express in a few words.
- I think/feel I have answered that question at 6a. I will add that I am signing this questionnaire here, even though I actually have local membership with [a different local] Meeting. However do value very much getting the email and

attending some of the gatherings offered. Sadly at present it does not fit to come to worship meetings, neither in [other Local Meeting] or Winchester. But very much value Quaker teachings and values. I would be happy just to be a member of AM and BYM but also OK with how things are at present. I am keen if possible to attend the workshop being arranged on this subject. It is important to me.

- I think we should continue to have membership, but that it not be made heavy weather of.

The reasons for those who put Very were:

- I understand that our organisation is a charity and it helps if a charity has members.
- It creates a solid foundation of Friends
- People in positions of 'power' need to be accountable. Paid staff (locally and nationally) need to serve the religious community (members and attenders).
- "Recognition and influence of Quakers nationally will to some extent rely on Membership.
- Self acknowledgement of being a Quaker"
- The likes of charity law might be tricky otherwise!
- I think we would need quite a new structure how to govern ourselves and how BYM discerns what it should engage with and how, if we did not have membership. It has already moved away from it's roots enormously and how it discerns and governs itself by having become a charity.
- The process is important as it shows an attender is thinking about his/her spiritual journey. It should not be given automatically. It can be seen as a spiritual review. It means we can make our corporate testimony through Quaker principles

The responses to "What aspects of membership do you value?" were:

- For me, I will be making a commitment to what I believe. What I put into it, is what I will get out of it.
- It means having a pool of people who are prepared to devote time to the necessary tasks
- Just knowing I am recorded as a member is enough. There are some minor advantages e.g. not having to ask the Clerk if I can attend business meeting, or receiving a copy of QF&P, but these were not the reasons I sought membership.
- connection, belonging
- Shared commitment. Discernment with others.
- As above, I particularly valued the process of the application for membership. I found it a very joyous and uplifting experience, as was the warm welcome I received from Friends as a new member.

- Knowing that I can worship with other committed Friends
- Support of a worshipping group and that people who say what they mean. I feel as though there is so much in the world at the moment of people say things that are entirely false and that you wouldn't expect that from a Quaker. Worship and group support, variety of people.
- I value the Quaker business method as I experience it in my Local Meeting. I am afraid my urge and capacity for engaging more at Area Meeting level or BYM level more is low, and like probably many others I don't really pull my weight there. My feeling of 'belonging' to our Local Meeting or feeling that others 'belong' has not so much to do with membership.
- Belonging. Time limited appointments. A commitment to a way of life and worship which changes lives and is seen by the "world".
- Quaker values. Social witness. Shared Friendship Spirituality
- Belonging, commitment, friendship, an understanding of what a meeting for worship is and can be, spiritual comradeship, gentle listening
- Attachment to a body with principles with which I agree
- I feel I have tried to answer this in 6a and 7b.
- At the LM level the real distinction between members and attenders is how much we each participate in the life of the Meeting rather than our membership status. So the value lies in how becoming a member affects the individual
- Sense of belonging
- A sense of belonging to my local meeting (Area Meeting does not give this but Winchester Meeting is large enough to meet my needs}
- An enhanced feeling of belonging. A chance to make a commitment.
- Knowing that I'm a member

Possible changes to membership and overall comments

In answer to the question "Do you have any thoughts on how membership could be done differently?" respondents said:

- I think it would be helpful to have a membership category for those of us who don't wish to be attached to one meeting or area. Young Friends have expressed this desire to me in the past. I would be quite happy to hear the reasons for any other changes or new developments.
- "I see 2 aspects to membership: one is about identifying with and supporting the Quaker movement (from the individual's perspective), the other is administrative (organisational perspective).
- It might be better to be members of a national Quaker body, instead of an Area Meeting, while 'attached' to a local Meeting. AM's (or bigger regional bodies) could continue to have an administrative / communications / events role. "

- I'm unconvinced by membership being held at the level of Area Meeting. I do still feel uncomfortable at Area Meeting for Business, whereas I feel entirely at home in my Local Meeting. It was the experience of attending my Local Meeting that convinced me to join. Although I attended a few Area Meetings, and visited other Meeting Houses in our Area, as part of preparation for membership, I don't feel any particular affinity with the Area.
- The process of Visiting should be strengthened.
- A record of attenders who prefer not to become members but acknowledge their Quakerism
- In terms of principles membership should be national. In terms of worship it should be local with fellow worshippers and arranged locally perhaps through nationally agreed procedures?
- "I am unclear how it can be done but I do feel it is important to gently give out reminders to members and attenders why membership is important as I tried to say in 6a. If the values and teachings of Quakers are important to an individual, membership I feel helps to follow those and be committed to these.
- Also that there are in a local community many tasks to fulfill and by committing or being aware of that helps keep communities together. I am aware that at present I am not able to do that but do try and come to AM and other events via zoom, and in my daily life live out the values. I do also feel some attenders maybe need to be encouraged to if at all possible help financially especially as BYM is more and more strapped for finance. But on the other hand I have also very much valued that Quakers have not been pushing people for their money nor to procelatize! In a long winded way I am asking: do attenders need to be reminded like members of why it may be important to support in whatever way possible? "
- What we do now is OK, but I sense that Area Meeting is becoming less relevant and meetings are becoming more congregational. If that trend continues, perhaps the application procedure could become more local
- The geographical links to areas were tricky for me when I was moving around - I know we need links to pastoral support but I found this limiting.
- Teenage/university age is an issue with lack of geographical links. People can be put off by feeling that they will have an interrogation - I think of it as a shared experience exploring where people are. There is something wrong with the way people think about applying for membership. New route helps. Quakerism basically simple but is complex in practice. Important that people have some understanding of historical context.
- "Too difficult for me to answer. It needs to avoid the danger of the Quaker business method being misused. But that business method shouldn't be more cumbersome than it already is. Is there a way of combining inclusiveness with the need for commitment, quality of service, knowledge, wise discernment? I absolutely hated committees, and never felt engaged in any churches with the Parish Council, but I have developed quite a different attitude to the way the

Quakers run things and have grown into doing things that I would not have grown into anywhere else. I treasure the Quaker Way (e.g. business method) with all its limitations, but can't quite see how that could be achieved without any form of visible or accountable belonging.

- Ours is a very individual way in making the application. Other churches have formal teaching leading to communion e.g. or total immersion. , so I find it difficult to understand when people find this intimidating. Perhaps we could suggest that applicants join in the Becoming Friends course with input from a variety of experienced Friends
- Maybe more roles to non-members.

10. Is there anything else that you would like to add on the subject of membership?

- “With national membership, perhaps we could all sign up to online updates that interest us most, e.g. events in my area or region / QPSW work / a Quaker specialist group / international initiatives. (Consulting members could be done without Area Meetings.)
- We might also have a better idea of our movement as a national organisation - what is the difference between Quakers in Britain / Yearly Meeting / Friends House?”
- “I was pleased with the new method of membership, where you can request Friends you know to accompany you through the membership process. I feel this made the experience much less intimidating than when one was visited by, possibly unknown, Friends from other Meetings.
- I found attendance at the Becoming Friends course at our LM to be invaluable. It was a pleasant way to learn about Quaker ways, history, etc. and to explore my own beliefs. It also gave me a few well-trusted friends, with whom I could discuss any issues that arose on my early steps into Quakerism.”
- I greatly value my membership and happy to acknowledge that I am a Quaker whenever appropriate
- Yes- After 6-12 months when an attender wants/ or we want them, to be in the contact book, (which means we trust them with our details and they trust us with theirs) they should be asked if they would like to become a member. We have the “alternative” route of a membership conversation, the they can join after this if both & LM& AM think are appropriate. BUT a very strong/ robust offer of on-going exploration of Quaker values/processes with discussions of why but also how they might evolve + which parts they find easy and which hard/ challenging but no judgement. I think we need the latter to ensure a spiritual, even handed approach is maintained rather than becoming another campaigning partisan group of lobbyists, of which there are many on offer elsewhere!

- “It has been a good exercise to think through what does it still mean to me several years on. I am sincerely sorry that at present not able to contribute more in a local meeting.”
- I think the current re-evaluation of membership is related to the uncertainty about who Quakers are and what they stand for at this point in time
- No formed ideas at present. When people in Meeting write to the Hampshire Chronicle about things related to Quakers reluctance of Friends to include that they are Quakers in with the letters.

Discussion

The survey responses show that Membership is important to many at Winchester Meeting. As is the ability to decide when and if to apply. The responses give a wide range of ways in which membership is important to us as individuals and that we feel it is important to the Religious Society of Friends as an organisation.

There is a need to have and maintain information/structures that enable attenders to learn more about Quakers and to enable them to be aware of what membership means. The Becoming Friends sessions are a valued part of this process in Winchester.

Changes to the geographical element of the current membership arrangements are worth considering, as the current set up with membership of Area Meetings could be improved on.

2023/04/22 Membership workshop

Following a questionnaire-based survey with Winchester Local Meeting, we held a workshop to further explore the question of membership, in response to BYM's request to contribute to a national consultation. The workshop was prepared and led by Marion Penn and Lorraine O'Hanlon, and attended by a total of 8 people. Marion invited us to a short period of worship, then talked people through the results of the survey. As the numbers were quite low, we invited contributions free-style to a discussion, while treating it a bit like worship-sharing. People were asked what their thoughts on membership were, having heard about the survey results.

Points that came up:

Reservations about membership:

- not knowing what is involved, what you are letting yourself in for
- not sure about accepting the 'label' Quaker
- not knowing about roles
- who are our Elders and Pastoral Friends?
- as an attender, who do you approach with questions?
- odd becoming a member of AM when only developed affinity with LM
- odd that Pastoral Friends answer to AM, when role is LM level

- some people attend more than one Local Meeting, or are mobile, or are involved in a Quaker body other than a Local or Area Meeting
- are some roles only given to members, when attenders could do them?

What membership means to individuals:

- a commitment
- sense of belonging
- being part of a body that can take corporate actions, have some 'authority'
- a framework for national corporate actions
- offering service
- getting support in a role
- receiving pastoral care
- an available choice, good that there's no pressure to join
- aspects of Quaker membership and processes/terminology are different to other faith groups
- good to show that we do things differently
- being active in LM (some attenders are active 'members')

AM membership:

- meeting Friends from a wider area
- an historical perspective
- input to LM matters and undertakings, from others in the area, when useful

Hardshaw and Mann AM Liverpool LM

We acknowledged that there are practical reasons for having membership: data keeping, legal & regulatory requirements relating to the stewardship of money and property however, this was not the main value we attribute to having membership. A great value was ascribed to how membership engenders a sense of belonging to and, affirmation from our community. Membership is an outward sign of a commitment to our inward life and our Quaker community. It provides a spiritual home where we can live our testimonies through joint witness and action as we travel together on our spiritual journey.

We recognise with joy what committed and involved attenders bring to the life of our meetings. Not all members are committed and involved; not all those committed and involved are members. Any future form of membership should encourage Friends in, rather than being a hurdle to jump. It is important to remember that membership doesn't require us to prove we are good enough only that we are committed to the search. The form should enable recognition of what attenders as well as members bring.

In current times, the word membership can convey a sense of exclusivity. Could the name be changed? Would the concepts of both Committed and Convinced Friends be helpful? Committed Friends being those active attenders who are a significant part of our communities. Committed Friends could be formally acknowledged, allowing them to undertake roles even where they have not undertaken the process of membership (becoming a Convinced Friend).

Could membership be held at a national level and recognise (possibly multiple) community affiliations, whether those be Area Meetings or other communities? This would allow for virtual & non-geographical communities that bring Friends together as much as Area Meetings do. It would be flexible enough to support convinced friends who have to move around the country frequently, making it difficult to take out membership in a particular Area Meeting.

Any form that it takes in the future must allow us to keep right ordering. It should provide a structure that enables the provision of pastoral care. It should create a space to talk about our beliefs and build a worshipful community in which we can support and uphold our testimonies. It should allow us to take responsibility for finance, buildings and infra-structure, make links between our local meetings and create a sense of fellowship. We should look to find a way to mark personal commitment to seeking spiritual direction in today's world without penalising those who aren't in formal memberships but are committed to our communities.

This minute is provided in preparation for our Area Meeting's discernment of this subject with the expectation that Area Meeting provide a response to Meeting for Sufferings by August.

Southport LM

We have been asked to consider Why do we have membership? What is it for? Is it still necessary? If yes, what form should it take? The meeting discussed the above and each of our own commitment to either Membership or Attendance. There was a common spiritual thread running through the discussion which was that some degree of commitment and structure was necessary. Each member or attender could decide what their own commitment was to be. We agreed that the current structure of membership and attending was a good one that should be continued.

Wigan LM

Along with our other Local Meetings we have been asked to discuss the relevance of Membership in our time prior to a discussion at Area Meeting and a subsequent minute to Meeting for Sufferings. Our structures are based upon ideas and ways of earlier generations and may need reconsidering. Our meeting consisted of two members and two long standing attenders.

Members were of the opinion that membership continues to be of importance. It indicates a commitment and a clear acknowledgement of the acceptance of Quaker testimonies. We recognise that certain roles within the society should be filled by

committed members. For example the roles of treasurer, trustee and Elder are most appropriately filled by committed members. One of our attenders expressed the view that, for her, membership as opposed to being an attender indicated a division between attending meeting for worship and being part of the administration. She finds that our Area Meetings for business lack the warmth that she finds in meetings for worship and this is a factor in discouraging her from applying for membership. Another attender spoke of how she feels somewhat second class and unwilling to offer a point of view at Area Meeting. She relates this back to our previous way of asking attenders to leave the room when membership matters were discussed. She also spoke of the long winded and somewhat boring ways that we have of making decisions and how this is a factor in discouraging her from membership and from taking on roles within the Area Meeting. The lack of warmth or the way in which we undertake our business meetings is something that Area Meeting might well consider. There may be ways in which we could make them warmer, more prayerful and approachable to those of us less used to them.

Hertford & Hitchin AM

23/30 Response to Membership consultation from MfS

In several Area Meeting sessions and in our Local Meetings we have considered the question of whether lack of formal membership [of the Religious Society of Friends] should be a bar to appointments.

We feel we should trust the discernment process in our [the Society's] Nominations Committees and Meetings for Worship for Business, to appoint the right person whether member or attender.

We ask our Clerk to send this Minute to Meeting for Sufferings together with the document compiled by Cathy Rowlands as requested by Area Meeting in March.

Hitchin LM

9 Friends attended the session, both members and attenders. Cathy spoke briefly of the concern from Meeting for Sufferings, shared her own journey into membership, and read the second paragraph of QF&P 11.01:

'Early Friends felt no need for formal membership; they were a community of seekers who recognised in each other a similar hunger, a similar quest. Seeking the 'hidden seed of God', they were prepared to recognise it wherever they found it.'

Some points arising from our discussion:

- That attenders may come to MfW for years and never apply for membership is not necessarily a 'problem' that needs to be fixed.
- Application for membership is an outward confirmation of an existing commitment.
- At our meeting there is minimal distinction between members and attenders, but we heard of other meetings where there is much more of a distinction, to

the point of members being considered 'proper Quakers'; we strongly disagree with this.

- Membership could perhaps be considered as a private matter, a step in our faith journeys, comparable to adult baptism. 'We are all on the same journey, but in different vehicles'.
- Many Friends do not identify with Area Meetings, perhaps membership should be of Britain Yearly Meeting instead?
- We should trust the discernment process in our Nominations Committees and Meetings for Worship for Business, to appoint the right person whether member or attender.

Ipswich & Diss AM

I have included in this paper relevant minutes from LMs and our AM in response to the request from Meeting for Sufferings.

19.22 f) Online membership

We have received and include below the following minute from Woodbridge LM.

Woodbridge LM minute 22/10: Membership and online meetings

We recognise that the nature of our Quaker communities is changing and for some, an online community is the natural one for them and they feel a need for meetings which are based either online or in partnership with local or area meetings.

We note that we have recently considered details of our membership procedure at Area Meeting, but we think that the time is due for a consideration of membership nationally.

We agree to this minute and ask our Clerk to forward it to Quaker Life and Meeting

Local Meeting responses

Diss LM

Meetings for Sufferings has asked area and local meetings to consider the following issues relating to membership;

Why do we have membership?

What is it for?

Is it still necessary?

If yes, what form should it take.

Diss local meeting has considered these questions, and in our discussion about membership we spent a little while looking at the difference between members and attenders. We are a small meeting and for us there is no difference between members and attenders. For example, there is always an invitation for attenders to come to and participate in local business meetings, We are happy with this approach, which demonstrates inclusiveness. However, whilst we recognise that this

approach works well for us, we accept that at some meetings the differential will be more obvious, but we nevertheless ask Meeting for Sufferings to acknowledge how things work in smaller meetings.

On the question of why we have membership, we believe that there is a high degree of individuality about this which has to be respected, and any attempt to establish criteria which a person either meets, or doesn't meet, is a violation of basic Quaker principles.

We recognise that current organisational requirements specify membership for roles such as Clerk, Elders and Treasurer, but we felt that the concept of membership as a prerequisite for these roles should not be a determining factor in whether or not to have membership.

We accept that some people feel the need to have membership as a formal commitment to the Society, but that this was an individual matter and should not in itself be a factor as to whether or not we have membership. A view was expressed by one Friend who felt that membership gave them the power to change and challenge not available to attenders.

We also considered the current process of membership, and the question was raised as to whether the interview was judgemental. Friends experience was that they did not perceive it a judgemental, but it was accepted that this could be the perception of some people. Rather, the interview was considered as a space for people to reflection their personal experience of Quakerism and its relevance to belonging to a Quaker meeting.

Felixstowe LM

There are differing views, particularly over Path Two- Meeting for Clearness, but we are broadly in agreement with wanting to keep the category of Membership, and we think the Becoming a Member leaflet is helpful. The LM clerk will send a copy of this minute to the AM clerk". (The leaflet referred to is our AM leaflet)

Ipswich LM

Membership: (Request from Meeting for Sufferings)

All AMs have been asked to consider the following 4 questions.

Q.1 Why do we have membership?

Answers from a group of Friends:

To show commitment

It creates a cohesive group.

You can feel you can say "I am a Quaker" and not just "I go to a Quaker Meeting"

A feeling of belonging.

You have taken the decision to join (you have taken action)

(From a Friend (F)) Membership is about commitment rather than a looser 'association with' (see the 3rd paragraph) which experientially comes from a different angle. Membership is then a statement to and with a body of Friends of a personal commitment to the Quaker spiritual way and of responsibility, initially to a Meeting and its Area Meeting

(From an Attender(A)) I think it does emphasise a definite commitment and automatic right of attendance at BMW's. Also it includes being present at a members only item though I can only recollect one of these. I also think it helps to support elders if all are members, which is the case in our meeting.

(Friend) I feel that we should continue with Membership. It is a two way shared thing, on the one part by the individual saying ' I want to belong, and share in the responsibility that comes with it' and the other is that the AM says ' We are happy for you to belong, and again, share in the responsibility of the running of our Area Meeting. Although we have committed attenders, these friends can drift in and out, there is not always the commitment that comes from belonging that membership brings.

(A)Membership may engender a sense of commitment. It can be a source of income (although attenders do contribute)

(F) Everyone is welcome to take part in Quaker worship. To become a member involves making a commitment to Quakers' faith and practice.

Q.2 Who is it for?

Group:

It is for everybody

It means a decision has to be made including those who decide not to take it up

It is for the Society for admin purposes (client base)symbiotic , for LMs, AMs and individual Friends

Symbiotic relationship between LMs, AMs, Friends and individuals

Being part of the community of Quakers

It's like a shared meal, we are doing it together

(F) Membership is for the individual in their spiritual life as part of the Quaker way - and, symbiotically, membership is for the Meeting and Area Meeting which are the result of, and therefore exist for, the spiritual life and commitment of its Meetings and members.

(A)For anyone who feels ready but only after a commitment of at least six months of regular attendance. Too many times in our meeting those made members suddenly stop coming. That tends to refute part of my answer in question one as attenders are present in many of the meeting's committees.

(A) Friends who have attended fairly regularly for a few years and agree with perhaps at least 4 out of 5 of the testimonies. Maybe they have read “Advices and Queries” and dipped into Quaker Faith and Practice”

(F) Quakers have a very definite behavioural creed. As we are all equal, with no separate clergy or leaders, Quakers have each to make an educated and considered decision to follow this creed. It is not a decision to be taken quickly or lightly as it should inform how we act in all areas of our lives. I believe this is what it means to become a member and this is why we should have membership.

Q.3 Is it still necessary?

Group:

Yes

It is not automatic like being baptised in a church when you are then a member for life

(F) Meetings and Area Meetings do not exist without committed members - so to ask if members are necessary one might as well ask ‘are Meetings necessary’? It’s a circular, symbiotic thing: it’s being part of the Quaker movement, and the movement is embodied in the Religious Society of Friends, both of which, in turn, exist because of spiritually committed Friends belonging to the Quaker movement, therefore to the Religious Society of Friends, therefore as a member.

So the titles ‘Full Member’ and ‘Associate Member’ (instead of ‘Attender’) could be adopted, where both categories are therefore regarded as members. I have experience of this in other associations and it’s not a problem (of status) as the choice is largely down to the member and their level of commitment. (Addressing all Friends as ‘members’ would also resolve the current difficulty of addressing Friends as ‘members’ - oh , and ‘attenders!’).

(F) Membership, I feel is an important step on the road to belonging and shows a commitment to Friends and the Quaker way.

(A) Most religious groups (and Quakers is the Religious Society of Friends) have some way to make a person moving from an attender to a member. So it seems a bit odd to me that Quakers are even discussing whether they need membership. But, in these days of people being able to simply declare their gender, does it matter if people simply declare they’re a Quaker? Neither seems right to me, but I seem to be in a minority on the first!

(A) I’m not sure I liken it to “living together” (attenders) and marriage (members) – both can be very committed. Some members have suddenly stopped attending shortly after confirmation of their membership for whatever reason.

(F) Membership is a way of affirming one's beliefs and an agreement to uphold and, therefore, to maintain Quakerism.

This is why I think we have membership and why it is still necessary.

Q.4 If yes, what form should it take?

Group:

Advantage of membership means you can exclude people

One example of a Friend after having their visit, did not want the report read out to Friends at the Area Meeting so a decision on whether to accept her into membership took place without knowledge. Suffice it to say they did not remain coming to the Meeting for very long after they came into membership.

It should be more than one visit. Some churches require applicants to take a course before they are allowed to "convert" e.g. Jews and Catholics.

Should visitors have a crib sheet of questions to ask?

Any of the 3 methods we feel are relevant so the Friend could choose which one they wanted e.g. visit, Clearing or writing a statement.

Do attenders know what it means to be in full membership? Is there a difference?

Are they prepared with any knowledge of Quakerism?

Does it need to be spelt out to them?

What is the difference between attenders and members? Is there any advantage to being a member?

(F) However, the process for Full Membership should be concerned to address the applicant's spiritual alignment with Quakerism and that Quakerism is spirit-led (not least in the process of discernment in decision making) and what this means - as well as in the practical aspects, such as structures and role holding. (Without this information some newer Friends can fill in those spaces with their own assumptions which sometimes leads to misapprehension and difficulties within Meetings).

The membership applicant can be offered various options for making an application - for example by the 'traditional' visit - or using a Meeting House or church room or other venue - or in comfortable coffee venues, or in meetings for clearness with experienced Friends, whatever an applicant would think would be most fulfilling and relaxing.

(A) I have no objection to the current procedure of a meeting between the applicant, one person from their meeting and another from a separate meeting. They then report back to Area Meeting. However, if the applicant is known to believe in God it

would help for one of the two others to also be a Christian. However, bearing in mind that at least two from our meeting have over the years been made members without appearing to believe one or more of our core beliefs, I think the meeting conversation should include :

peace testimony
environmental concern
simplicity
the importance of silence
knowing the way a QMW is held
recognising 'the light that is in all of us'
and at least having read Advices and Queries.

I would like to see the presentation of a copy of Quaker Faith and Practice to all new members, as used to happen- obviously postponed if a new edition is imminent.

(F) The ways we come into membership can be through the 3 various ways that are in the attachment document.

(A) Maybe a visit by members that ask the attender about the person's beliefs, the testimonies and Advices and Queries.

(F) I do not have a good answer as to what form it should take. I recognise the argument that the current process of becoming a member can feel challenging and perhaps intimidating. There should be opportunities for people to ask questions and discuss any concerns. These opportunities should be easily accessible and welcoming.

People might ask to become a member, or current members might raise the question. Would it be reasonable to use the idea of the "sense" of a person's readiness, as the clerk does in Meetings for Business?

(F) indicates a Member

(A) indicates an Attender

Group indicates several Friends discussing

Kendal & Sedbergh AM

Minute 23.07.5

We have heard from Preston Patrick LM and agree to forward its response to Meeting for Sufferings.

We encourage Local Meetings to continue to consider the matter, and their responses will be forwarded to MfS

Preston Patrick LM

We looked at the way membership began in the early days, to identify "Those

persons who had been convinced of the Truth, who duly attended meetings and who professed (i.e. accepted Friends' beliefs) were considered to be members.

This was later refined in order to identify those who, being outside the Church's provision for financial help, needed help from fellow – Quakers.

Today, Friends asked to give service to their meetings are, in Gerald Priestland's words "Seasoned and with integrity" but not always necessarily in membership." Membership is the outward expression of an inward commitment"

We decided that there is a "natural membership" as well as a formal one, but that the process of applying is an important stage for many people. Others may be put off by what they see as the requirement to undertake roles, and others may join purely as activists in some area – though this should be enquired into during the membership process.

There are legal requirements for a Charitable body, as the Religious Society of Friends is, to have a membership, which also enables us to speak out to the world as a body, rather than as a loose grouping of like-minded people.

This quote from BYM at Bath in 2014 spoke to us:

" We recognise that the path to membership will not be right for everyone. Meetings delight in the gifts and leadings of both members and attenders. What is important is the quality of relationships, the sense of community, encouraging one another and offering love to all who come amongst us."

Kingston & Wandsworth AM

23/48 Minute on membership

We receive the following minute from the ad hoc Meeting held on 31 May 2023 to consider membership. The meeting sought to answer the questions posed by Meeting for Sufferings. We agree to send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings.

The minute reads:

We have considered the following 4 questions about membership sent to area Meetings by Meeting for Sufferings:

- What is membership for?
- Why do we have it?
- Is it necessary?
- What forms might it take?

We have shared experiences as attenders, members and visitors and feel that despite some tensions and imperfections membership remains an important part of our Quaker commitment. Some have expressed the value of belonging as a member

beyond their local meeting and others have talked of a welcome deeper commitment.

Accepting someone into membership recognises a reality that has already happened. People become ready for membership at different points. Neither the concept nor the process is perfect but that is more a reason to work at improving it than to scrap it.

We feel there is room for change to make our processes more inclusive, less nerve-wracking and simpler. We could communicate more clearly. We could be less coy about talking to attenders about membership. We could write letters of invitation.

We could make more use of alternatives to visitation. We could celebrate membership as a joyous event, featuring cake! We could find ways to express the value of long-term attendership. We could add the option to simplify the whole process to a single application form that ensured mutual understanding of the nature of the commitment to the Quaker way. We could refresh our leaflets.

We could be more understanding of the fear that membership may bring more responsibilities. How can we carry out the necessary work of our community without leaving some members overburdened? This needs more thought.

We need to ask ourselves why young people are not joining us. Have they found a different, a lighter way? We would like Meeting for Sufferings to explore at last a different form of membership, including on-line, not tied to area meetings.

We note that, as discussed at the ad hoc meeting, when Friends become members of their Area Meeting they also, at the same time, become members of BYM.

We agree to circulate what Quaker Faith & Practice says about which roles have to be held by Members and which might be held by Attenders. We recognise the benefits of opening as many roles as possible to attenders where Friends are so led.

Lancashire Central & North AM

Leeds AM

At the Meeting for Sufferings in December 2022 the item 'Quaker Membership: the way forward?' was raised.

Representative to Sufferings were asked to take these questions back to their Area Meetings:

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

A Blended Meeting (in person and online) was held at Carlton Hill Local Meeting at 7pm on Thursday, 7 September 2023 to discuss these four questions. All Members and Attenders in the Area Meeting were invited. Fifteen Friends attended.

We are coming to a new understanding of Membership. It can be perceived as divisive. Many of us who are in Membership cherish it, but are nevertheless open to change. We feel that we are at a stage where change is necessary. Many thoughts have been expressed, but we are only beginning to work through them. This will be an on-going conversation.

Whatever we do, the process will be complicated, but we believe that change is entirely possible. We are bad at sharing our spiritual lives. If we did not rely on Membership, we might do this better and put more emphasis on the discernment of Nominations, which would be a good thing. We need to remember that we should all be living and learning together.

Leicester AM

Lincolnshire AM

London West AM

Luton & Leighton AM

Manchester & Warrington AM

2023.33. Call for Discernment from Area Meetings on Membership

Minutes from each of our local meetings on this subject have been read aloud. The clerk has also picked out some extracts from a longer report prepared by Elders at Central Manchester who held a detailed consideration of the issues.

We have had the opportunity for a break-out discussion in small groups to share experiences, hopes and fears about membership of the Society of Friends and to express some of those feelings in Meeting for Worship. We conclude that:

- Broadly we value the opportunity to express commitment that membership brings and believe that it remains an important feature of the life of Quakers in Britain;
- Most of us recognise membership as an important part of Quaker discipline;
- The tradition of visiting people to discuss their application provides an opportunity to ensure a good common understanding of the principles of Quaker worship, testimonies, business decision making and ways to contribute to the life of the meeting;
- Membership visits provide an important opportunity to share spiritual journeys;
- It is important to us that those who chose not to apply for membership are not excluded from taking as full a part in our meeting life as possible;

- We wish to reduce the number of roles that must be filled by members to a minimum;
- We hope that central guidance can be provided to help determine which roles, if any, must be filled by members;
- A move to a national model of membership away from an Area Meeting model could help reduce risk of Friends, particularly younger Friends, becoming detached from Quakers. However we recognised that we hadn't been able to include much consideration from younger Friends, or indeed attenders more widely, during the consultation and are also aware that there does exist a route to membership through Young Friends General Meeting;
- We realise that many of our formal responsibilities (for example under charity law) remain at Area Meeting level and if there were a move to national membership, some way of retaining connection locally will be essential. Any reform will need careful and detailed national consideration including of legal implications;
- We feel there may be opportunities to simplify procedures, both for joining and leaving membership;
- We feel there are things we can and should do locally and encourage Local Meetings to consider how they may support those exploring their spiritual journeys and considering how membership might play a part in that.

We ask the clerk to forward this minute to Meeting for Sufferings along with the detailed consideration from Elders in Central Manchester.

Elders report on the question of Membership

Elders in Central Manchester meeting have sought to engage with Friends in response to the questions posed by Meeting for sufferings regarding Membership.

In order to encourage Friends to share their thoughts Elders distributed a questionnaire and seven responses were received. Two meetings were also arranged, one held at the meeting house and one on zoom.

The following is a summary of the responses.

Why do we have membership and what is it for?

Several Friends described very positive feelings about their own membership and spoke of having found the visiting process, as part of the application, a valuable experience.

One Friend spoke of being a birthright Quaker, meaning that their experience of being a member was through the experience of commitment, rather than a process of being accepted into Membership.

Some Friends described a "powerful feeling of belonging", and found being a member of the Quakers was important for their identity, as well as feeling a valued part of a community.

Membership as a symbol of commitment was mentioned often, and for various Friends this included financial commitment, time, energy and accepting responsibilities, as well as a commitment to learning more about Quakers, to live the Quaker faith and to maintaining the Quaker movement spiritually.

The importance of having an understanding of the basic principles underlying Quaker worship and its business structure for becoming a member was mentioned, as well as a sense of being on a shared spiritual journey and commitment to a process of communal discernment.

Friends said that they were happy to see Attenders on an equal footing - recognising that a good number of Attenders are more active and more part of our community than many Members.

Friends who felt less positive about membership discussed struggling with labels, questioning what the difference was between members and attenders and feeling that a “two tier” system wasn’t congruent with our testimony of equality.

One attender found themselves wondering if they could call themselves a Quaker if they were not a member, whereas another strongly felt themselves to be a Quaker, despite not feeling led to apply for membership, even after having been asked.

Issues that left people hesitant about applying for membership included the fear of being overwhelmed by the jobs that need doing (as some jobs may only be done by members) and feeling that they would feel the responsibility of taking on roles more strongly if they became a member.

Other people wondered if the prospect of being visited as part of the application process might be intimidating, and the safer recruitment requirements were also mentioned as off putting.

Is it still necessary?

Some Friends felt there was no need for anything to change.

A Friend spoke of the need to support attenders to explore membership if they wish, but not require it.

The shared sense of commitment as a foundation of the Society was seen to be helpful in establishing expectations of support and responsibility.

Apart from the views held above, other issues mentioned when considering how necessary Membership might be included the following.

A Friend described a wider “crisis” of the society having fewer members, with looser ties to each other and to the meeting, and less willingness to do jobs.

The necessity for us to have some sense of numbers within the Society was mentioned, which would be difficult if we had no way of defining who was a Quaker.

Having members was considered important for the meeting and the wider community as a way of having a core of committed people, to help the organisation develop and maintain a sense of direction, through consultation, time, money, energy and ideas.

Friends were aware of the difficulty of Young Friends and other people who may not be settled in one area for long and consequently don't feel connected to a particular Local or Area meeting. It was considered important to hear from Younger Friends, and there have not been much feedback from them included in this report.

The recent possibility of joining meeting for worship 'virtually' from different locations around the world was highlighted and was felt to put further pressure on the community-based model of Quaker meetings.

Friends discussed the fact that some members are not active and haven't been seen or heard from for a very long time. We discussed the possibility that they may feel they align themselves with Quaker values but don't want to be part of the local community. We were reminded that there is a way of formally removing Members from the lists if this is felt to be important.

It was recognised that there are legal responsibilities connected to charity law which are held at Area meeting level, rather than by a national authority, that require some roles to be held by members. However, there is "boundaried flexibility" whereby attenders can be appointed to roles traditionally done by members, if a minute is prepared, explaining why the decision was taken. There does seem to be some differing understandings currently about which jobs can only be done by members.

A couple of Friends focussed on why some boundaries may be necessary, mentioning that Quakers are theologically diverse and keen to be inclusive and equitable and in trying to be all things to all people, there is a risk of not being able to maintain organisational integrity. Quaker processes were described as subtle and fragile and could be easily subverted or corrupted in a way that is not obviously apparent because they are dependent upon 'the spirit' rather than bureaucratic rules. In the absence of a centralised authority occupied by specific role holders (a church senate or priesthood), there is no distinction between members. This can and does lead to difficulties with conflict in meetings where differences cannot be resolved by conventional calls to creed or obedience to authority.

Maintaining the integrity of Quaker groupings (by the function of membership) provides protection from the potential of malign actions from external groups/organisations, even if such a possibility is not currently being anticipated.

If yes, what form(s) could it take?

Some Friends wondered whether there would be more to gain if the conditions of membership were to be loosened further, feeling it could be a bit cumbersome at present. One suggestion was that a process of discussion at LM level might take place with people known to the attender, rather than having to wait for what can

sometimes be long periods while AM appoint visitors and then feedback. Perhaps initial membership could be of LM, until endorsed by AM.

A Friend discussed how to make the idea of membership more attractive, possibly providing people who may be considering membership with a “buddy” to work with them. Also there should be opportunities to find out why some attenders have no wish to become members and maybe set up a dialogue between them and Elders.

A possibility of being able to become a member of a grouping other than AM, ie national groupings such as YFGM, or BYM was mentioned. (If a Friend became a member of YFGM then provision would have to be made to transition elsewhere in due course.) We heard that currently it is possible for geographically isolated Quakers to have membership through EMES (FWCC) .

A Friend felt it might be important for people to be able to have a membership with whichever Quaker group they felt an affiliation with, but that this should not be at the expense of more involved participation with one’s local Quaker community.

Mention was made of Friends in America who are asked to review their membership each year, with a commitment of finance and time. Some Friends felt that they wouldn’t want to have to do this and spoke of wanting to feel they could still belong to the Quaker community even when old and not able to actively participate.

Mid Essex AM

Mid Wales AM

Minute 28/23: Membership and Belonging:

In our afternoon session we have prepared our response to the Minute from MfS 22/12/10 requesting Area Meetings consider Quaker membership and, in particular, the following questions: 1. Why do we have Membership? 2. What is it for? 3. Is it still necessary? 4. If yes, what form(s) could it take? The response from this session will be sent to MfS together with this Minute.

Appendage to Minute 28/23: Responses, addressed question by question. Many of the responses overlap:

Why do we have membership?

Originally Membership, which from 1737 could be birthright (although this birthright abolished in 1959), was a mechanism to control poverty assistance. This may be seen as a crucial factor in the continuation of Quakerism when other, similar radical movements, fell by the wayside. Quakers are the only radical group from 17th century still in existence.

- Membership necessary to functioning as a spiritual/religious organisation.
- It has a function in apportioning roles and holding responsibility.
- It is about belonging and being accepted - a ‘right of passage’.

- Demonstrates a reciprocal commitment between the person and the organisation.
- Gives an opportunity to devote energy to something believed in.
- An encouragement to other's who might want to take part.
- Membership gives structure to the organisation.

What is it for?

- Membership gives a sense of belonging, spiritual continuity and history.
- It is a way of holding traditions that are tried and tested.
- It is a way/a guide to sharing our lives as a supportive community, and apportioning jobs and roles.
- Having membership builds trust so that we can:
 - Share in a search, giving opportunity for exploration.
 - Share beliefs' understanding.
 - Open ourselves to new light / experiences / education.
 - Challenge hierarchies
- It is for our comfort and discomfort.

Is it still necessary?

- It may be seen as a source of finance/financial support.
- It provides a base for action.
- Its value to individuals can be in the solidity that it provides for those who want to dip in and out.
- As members the commitment to seeking truth holds us together.
- Membership becomes a crucible, holding a valuable jewel in realm of spirituality.

BUT

- It loses value in the hierarchical implications of 'membership', causing splintering into different groups, (i.e. members, non-members / attenders).
- There is a need to ensure that the willingness to take responsibility, or of being a 'member', is not seen as a badge of honour.

If yes, what form(s) could it take?

- The division between attenders and member may be seen as unnecessary where 'attenders' are as active in meetings and take on responsibilities.
- Is there a problem with the word 'attender'?
- Could there be 'formal' and 'informal' membership – i.e. everyone a 'member'?
- Could there be 'local' membership – identified as commitment to the community of the Local Meeting, coming together to worship, in silence, rather than necessarily a commitment to the wider structure of Quakers?

(Reference – *Quaker faith & practice* 10.03 – 1994 – Change of structures, BYM)

Mid-Somerset AM

Mid-Thames AM

23/07/08 Membership of the Religious Society of Friends

Further to our Minute 23/04/11 we offer Meeting for Sufferings this response to their questions about Membership. It is the result of the considerations of our Local Meetings followed by the discernment of Mid Thames Area Meeting.

Why do we Have Membership?

Membership has several quite different roles. One is purely administrative which enables us to communicate with and support each other and fulfil the requirements of external bodies, such as the Charities Commission. This requirement could be met in other ways and is not, on its own, a good answer to ‘why do we have Membership?’.

Those who become Members value it for

- the sense of belonging and recognition
- a way to express their spiritual and practical commitment to The Religious Society of Friends.

Many Friends are regular Attenders who have not sought or do not wish to seek Membership. They appreciate that they are not under pressure to become Members (and resent any well-meaning attempts to suggest that they should). For some, this is a matter of principle. Others, who have been brought up as Quakers and called themselves “Quakers” all their lives, wonder why they should have to apply for something that they live. Perhaps this provides a clue as to the definition of Membership, you become a Member when you move from saying “I go to Quaker meeting” to “I am a Quaker”

Perhaps the question should be “How do we recognise this commitment when it happens?”

What is it for?

Key points made from personal experience are:

- Providing a sense of acceptance and belonging (becoming a Member can make Friends feel truly part of their Meeting and the wider world of Quakers, but this can also happen through getting more involved in Quaker life).
- An inward and outward sign of strong personal commitment, to the Society, to its spiritual roots and the way of life that springs from those roots. Like marriage as opposed to living together.

- It's the way we identify with and are part of The Religious Society of Friends as a whole.
- The visit is an opportunity to clarify where the Friend is on their own journey and to know other Friends more deeply. It is greatly valued by many Friends.

On the other hand:

- The Society does not need to 'approve' personal conviction
- Some Friends feel that Membership goes against the testimony of equality, creating two classes of Friends within Meetings, though many long-term Attenders do not feel excluded or second-class, but appreciate being able to choose to be Friends Without Membership. We value diversity.

Most of our Local Meetings agree that in practice there is no distinction made between Members and Attenders and they all play an equal part in the life of their Meeting. We ask that barriers to regular attenders fulfilling roles such as trustees, or on central committees, be removed.

Is it Still Necessary?

For some Friends our current Membership processes do not appear to work. Others think that usually our current Membership processes work well and do not need changing.

There is some concern that the questions being asked seem to be leading towards getting rid of Membership as a foregone conclusion.

It seems that Meeting for Sufferings is finding it hard to fill committee roles from within our Membership. This issue can be solved by membership no longer being a requirement for central committees, or for any roles in the Society.

If the 'practical' and 'external' requirements for Membership cease to exist, Membership is no longer 'necessary' for external reasons, but is still beneficial to many Friends at a personal and spiritual level. There is a strong feeling that the decision to become a Member or not, is a personal matter.

For some Friends, Membership has never been spiritually 'necessary'. For others it is very important. Many, who have been brought up as Quakers and called themselves "Quakers" all their lives wonder why they should have to apply for something that they live.

What would be lost if we didn't have it?

- An opportunity to declare our commitment publicly and within Meeting
- Something that recognises an important stage in our spiritual journeys
- A ritual of belonging – and we have few rituals

- Milestones in our journeys could be and are marked in other ways which are recognized by the Meeting as a whole.

If Yes, what form should it take?

We feel that it is helpful to many Friends to have their commitment to Quakers recognised, though this does not have to be called membership.

We suggest that MfS consider the administrative, spiritual and belonging roles of Membership separately.

The administrative function could be fulfilled by Area Meetings maintaining a Register of Friends, initially based on Handbook data with appropriate consents. This would be published as the Handbook but would not distinguish between Members and Attenders as these terms would no longer apply. Local Meetings would maintain an email list for communication. Being on this list would indicate no commitment, but simply a wish to be kept informed.

Local Meetings should focus on creating the sense of community, belonging and welcome for all Friends and visitors.

Local Meetings should encourage Friends to explore the wider Quaker World, by regularly reminding Friends that anyone can attend AM, RM, BYM, a Woodbrooke course or be the Meeting's link with Quaker Life or QPSW or other Quaker bodies etc. QF&P could be presented to any Friend showing commitment to the Local Meeting.

Friends would join Quakers by notifying their Area Meeting that they wish to be a Quaker. No visit would be needed before being registered in the Handbook, but could be offered as a service that can be taken up at any time. Friends registering would be acknowledged and welcomed as they agree with their Local (or Area?) Meeting, but ideally this would include Friends from another LM. Once registered, Friends would be offered a Pastoral Friend and be listed in the Handbook if they wished. Nominations Committees would discern suitable people as they do now, but without membership being involved.

There could be an opportunity for Friends to have a more formal recognition of their commitment to Quakers, which involves a visit and a welcome, thus giving them the chance to meet and be acknowledged by Friends outside their Local Meeting. Friends could be encouraged to explore this possibility when they realise that they identify as a Quaker.

This approach might be less daunting and confusing for newcomers. We want to welcome people into our Meetings and be more open and inclusive.

A Question for MfS

How would BYM retain its identity without Membership?

Norfolk & Waveney AM

9. Membership Discussion

Meeting for Sufferings has asked Area Meetings and Local Meetings to consider the following four questions –

1. Why do we have membership?
2. What is it for?
3. Is it still necessary?
4. If yes, what form(s) could it take?

The Meeting considered these questions both in small groups and in worship sharing. A summary will be prepared for forwarding to Meeting for Sufferings, and for circulation to Norfolk and Waveney Area Meeting.

Summary of exercise regarding Membership.

Friends did not really keep to the questions posed, but a summary of responses is given below. It is fair to say that they were, on the whole, very positive.

Positives

Historical - tradition since 1712. Good to confidently acknowledge the variety of traditions represented in our Meetings.

Spiritual Commitment – allows Friends who so wish to make a commitment to Quakers.

Gives mutual support and feeling of belonging – could possibly act as legal reason for refusing certain requirements, such as conscription or oaths. Allows a greater degree of organisation and thus potentially a stronger voice in the community.

Reservations

Is membership compatible with a truly open society?

Suggestions for the future

Need to remember that the process of coming into membership should not be hurried – it is different for each individual. Needs to be accessible and inviting – Are you ready? Rather than Are you acceptable?

Important to ensure that applicants have sufficient knowledge to understand what they are applying for.

Is there a route for individuals not attending an Area Meeting? Membership of an Area Meeting means the individual is also a member of BYM, but can one become a member of BYM without going through an Area Meeting?

Norwich LM

We have considered the summary of views on membership expressed at Area Meeting in July and add the following comments:

1. We have reservations about Friends coming into membership without at least some affiliation to an Area Meeting
2. We would find it instructive to consider how other national Yearly Meetings approach membership
3. We would encourage transparency in the process of applying for (and leaving) membership
4. We have found it helpful that our Local Meeting Nominations Committee has prepared terms of reference for Local Meeting roles so as provide a better understanding of what is involved.

We ask the clerks to send a copy of this minute to Area Meeting clerks as soon as possible so that they may be added to views to be submitted to Meeting for Sufferings by the end of September for its meeting in October.

North East Thames AM

23. 53 Spiritual and Practical Basis of Membership

This morning we heard reflections from a number of F(f)riends about what membership means to them and why we have membership of the Religious Society of Friends.

We have heard many ways that we value membership and the aspects of membership that are important to us.

Over the course of the day we have considered the following questions:

- What groups are you a member of?
- How do you show you are a member?
- How does the group acknowledge that you belong?
- What do you get from being part of the group?
- Why do we have membership?
- Do we still want it?
- What difference does being a member or not being a member of the Society of Friends make to you?

We have heard there is a potential tension between:

- our testimony to equality and the concept of membership
- feelings of inclusion and exclusion.

We feel that membership continues to be needed and have spent this afternoon considering alternative forms of membership and explored alternative membership

procedures, in the light of the fundamental elements of being a Quaker outlined in *Quaker faith & practice* 11.01.

We have been reminded of current membership application processes in different AMs and Young Friends General Meeting.

We feel that an important part of being a member is a willingness to contribute to the spiritual life of the Society of Friends and its corporate discernment processes.

There are many people who consider themselves to be Quakers but do not wish to become a member and we have heard some of the barriers that may contribute to not applying for membership. We have felt the lack of voice of long-term attenders today.

We thank our Friend Helen Carmichael for leading us through the programme and all those who have helped with the arrangements for today's meeting.

We forward this minute to Meeting for Sufferings and hope this will aid their discernment when considering membership.

We also forward this minute to North West London AM.

North East Thames Area Meeting with North West London Friends 10 June 2023

Why do we have membership of the Religious Society of Friends?

Practical/legal

- To keep it going
- To provide an entity
- Charity law requires it for decision-making and a quorum for winding up
- Membership gives a fairly reliable source of income
- Official sanction of what is and what is not Quaker
- A Quaker identity
- Having a Quaker voice to policy makers
- A non-hierarchical structure needs it
- Commitment to achieve purposes/values/testimonies/beliefs
- Outward expression of our beliefs
- Testing with each other – participating in discipline
- Being open to challenge
- Giving up independence/accepting divine guidance

Personal reflective

- For protection/peace of mind
- For social cohesion
- A beautiful place to be buried
- Being open to challenge

- Simple acknowledgement of our spiritual home (celebrating and acknowledging it)

Do we still want it? Is it still necessary?

Recognising tensions

- We have a tension around the status/exclusivity of Membership
- We have a tension around AM saying 'no' /bar of respectability
- We don't want to scare off talented people that we want to encourage
- Recognise the ongoing tension between secular and spiritual authority
- Need to understand why people come long term without asking for membership
- Need to recognise/respect those who don't want to apply

Organisational needs

- Necessary to have confidence in certain roles and for effective representation
- Necessary to organise and get things done
- Importance of ongoing learning
- Important to retain non-hierarchy and seeking unity through discernment
- Good to review to recognise to continuing revelation/changing nature of Membership
- Membership is necessary to prevent the subversion of the identity of Quakers

Personal responses

- I need to be in Membership
- Gives the option of saying 'no/not yet'
- The visit provides an occasion for personal testimony and sharing it
- Important to be true to ourselves/maintain our integrity whilst giving up the ruthlessness of life and responding to the Quaker discipline
- It's like a good marriage
- Making our own decision to belong/apply
- It is a welcome even if you don't think you belong
- Membership accepts as we are/warts and all, including less acceptable parts
- It is an affirmation of being a Quaker

What alternative forms of Membership or suggestions for amending Membership do we have?

Practical

- Promote and celebrate the fundamental elements of Quakerism that members are committed to (Qf&p 11.01)
- Making YFGM a non-geographic AM

- Introduce a form of membership and connection for non-geographic based Friends
- Hold a list of people 'attached' to Quakers for news/communications who have completed GDPR forms
- Hold a list of 'dormant' Friends – for what reason?
- Change the name of Attenders to Sympathisers
- Change membership Visit to Membership Conversation (not held in applicant's home to avoid feeling of class/ethnic background/wealth judgements)
- Introduce clearer cut off point for pastoral care responsibilities eg YFGM's rule that 3 years with no contact ends Membership.
- Be clearer about the need to 'demonstrate willingness to contribute to the life of the Meeting' in order to continue in membership. Give clarity that we are not just in Membership for nostalgic/personal vales/family historical reasons.
- Membership demands willingness and commitment.
- Discern well with an Attender why they aren't applying for membership
- Implement a careful ongoing teaching and sharing ministry

Exploratory

- What is exclusive about Membership?
- What do long-term attenders think?
 - Who comes to Business Meetings? o Are Attenders welcomed readily?
 - Are attenders put off
 - How are Attenders supported to attend?
 - A Sponsoring Friend could ask for permission for an Attender to attends Business Meeting

In our efforts to be inclusive we are not clear about what is expected. Clearer expectations would help all.

How to ensure Quaker central structures practice and follow Quaker discernment?

Towards the end of our session, we were working on possible answers to the question of whether Attenders should be appointed to roles in central Quaker work.

We can

1. Trust Nomination Committees and Appointing Bodies to do their work and support /uphold/hold to account all those who take on central/regional roles. Without effective upholding, willingness to learn and be challenged, role holders (Attenders and Members) can lose their way/burn out. An ongoing teaching and sharing ministry is essential to support and involve all role holders.

And/or

2. Require only those who are Members to participate in the major work of the Society. Friends in membership have demonstrated a commitment to participate in Quaker discernment processes, putting the shared leadings of the spirit ahead of their personal views and commitments. Attenders can take a full and active part in the life of LM/AM, but not in major decision-making processes that they have not yet committed to.

North London AM

North Scotland AM

30/23 Consideration of membership

In response to a Meeting for Sufferings request to consider the nature of membership our Meeting today has collected the following comments:

- Why do we have membership?

It provides an opportunity for Friends to commit. We need Friends who are long-standing, committed, maintaining Quaker tradition, practice, and our Quaker voice in society.

Membership affirms a society of like-minded people. There are no other leaders and ministers than us.

- What is it for?

It marks a right of passage, being loved into Quakerism, it takes time, it's an invisible process.

Membership recognises the knowledge required before joining

- Is it still necessary?

While it is important to minimise the difference between attenders and members, welcome attenders into roles and to recognise their gifts to our Meetings, we need to identify key roles that perhaps only members can fill (for legal reasons as well as evidence of commitment and experience): AM clerks, trustees, 'elders'.

- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

A greater emphasis on being members of BYM. AM's only administers our membership to the Society of Friends.

Flexibility on routes into membership. That Local Meetings might initiate the membership process by finding out what route to membership an Attender might prefer. Attenders might then be simply given an invitation to join the Society, or to receive visiting Friends. Area Meetings appointing visiting Friends might best check with the Attender that the names of visiting Friends are acceptable to them, and to agree a location for the visit.

The membership process needs to be unthreatening and welcoming, minimising the sense of meeting high ideals, accepting new Friends on the journey, at any point in that journey.

Young Friends might have the choice of not be attached to an Area Meeting, but attached to Junior Yearly Meeting, for example.

It is helpful to let attenders know that they can choose how and with what AM their membership is attached to/administered by.

Reassure Attenders that it is an easy process to resign membership.

There might be an option for paused membership, so that those Friends (Members) who are no longer active or contributing to AM are not adding to the AM quota.

We recognise there is a need to modernise membership and our route to membership.

North Somerset AM

23.35 Membership of the Society of Friends

Friends in our Meetings appreciated the opportunity to think about the meaning of membership. Our Local Development Worker Jac Blacker facilitated a well-attended online meeting and each of our three Local Meetings considered the matter in their meetings for church affairs. Their minutes reflect a clear sense that membership continues to be valued for a number of reasons:

- It supports a sense of commitment and belonging;
- Continues to be essential for certain key roles;
- Signals acceptance of the structure and discipline of the Society.

Minutes from our Meetings also indicated the need to look again at the process involved in becoming a member to make it more supportive. The importance of nurturing attenders and enabling them to fulfil a greater variety of roles was emphasised.

Ministry at this Area Meeting highlighted the following:

- We need to remember that some Friends feel comfortable to remain as attenders while being active in their Meeting;
- We are conscious that we have an increasing difficulty in filling roles. We hope that Meeting for Sufferings will encourage Area Meetings to enable attenders to take on a wider variety of roles. We may have too many roles to fill, but maintaining the life of the Meeting and finding Friends who are prepared to give wider service in the name of Friends is vitally important.
- The human connections, the way we react to each other in our Meetings is crucial, but there also needs to be more clarity about systems and structures as well as the tasks which need to be performed.

- A range of alternative processes for becoming a member should be considered and explored, including different patterns which have already been tried in some Area Meetings. This can include variations in the way visits are organised. Attenders being able to choose their visitors can be supportive, as long as at least one visitor is an experienced member.

Talking about what it means to be a Quaker and using study programmes such as Quaker Quest and Becoming Friends are helpful.

North Wales AM

23/55 Further to minute 23/14, local meetings had been encouraged to give consideration to the question of membership as such, the need for it, the shape of it, possible routes to it. The clerks collated the responses (attached) they received from some of our meetings, which have been circulated.

This is something individuals as well as area meetings have been asked to discuss and we have had a period of reflection on this matter, in order to respond to Meeting for Sufferings as an area meeting by the deadline for their consultation.

We find that, across our local meetings, we value the current system of membership – while respecting the decision of attenders not to come into membership and encouraging their full participation in our spiritual life and work. We would like to see full appreciation in future of attenders' offer to serve, at any level.

We do feel that, as an area meeting, we could in future be more flexible about the possible routes into membership already available.

At area meeting level, we see a need for embracing online Friends, without them having to 'belong' to a local meeting.

We would also like to see a possibility for those meeting primarily online or not affiliated to a specific area meeting to hold membership at the Yearly Meeting level and we hope that this is a question that will be resolved soon.

Feedback on 'membership' discussions from those meetings that responded:

Bangor LM

- Friends recognise core Quaker insights centred on experience of the Spirit and a form of worship which nourishes it. Being led by the spirit is vital in Membership.
- On a personal level the commitment of membership was seen as important and the discipline of being a member was valued.
- The corporate aspect of Quaker Membership is very important – being part of a community with each member, according to their own special gifts, contributing to and being supported by the community.
- Being a Quaker means living out Quaker values and caring for each other.

- It was noted that attenders can be just as committed in their Quaker journey as Members.
- It was felt that we should respect committed people who do not wish to apply for Membership.
- We have attenders in our Local Meeting who contribute fully to the life and work of the Meeting.
- Contributing financially matters but both members and attenders can and do contribute.
- The question was raised whether distinguishing between Members and Attenders helps the Society.
- There was much discussion about on-line groups which is an important and developing area in the Society. People have experienced the vitality and depth of the group. Can we make membership available to people in these Groups? Where do seeking Quakers in such groups go for advice and support? We recognise the need to address this issue now.
- The opportunity to become a member has been extended to Young Friends and this could be extended to other groups.

Colwyn Bay LM

Colwyn Bay Meeting held a Meeting for Discernment about membership on 19th February. We feel that membership is still necessary, both to express our commitment to Quaker values and for administrative purposes. We are delighted that a long time attender expressed her desire to join the Society.

Online Worship Group:

Engagement with Quakers takes many diverse forms: for example, an experienced attender who does not join anything; an attender whose work moves them around locations and so can only be in a meeting for a short period, someone 'trying out' Quakerism and so on. All of these must be respected, though this can have financial implications for meetings.

It is necessary to be a member to undertake certain roles. Does this need to change? Very likely because we are in crisis. Nominations groups are finding it increasingly difficult to find members or attenders for many key roles. At a recent session, Meeting for Sufferings considered that if an attender is discerned to be experienced, could they have a role traditionally taken by a member? This would ease the work of Nomination groups. Unfortunately, reaching discernment on this was held up inappropriately.

Young Friends are often moving about a lot, for work, for education and so on. How they can be members because of this has been discussed for more than 4 years. A Peripatetic Quaker form of membership has been suggested. Is this a way forward?

Perhaps we could be sympathetic to the phrase 'Quaker is as Quaker does' i.e. if you 'walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone' you are a

Quaker. [George Fox – Quaker Faith and Practice Chapter 19 number 32] However, coming to meeting is the start of a long, life-journey learning to walk in this cheerful, spiritual path. Is not membership a key stage along the way?

I'm a detail person and I ask questions. We are a religious society and a charity.

I recognise that a lot goes under the radar under the label 'religion'. For 25 years I have been seeking authenticity in the search for who I am. I have many questions about the word choices in some key Quaker texts.

For example, Advices and Queries – Introduction 1.01

As Friends, we commit ourselves to a way of worship which allows God to teach and transform us. We have found corporately that the Spirit, if rightly followed, will lead us into truth, unity and love: all our testimonies grow from this leading. [The underlined words prompt questions in me.]

The introduction holds the key to our testimonies and yet the words can give pause.

For concern? For discomfort? And so, I ask questions, lots of them. I'm like a stick of rock with Quaker written through it but, as yet I am not ready for membership.

I joined when I thought I was ready many years ago. I have been able to participate fully as a member. I've had many roles, attended different meetings and I feel at home. Now I do not see such a need to be a member to be in role. I sometimes think, do I need to be a member? I feel part of my Local Meeting although I attend online.

People should apply for membership when they feel it is the right things to do.

A register is needed for some practical, legal or charity matters. For example, how would we know how many members there are in Wales without a register? But this leads to the question - what is an attender? We need a definition of an attender to be able to register someone as an attender. I see there being 2 reasons for this. 1. Practical – is it a statutory legal requirement to need a register of both? 2. Personal – a declaration of commitment on behalf of the individual to attend and walk in the Quaker Way.

A Friend explained that health difficulties meant that they hadn't been able to come to Local Meeting often and hadn't been able to commit to membership finances because of low

income. Getting lost in the Englishness of it all was highlighted. They felt at home in the Welsh language meeting. Membership is important and they found the idea of a peripatetic Quaker form of membership interesting.

The idea of a national membership is an interesting one.

There is a problem with the register of members because some members haven't been seen for years and a meeting's contributions to Britain Yearly Meeting, Crynwyr Cymru/Quakers in Wales and Area Meeting are often calculated by the number of members. It should be a much simpler matter to 'clean up' the members list. Many Local Meetings are reluctant to do so due to the difficulties with the current procedure.

Should one have to attend for a specific time before you can be deemed an attender?

A few of us feel very much a part of the Online Meeting for Worship group and rarely or never go in person yet come regularly to the online worship group. Membership is of Area Meeting not a Local Meeting. The online group does have roles which should be carried on by a member. We need elders, a pastoral carer/Bugeiliaid, a convenor or facilitator, possibly more going forward. Such roles are in place on a temporary basis and not through a Nominations process. We wish to keep things simple and are working things out as we go along but membership may have an impact on this going forward.

I have been thinking about myself and whether I wish to come into membership. I have created a title which fits where I am at the moment. I am an Aspirant Member. The word 'attender' does not say it for me. I'd like to keep ideas around membership as simple as possible. I understand the need to keep things regulated to give fees/donations to the other meetings.

One Friend wonders if they came into membership too quickly. They discovered that they had, in fact, been a Quaker most of their life but the wish to commit was intense. They now wonder if the Society was not a charity would membership be necessary. They had never been a 'joining' person, apart from choirs.

One Friend had not been 'at unity' with aspects of Quakerism. They had found the Local Meeting 'too churchy'. They were dedicated to Light and Spiritual Grounding but ultimately walked away from membership-based Quakerism but was still a Quaker. They did not equate membership with attending meeting.

Another Friend explained she had found it a new way to be Christian. Quakerism coupled with another local Spirit-led community has given them a comfortable place to be in. They felt a connection with Spirit and Light. They are now a Spirit-led Quaker. The saddest moment was when a committed atheist was allowed into membership.

The journey into membership requires personal searching, a grappling with understanding discipline and discipleship, standing in and submitting to the Light. Is not the journey more important than the getting there? Should we all be, as our Friend has described, Aspirant Members?

Mold LM

We have membership to formalise the wish to live a Quakerly life, guided by our Testimonies and accepting the financial implications, realising the costs involved. It also provides an ecumenical spiritual home where all are welcome and respected as they make sense of their lives.

What it is for: it shows commitment. As we are a recognised charity, it gives our trustees the information that they need to be answerable to the Charity Commission.

We do think it is still necessary.

Coming into membership could be less formal. Perhaps local meetings inviting attenders at their meeting to consider membership once they felt they knew them well; then sending their recommendations to area meeting, which would do away with the formal visitation. Maybe this would help attenders to gradually become members?

Oswestry LM

We thought the current system worked well, giving attenders a choice whether or not to move into membership (we didn't like the idea of 'automatic membership' for longstanding attenders).

We thought it preserved a necessary structure and clarity about what being 'a Quaker' meant, including commitments (being part of the 'clergy'/financial support, if you can) – some of us feared that without this, as meetings and in general, we might be 'diluted' by self-proclaimed Quakers who don't really care to learn much about us ...which raised the whole question of what we (don't) say to newcomers.

We recognised that young people, those moving about a lot and those affiliated to online meetings only, require a new process and 'place' of belonging, possibly BYM membership.

Llangollen LM

The following bullet points are gathered from these discussions and perhaps cover a wider view than just 'Membership'

- Local Friends generally support the purpose of Membership as an affirmation of their commitment to being a Quaker
- The term 'Attender' does not preclude the commitment to being a Quaker
- The voluntary financial contribution of Members to Area Meeting and BYM is seen as a necessary and mostly worthwhile contribution to maintaining the Quaker workings
- The connection of Members (and Attenders) to Area Meeting is generally not strong
- The revitalised activities of East and West Cluster events may help to improve the connections with AM

- The connection of Members to BYM is generally stronger than the connection to AM
- In Llangollen Meeting the connections between ourselves are the cornerstone of our Meeting
- The age profile of our Local Meeting is not generally conducive to being involved in wider Quaker activities and we are concerned about the longer term viability of our Meeting
- It is possible that, in the fullness of time, links with Crynwr Cymru Quakers in Wales (CCQW) might be strengthened

Wrexham LM

We wrote the words and phrases that we associate with membership or commitment as a Quaker.

We placed the words that we felt were more central to the meaning of membership and commitment as a Friend closer to the middle. Below is the screen that we created with our words and phrases.

We shared that membership to the Religious Society of Friends ‘shows our commitment to being a Quaker,’ and that seeking membership is an outward affirmation of our faith and beliefs. Attenders may feel like ‘they are standing on the side-lines.’

We appreciate the shared vision of Quakers and know we will find others who share this vision. Belonging to a quaker community is an anchor which Friends find valuable and appreciate.

We acknowledged that all the words we associated with commitment and belonging can also happen without seeking membership.

Individual responses:

from the notes of the last elders' meeting in 2022:

All recognised the role of elders in ensuring the right ordering of Meetings for Worship; meetings feel solidly rooted with the presence of an elder. A Friend shared his sense of being more aware of this responsibility in MfW on zoom. On-line worship had required Friends to establish an order / discipline within a new context.

While the main functioning of the elder may be within her/his local meeting it is important to feel part of the larger body; the Area Meeting links us within the structures of BYM and Friends in Wales.

from Margaret Biddle (as not exactly a representative of Holyhead):

Fel ti'n gwybod, after decades of being an attender, I am now a member!

For me, I think it felt as if I ought to acknowledge – to recognise and admit! – that I share the values that I understand to be those we share as quakers.

The commitment to beginning in silence, in attending / attention, in listening.

The commitment to the understanding that process is all.

...and so to finding ways consonant with respect, with what love requires of us.

The intuition of the possibility that love is so deep and powerful and creative that we can put our hope in it and commit our being to flow with that energy – like being boats turning to go with a deep and powerful current.

I think my decision / recognition / admission was in an on-line meeting for worship, during ministry from a friend. I simply felt ‘Yes – I belong here; this is what I believe is important, and I should acknowledge that’.

It was also after I had been part of the protest at the huge sale of arms in London. I realised then how important it was to me to have profound confidence in other friends – in the commitment we share to ‘being the change we want to see in the world’, to treating others (and the planet!) as having ‘that of god’ in them, to acting and being non-violently. The means as the end.

More prosaically, becoming a member for me is a bit like standing up and being counted – rather than denying where I stand.

North West London AM

NWLAM Minute 2023.07.23.5

We support the concept and process of membership with its commitment and responsibility. All are welcome to participate in our Meetings, members or not, and we hope attenders feel equally part of the Meeting. We hope membership can be extended to include Friends without a local geographical tie.

Northamptonshire AM

Northumbria AM

Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire AM

2023/20 Response to MfS regarding Membership

The draft response was approved and is attached to the Minutes.

Why do we have membership?

- Membership is about discipleship and the affirmation of Quaker values and practices. It is not about spiritual achievement.
- It often leads to further learning about Quakerism
- It is common for organisations to have membership.

- Quaker membership asks us to: accept Divine guidance; be able to participate in Quaker worship; accept the equality of all people; be willing to share responsibility for our Quaker Meeting.
- Quaker membership makes clear that the way we live our lives is as, if not more, important than any set of beliefs
- It is meant to be both a responsibility and a joy – a statement that ‘this is my spiritual home, where I belong’
- It is necessary to understand the numbers for planning and staffing the whole organisation including BYM
- It has an external dimension that is demonstrated to the outside world

What is it for

- A demonstration of personal commitment for some, and also a commitment from the Meeting.
- It is seen as a step on a spiritual journey
- Some wish to be visible as a Quaker.
- Mutual support.
- Some system of formal membership is necessary for the right management of money and property. Trustees are certainly required legally to be members and there may be other roles both locally and centrally that have the same requirement.

Is it still necessary

Yes

If yes, what forms could it take

- The present membership process is too cumbersome and should be simplified. People move around the country – especially those studying – and it should be possible to belong to BYM and not just one AM. It should not be necessary to document transfers between AMs.
- Membership could be automatic after a suitable period.
- Attenders and Members should be equally considered for all roles. This should be a matter of discernment for the local meeting, especially the smaller ones who struggle with maintaining a full business structure.
- It may not be necessary for it to be a commitment for life and could possibly be renewed periodically.

We recognise that some Friends are not Members for a range of reasons such as:

On the journey towards membership

- Already hold membership in another faith community and feel that is sufficient/do not wish to feel a previous commitment is being rejected

- Value the Quaker way but continue to miss aspects from other traditions.
- Find the process cumbersome

Oxford & Swindon AM

Pendle Hill AM

Pendle Hill AM Minute 23.35 Membership

Further to area minute 23.32 'Membership Reflection' Pip Swancott our Meeting for Sufferings representative has collated our responses.

We discerned during worship sharing on 10th June that membership is important to us. The analogies with marriage or being part of the crew on a passenger ship were expressed several times by Friends as was membership meaning belonging and commitment to the Society.

We considered our existing membership process to be still important but that it could be modernised or simplified so that the process does not represent a barrier or make Friends who are not in membership feel 'secondary' in our meetings. We have heard that Friends not in membership can feel undervalued and hope we can simplify our ways of working to enable them to use all their gifts in our meetings. We have also considered the possibility that Friends could have 'National Membership' rather than AM membership where more appropriate. We have considered that the membership process could become a local meeting rather than an area meeting responsibility.

Area Meeting agrees to forward this minute to Robert Card, clerk for Meeting for Sufferings.

Pickering & Hull AM

Quaker Prison Chaplains

23.16 Membership issues for chaplains

We reported back the experience of our threshing meeting about whether membership is a crucial step for chaplains.

We affirmed that membership remains an important part of the official faith endorsement of Quaker Prison Chaplains:

- It expresses a commitment to the Religious Society of Friends through a recognised process which means that chaplains can expect to be properly acquainted with the full richness of Quaker life of which they will be a representative.
- It gives confidence that an appropriately rigorous process has been adopted as a starting point for eligibility prior to the discernment, nomination and appointment of the chaplain. This provides a clear link of accountability

through to the Quaker Area Meeting that can be upheld by the Quaker Faith Advisor to HMPPS, and provides parity with the processes followed by other faiths.

- We affirm that, for the purposes of appointing Quaker Prison Chaplains, the membership system exists as a helpful and systematic process that we can trust has been conducted in right ordering at the local community level where the individual chaplain is best known: if we didn't already have this process we would need to create another system to do the same job.

We send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings as part of their consultation on membership.

Sheffield & Balby AM

South East London AM

23/20 Membership

Meeting for Sufferings has asked all area meetings to discern the role of membership and to report back to them..

In particular:-

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for? (and maybe, in addition, what is it not for)
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

This was discerned at length, and the following minute approved:

SELAM Minute 23/20 Membership (19 March 2023)

We held a wide-ranging discussion about membership, both of in-person and Zoom meetings. Friends generally felt that membership should be retained, although perhaps in a different form as means of communications change. We believe that membership shows commitment, but may not be the only way of showing it.

One attender who joined us on Zoom is deeply involved in Quaker work and wishes to be a prison chaplain. However, as he is not able to attend a "bricks and mortar" meeting, he cannot currently become a member and therefore is unacceptable to the prison authorities. We would hope a solution to this problem can be found.

We believe that membership needs to be welcoming and inclusive, and we accept that

people's ability to contribute to the meeting may vary as their circumstances change. A sense of belonging is paramount We also accept that Friends who are unable to attend Meeting physically for any reason should be as welcome and as much a part of the community as anyone else.

In short, we feel that diversity in forms of membership (not excluding the current procedures) will enrich our communities in the future.

This minute will be sent to Meeting for Sufferings, as requested by them.

South East Scotland AM

South London AM

Earlier in the year you asked Area Meetings 4 questions about Membership. We dealt with those at Area Meeting last Sunday and I attach our response. While they are bit a straightforward answer to those question our response does, we believe, encapsulate our thoughts about Membership-Item 4 of our Minutes.

Summary of responses from Friends at South London Area Meeting

Meaning of membership to individual

It imparts a sense of belonging, to a community and a tradition (historical community)

It enables members (and attenders, as potential members) to grow and develop spiritually. It can attract people to Quakers via what is seen by some as a practice of mindfulness.

It gives access to a community of support. (We were reminded that membership historically developed as a way of providing a community of support.)

It may be personally important to say 'I'm a Quaker'.

It can be an important stage in the spiritual journey of friends

Meaning of membership to a Quaker community

It enables the meeting to compile information about friends who are participating in the life of the meeting, and especially those who are doing jobs that involve legal, financial or safeguarding responsibilities.

It enables a formal relationship between the individual and the Quaker community, with a clear set of responsibilities on both sides. There is a discipline to membership, and it clarifies both what being a Quaker asks of us, and what we receive: personal service is an important way of doing Quaker, as well as being Quaker.

It is important to have signed-up members to give stability and structure to our community.

It provides corporate security for both right ordering of Quaker worship, business and financial stewardship.

It is important to apply a consistent standard for membership, through guidance for visitors.

Personal service is an important way of doing Quaker, as well as being Quaker.

How will membership work in a Pan London Area Meeting?

Meaning of membership to the wider world

Membership is part of the historical context of the beginning of the Society's movement; it would be sad to let it go.

It demonstrates to the wider world that Quakers can fulfil the legal requirements of corporate governance and compliance (which may be important for the Charities Commission).

It is a public commitment to trying one's best to live by the Testimonies.

This corporate membership allows us to have a distinct Quaker voice with which to contribute to public discourse beyond the Society itself.

Acquisition and types of membership

Recognising it is sometimes difficult to fill posts, might we consider a 'half-way house' to fill posts?

Acceptance of membership may come to mean added pressure to take on jobs and to contribute financially, which may deter attenders from applying. The spiritual meaning of membership should therefore be emphasised.

Remaining out of membership may make a statement by attenders who thus show their wish to maintain a limited level of commitment, and it is important to continue to allow them to enjoy that freedom.

The process of applying for membership and needs to be robust but also a sensitive, supportive and shared experience between the applicant and the meeting.

Acquisition of membership might be made more flexible: the example was offered of a meeting that allows attenders to enter membership via correspondence, for those who do not wish to be visited.

Given that people are generally more reluctant to join organisations these days, might we consider replacing formal membership with a statement by meetings that an individual friend was in good standing with them? What practical difference would that make?

We noted the growth of different forms of Quaker fellowship, such as the growth of online meetings, where there is no natural geographical link. Online meetings offer benefits to disabled and elderly friends and those who belong to dispersed communities.

However, we are aware that virtual communities in general raise issues and challenges for the oversight of membership and the maintenance of right ordering in both worship and church governance, as well as safeguarding. It is difficult to see how enquirers and new attenders will learn about the Quaker way without having a

geographical location, or attachment to something more formal than logging onto a virtual meeting for worship. We recognise that many people have always been in places of isolation and their participation needs to be supported.

Young people who may be moving around - for example, between their hometown and a university town - may find it difficult to build a link to one local community. Might this be recognised by some other form of membership, such as national

South Wales AM

Minute 2023.07.06: The meaning of membership: Response to Meeting for Sufferings

We have received notes of an area meeting event on membership and belonging, held on 7 June, and minutes and reports from Cardiff, Lampeter, Milford Haven, Newport, Penarth, and Swansea Local Meetings: see the attached document Minutes and Reports. Some of us also attended an event hosted by our Local Development Worker in March. Alongside long-standing and more recent members, a few attenders were present at most of the discussions, and they added valuable perspectives.

The pandemic has helped to create new ways of being in community. Some Friends now feel their strongest connection to an online community, which can be more inclusive of those who find it difficult to attend in person, for health, geographic location, or other reasons. Worshipping online is also a preferred or additional option for some Friends. It is important that where and how we meet is not a matter of certain ways being more 'the real thing' than others. Any form of membership in the future will need to recognise that for some people the local meeting is not their primary, or only, Quaker community.

What does membership mean to us personally? It can be an expression of commitment, a mark of belonging to a community and being at home, a public statement of identity, like a marriage. The commitment of members to uphold Quaker discipline, and to the testimonies, is important. Another analogy is that of being part of the crew rather than a passenger on a ship. But membership can mean different things at different stages of our lives, we might be actively involved at times and more distanced at others. Friends belong to multiple communities, Quaker and non-Quaker, and they might have a sense of just one community being their spiritual home or of several feeling that way.

To some people membership can appear off-putting, making them feel more of an outsider. The distinction between members and attenders can be viewed as a contradiction to our testimony to equality. Some feel that joining is unnecessary and irrelevant as part of their spiritual journey, they are already part of the meeting. If the commitment is strong enough, do we need the label?

Membership marks boundaries and defines who is part of the community, for example, for charitable purposes. Some people wondered whether it could be as simple as including all those who are invited to be on the contact list as members? Is it essential for the secular purposes of membership to be conflated with a spiritual commitment? The Spirit does not require membership, but membership does require the Spirit.

Some felt the present geographical basis of membership works well for most Friends, but that an alternative non-geographic system was also needed, e.g., BYM-wide membership.

The current form of membership does not work well for children and young people who may be very committed locally, or indeed more committed nationally. How can we ensure that children and young people feel welcomed and affirmed in their commitment to Quakerism?

Membership should be a two-way relationship – a commitment by the individual to the community and by the community to the individual. This commitment anchors us, particularly in times of need and difficulty. The opportunity to make such a commitment is both necessary and valuable. But does this need to be by joining the Society? Some Friends feel they express their part in this two-way relationship through faithful attendance, service, and financial contribution. Attenders and Members are all part of the Meeting, and it is primarily: ‘by their deeds shall you know them’.

In many worshipping communities no distinction is made between attenders and members when making appointments. Being in membership helped some Friends feel a commitment to serve, which helped them to grow and develop relationships across the community, for others the expectation that membership entailed service to the Society gave them a sense of a burden and guilt. Service involving three-year commitments to a role, was especially off-putting for some. Can we develop more ways of giving short term service to specific tasks, working in teams which enable us all to work more flexibly. Is there a necessary connection between membership and certain forms of service?

Whilst some people regarded the process of applying for membership as an unwelcoming barrier, many members described how the membership visit enabled them to talk about their individual spiritual lives as an experience which they treasured. A visit of this kind can feel like a meeting for clearness. Could we facilitate more of such conversations at depth naturally and regularly, so that we feel really known by our Quaker communities?

We send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings.

Collated minutes and reports of discussions within SWAM responding to the call by Meeting for Sufferings for Friends to consider these questions:

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

Meetings approached this consultation in different ways, some including a question related to our sense of 'belonging', in addition to the questions about membership above, or some adaptation of them.

Report of the BQLQ event on Membership and Belonging, 7 June 2023

This Zoom event was advertised widely within SWAM "for anyone who finds or seeks a spiritual home amongst Quakers". 18 Friends attended, all but one in membership. Friends responded in the first half to the question: What does that spiritual home feel like to you? Friends described how they value belonging to a diverse community which offers them:

- spiritual nourishment,
- acceptance, friendship and caring,
- encouragement to be creative and take risks,
- opportunities for meaningful service,
- boundaries,
- the practice of discernment.

A Friend asked, If your meeting feels like home, does it mean it's your only home? Or are there layers of spiritual home, or of belonging as a Quaker? Not so much 'home' as 'homes'. Another offered a parallel with an insight about bereavement, that people come into our lives for a reason, a season, or a lifetime. We are in some Quaker communities, such as our meetings, for a lifetime; we serve or take part in others for a season or a reason. But we belong to them all.

Friends then reflected on where membership comes into this: Why do Quakers have membership, what is it for? Responses focused more on what it means spiritually and personally than any functional purpose.

A two-way relationship. We heard how a US Evangelical Friends Church makes a covenant with its members: the meeting makes a promise to the individual and the individual commits themselves to the meeting. If we focus on the body that we belong to we might ask, What is it my meeting gives me that nothing else can?

What is the difference? Attenders also serve in key roles, worship as faithfully, give as much of their time and money. And yet membership does feel important. Maybe it isn't for anything, it just is. A Friend who hates joining finally felt they had grown up on making the commitment to become a member after many years as an attender. Another described how joining was a spiritual step, it said, I am a Quaker, this is what I stand for. But an experience of deep sharing in their meeting changed their

perspective – they were clearly all members. If the commitment is strong enough, do we need the label?

Our evolving faith and practice: Evolution is a characteristic of the Society of Friends; what membership means now is different from before. Some Friends value membership as an agreement to accept the discipline and contribute to the meeting, but others do little for their meeting while some attenders do a lot. Only recently did trustees have to be members. Things are changing all the time; our Quaker future isn't fixed.

A sense of identity. What do we gain and what does the meeting gain when we identify as members? It's a marker that says, I belong to this group and this group belongs to me. Our need for a sense of identity is very deep rooted.

The membership visit. It would be a loss not to have that process. It marks a vital transition in becoming a Friend, an experience of really being seen and acknowledged as who you are by your meeting, it's not just about being accepted.

Maybe we wouldn't need membership if we could feel more sure that our meeting really knows us.

Cardiff LM

Cardiff Friends met on 21 May and 4 June 2023 to consider the questions about membership put to us by Meeting for Sufferings. 17 Friends gathered in Charles St and online on 21 May, and 17 on 4 June, with 21 Friends in total, plus a written contribution from a Friend who was unable to attend. We note that more people in membership, than non-members, engaged in the two discussions. The proportion is perhaps two-thirds in membership.

We have considered why we have membership. Membership gives us a sense of belonging. It is something we choose to do once we feel we have found our spiritual home. It is a declaration, to ourselves and to the wider Quaker family, that we have made a commitment. On an individual basis, membership can satisfy a yearning for identity. We have used the metaphor of marriage: one can choose to live with a life partner, but the act of marriage is a public commitment. Membership is also like moving from being a passenger on a ship to becoming a member of the crew. We are not saying that crew or passenger is better than the other.

The sense of our meeting is that membership is still necessary and valuable. Nevertheless, there are Friends among us who are less certain about the meaning and value of membership. For example, some find having different 'levels' of being a Quaker creates inequality.

Our discussion has pointed to the challenges in considering individual needs. Whilst we have heard of friends who have felt excluded and 'not good enough' by not being asked to consider becoming a member, others who have been asked, feel alienated

and wonder if their choice to remain not-in-membership means they are considered 'not good enough'.

It is clear that we need to be more transparent about the process of applying for membership. Friends need to be assured that it is a time for them to explore their spiritual journey and see if being a Quaker is their home. It is most definitely not a job interview.

Moving into membership should be a natural process. Having it regularly raised as a possibility for everyone who has become a faithful worshipper would take away the negative effects of the 'tap on the shoulder'. However, we should remember that some people will need to be encouraged individually to consider whether it is the path for them.

We have not considered specific things put to us by Meeting for Sufferings such as Unattached Membership. Our discernment has been around what membership means for us in Cardiff Meeting and how it can be considered in relation to our Area Meeting.

Cyfarfod Lleol Llambod – Lampeter LM

Nine people attended the discussion on 15 June, and another sent comments in advance via email. Notes were compiled and circulated after the event and small amendments made. After discussion in our Business Meeting today we would like to emphasise that, whatever form membership takes, it should be a two-way process between the individual and the community that they are joining.

We agree to send the notes, as amended, to area meeting for their discernment and response to Meeting for Sufferings

Notes of a discussion about membership held on 15th June by Friends from Lampeter Local Meeting

We ranged in membership experience from two who had been members from birth to two regular attenders. The other six had come into membership in adult life and for periods ranging from two years to 60 years.

Our conversation started with our personal experience of membership, and our relationship to it but then moved on to a more general consideration of the four questions from Meeting for Sufferings:

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

The Spirit does not require membership: these questions feel quite secular.

The reason why membership was instituted by Quakers originally (to ensure that money raised was used to alleviate suffering of genuine members) certainly does not often apply any longer. Nowadays, it often relates to care for Meeting Houses, which are often old, listed and expensive. They are managed by the Trustees we are required to have by the Charity Commission.

The Covid period has made a significant change as to how we gather as community. There is no going back. We must not be nostalgic about the past but see the future coming towards us. How do we greet and welcome this future in the here and now?

The reality is at the fulcrum - the balancing point between the past and the present, between the old ways and the new. This is where the Spirit and Life is.

We see new patterns of belonging for some in online meetings, whilst others grieve for and wish to find again, the sense of connection which they experience in face-to-face meetings. Some are joiners and some are uncomfortable and feel boxed in by

the concept of membership. Some of us love the sense of belonging and commitment that membership brings: a sense of being at home; in a place where they can be honest and open; where they can share their passion for the environment with those with whom they feel close to spiritually. The word 'tribal' was used to describe what this can feel like, a group with its own ways of doing things, and which looks after its own: but tribalism can also feel excluding to those who do not feel they belong: are we as good at accepting difference as we think we are?

We feel that we should be welcoming to everyone without the expectation or assumption of taking on traditional roles.

Membership, for some, feels as if it comes with a burden of obligation and service, which is particularly hard for those who cannot serve in the traditional triennial appointments. Appointment for a specific task, or as part of a team knowing that one can step back from time to time for health reasons or other commitments would suit them better. We have noticed that there are fewer and fewer times when a meeting will insist that membership is an important criterion and we have noticed in some settings, that those who are members cannot always be relied on to understand and follow good Quaker processes.

Nevertheless, we are also aware that there are fewer and fewer Friends willing to do the tasks necessary – this is much more acute when property responsibilities are involved. If everyone wants to be on the periphery, what at the centre?

We can also see that any organisation needs to know who 'we' are. What might membership look like in the future? Might membership be as simple as those who choose to be listed in the contact book? This would allow people to be more flexible in how their commitment is demonstrated.

We were reminded of the draft text which preceded the 1994 Quaker faith & practice. It contained the phrase: doubt is not a failing. *Advices and Queries* 5 now reads: Appreciate that doubts and questions can also lead to spiritual growth and to a greater awareness of the Light that is in us all.

This has been our experience today.

Milford Haven LM

We are not just a social group; we are a Religious Society of Friends, which provides a special way to travel a spiritual journey. It was felt that whoever gathers with us in 'the spiritual presence' is indeed in unity with us and becomes a member of the Meeting for Worship

We note that many of us who consider ourselves to be Quakers have not taken the step to become full Members. Some of us do not feel the time is right for us to take this step. It was noted that for some the difference between an Attender and a Member is they have come to a different place on their spiritual journey.

Some Attenders consider they are already part of the Meeting; they are not 'joiners' and feel 'joining' is unnecessary and irrelevant. It is up to both Attenders and Members to contribute to the life of the Meeting.

At the moment we have a 'corporate' approach to Eldership: every member of the meeting being able to act as an Elder on an as needed basis. We also share the Pastoral Caring with our Attenders.

Some Attenders drop in and out. The Meeting is happy to welcome and support such Attenders, but we also need those that can commit to the 'servicing' of the Meeting and provide the 'backbone' that enables the support of all Members, long-term Attenders and those that drop in when they require our 'quiet space'.

Some felt that the following section from 11.01 *Qf&p* expressed our understanding of Membership aptly: 'Like all disciples, membership has its elements of commitment and responsibility, but it is also about joy and celebration. Membership is for those who feel at home and in the right place within the Quaker community. Membership is also a way of saying to the meeting, and to the world, that you accept at least the fundamental elements of being a Quaker: the understanding of divine guidance, the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the meeting's business, the practical expression of inward convictions and the equality of all before God.'

Attenders and Members are all part of the Meeting, and it is primarily: 'by their deeds shall you know them.'

Newport LM

Why do we have membership?

We agreed that Membership does provide a way for a person to make a statement of commitment to Quakers.

What is it for?

We think that Members holding important roles on central committees does provide a check that decisions are made by those of knowledge and experience. Could this be ensured by other means?

Is it still necessary?

We felt that becoming a member was a valuable statement of commitment for the member and should be retained as another step available on one's spiritual journey. One of us spoke about attending online Meetings and how they too can have a sense of community, a community to which an attender can belong. We also noted that having both members and attenders can lead to misunderstandings on the purpose or standing of each.

Penarth LM

9 Friends attended the Zoom meeting: 8 members and 1 long term attender. These notes incorporate responses later on from others: 3 members and 1 attender.

In the first half of the evening we addressed the question: What gives you a sense of belonging to Penarth Meeting, or to Quakers? If you don't really have a sense of belonging, what would make a difference to you?

Friends spoke about opportunities to share journeys and say things that matter, of finding support in difficult times, of being accepted in a community that shares aspirations. Some noted how a venue adds to their sense of belonging, despite the disruption of moving twice in recent years. We also heard how that same feeling of identity and community can be found in online meeting for worship.

We heard of a tension between belonging to a meeting and belonging to Quakers as an organisation, while valuing the connectedness between meetings and Friends elsewhere. But are we so occupied with structure and practicalities that we have lost sight of what we're trying to build and why? A Friend had drifted away from being involved, and now realised that it mattered – belonging is about taking part.

In the second half we watched a video of Local Development Worker Zoe Prosser speaking about her experience of membership. We then responded to the question:

What about you, how relevant is Quaker membership to your experience? The brief points noted here are drawn from a deeply engaged discussion on this subject:

- It mattered to me to go public, my membership reminds me that I am a Quaker.
- I applied for membership when I realised that I really care about this.
- The visit was the best I had felt I'd been heard in the meeting. Others have said it was their closest encounter amongst Friends. We need those close encounters.
- Does the Society need membership? What do individual Friends need?

- Membership as a marker on our own spiritual journey is one thing, belonging to an organisation is another. The Society has evolved and is open to change.
- I was told at a treasurer's conference I couldn't be treasurer as an attender, I could be an assistant and a Friend in membership should be recorded as treasurer. I said, If somebody else is named as treasurer, they can do the job, not me.
- I feel burdened and guilty being called to take on duties when I'm just about keeping my head above water in my life. It's easier to stay away from the meeting I love.
- We have to separate out service from membership, remove that sense of burden and guilt, and open up opportunities for service. Turning away willing Friends who aren't in membership is such a waste of good, committed Friends.
- When I could no longer take on roles, I actually considered resigning membership. Do some Friends not apply because they know they can't serve?
- We hear of Friends who don't feel good enough to join, or who believe they have to be invited.
- I became uncomfortable with how members and attenders are noted differently in our lists. Is membership actually against our testimony to equality?
- My long relationship with Penarth Meeting matters to me but I lack the wider Quaker experience I'd need to know whether I'd be happy to become a member.
- I'm a committed Friend but as an atheist I don't want to join a Religious Society.
- One member's view is that only members are Friends in the Society of Friends.
- The Society is shrinking and ageing while we navel-gaze. Have we got time for this?
- This is a moment in our history for the asking of questions. Let's celebrate that.

Swansea LM

We have considered the notes made at our discussion group meeting held on 19th February 2023 and the subsequent Zoom session. We ask our Clerk to send the following to SWAM Clerks in answer to the questions posed by Meeting for Sufferings:

Why do we have membership?

- It affirms our commitment to Friends.
- It is an affirmation of values, boundaries, and structures.
- It enables us to be of influence, changing things from the inside.

- Becoming a member is a deeply spiritual experience - being ‘married under the care of the meeting’, a statement of the accountability of the meeting to Friends.

What is it for?

- Legal requirement as we are a “Charity with members”.
- To hold us accountable
- It enables us to make financial, practical, and spiritual contributions. Is it still necessary?
- Practicality, legal requirement.
- We all see that there is a place for membership.
- It helps build community - a deeper sense of knowing each other.
- It is really important, however, that we recognise the value that those who are attenders bring to our meetings, there should be no discrimination or exclusion between members and attenders.

If yes, what form(s) could it take?

- Mostly it should stay the same, based on our geographic location as now.
- Some people have no permanent geographic base, particularly younger people who relate to YFGM primarily, or some have only experienced Quakers via online Meetings, e.g., Woodbrooke, so perhaps some alternative system of membership to cater for these groups could be developed, e.g., BYM wide membership.

Anne Hosking, Cardiff/SWAM, to the Membership review group. 31 August 2023

Why do we have membership?

For a mutual relationship and recognition between an individual and a community.

To quote some useful definitions: “A community is a group of people that interact and support each other, and are bounded by shared experience or characteristics, a sense of belonging, and often by their physical proximity.”¹ “... a group unified in a bond of reciprocity... giving and receiving”.² A sense of love and duty, from each, to each: we trust each other, we face in the same direction (towards God, TOGIEO³, ultimate meaning) in worship.

¹ <https://cjds.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cjds/article/view/318/539> Understanding Community, by Cobigo, Martin, Mcheimech, looking for an acceptable definition that works inclusively, accessed 30/8/23

² <https://communautedeschercheurssurlacommunaute.wordpress.com/senses-of-community-making-sense-of-the-word-community-in-european-languages/> Thierry Tremblay. accessed 9/6/23

³ TOGIEO, that of God in Every One, an abbreviation used with a smile where I once worked

But what is trust? It is notoriously difficult for academics, sociologists and others to define, but this anchors trust and membership well enough for me⁴:

1. Attachment to a person, a collective of persons or institutions [such as a Meeting] based on the well-founded but not certain expectation that he/she/they will act for my good.
2. The expectation, based on good but less than perfect evidence, that events will turn out in a way not harmful to me.'

Quakers use words like gathering, together, unity, committee, council, cluster, but above all 'meeting' to express this two-way relationship. Anyone can agree intellectually with our principles, but to live them fully one does need allies, a team, to work together, in trust.

Analogies:

- family - the importance of being together for special occasions, funerals especially, the old jokes, the pain when something like Brexit splits the family (some Quakers left their meetings for this reason). Choosing a surname to share is strongly symbolic - note the Quaker wedding certificate, witnessed by the family and the Quaker community, and friends.
- nationality - the significance of a passport, the right to remain and vote, plus the duty to serve one's country. (My dual nationality makes me acutely aware of this).
- gender - self-identification is essential, where it all begins, but equally important, one has to be recognized, accepted and acknowledged, legally, publicly and socially. Above all to be called by one's true name, safely.

What is it for?

Do you mean, how do individuals and meetings use this relationship? For well or ill?

Examples from my own experience and observation:

For several years I happily attended one US monthly meeting then commuted between two English local meetings, until I faced a medical emergency and had to say which chaplain I would want with me. I could trust Quakers to tell me the truth, no euphemisms, so I declared "I am a Quaker". If I was going to rely on Quaker support, I felt I had to offer it in turn, and so I applied for membership. Later in London, various country Friends at specialist London hospitals asked my LM for a supportive visitor, they never doubted a fellow Quaker would turn up. It was an obligation that as a member I was glad to fulfil.

Quaker burial grounds are few and small, so who has the right to be buried there? Can a neighbour not just pay for a plot in this lovely nature reserve? Most BG

⁴ Trust, A History, Geoffrey Hosking, OUP 2014 pp 27-29.

committees accept only those in membership (after all, the Meeting owns and maintains the ground) or regular attenders. But how do you gauge 'regular' and 'attendance'?

When something goes wrong, particularly if publicised - such as obscene letters written by a Quaker, or crimes - the identified meeting has to consider how to take responsibility. Other people think the meeting is to blame, or 'should do something'. How does the meeting forgive and reprimand, support and care for the victims, and explain to the town why such and such a response is Quakerly and right? That individual's commitment of membership (or not) is an important fact. For example, in one longstanding conflict within a meeting, the formal membership was something we could work with.

Imagine:

The relationship and procedures of membership, in the Quaker meeting, help people learn how to be Friends and how the meeting works. So someone like a survivor of abuse learns that, in principle, the elders and pastoral carers know how to keep a confidence and are supposed to be well-informed: it's their duty. Those are the people our survivor may well start with, noticing over time how they respond to mention of some apparently trivial issue or story in the news: trust takes time.

Who else might have good reason to be cautious about membership?

Some may want to be Quakers, but dare not be listed openly.

People who have been in prison, who have been drawn to Quakerism by a chaplain, may have to be very careful about how much the worshippers as a body know or say publicly. This would be to keep people (including the ex-offender) safe in the Quaker community and beyond. Some have other reasons: I recall at a conference I helped to organize, one representative was vulnerable and asked for name and meeting (i.e. home location) NOT to be on any list, noticeboard or article in *The Friend*. Some meetings are active in, say, breaking the law for climate reasons: worshippers with certain jobs might have to be, very definitely, not in membership. I heard of some lawyers in the US who might risk their state licence if involved in anything deemed illegal. Under an authoritarian government in this country, formal membership might become risky for some, also.

Suppose:

Suppose I were a clerk of trustees or area meeting, and worshippers were discerning whether or not, say, to withhold co-tax, that portion of PAYE paid on behalf of the meeting house managers that goes to war preparations. We tell the old stories of how Friends supported folk in prison for their faith. I would obey the will of God in the meeting's minute... I hope.

Before I risked serious legal penalties, I would want to be sure that everyone in the meeting was fully committed to this action that I would be taking on someone else's behalf. After all, I could be imprisoned, or heavily fined, for the consciences of other people. Suppose only a proportion, say a third of those present, were coming along to watch how Quakers make decisions? There might be semi-detached attenders, or single-issue activists who just go along with quaint and quirky Quakerism? Maybe digital or nomadic people on our contact list that no-one quite recognizes - would I trust them to share the care for my family, really? If my property were taken by bailiffs for non-payment of fines, would they unite to buy it back?

If I didn't have confidence in a united and reliably committed meeting, with members fully aware of their responsibility, I think I'd find a reason to ask in good time to be released.

Is it still necessary?

Yes!

Formal membership is a shorthand term for a real relationship. It implies a reasonably well-explored and developed knowledge of Quaker way, shared values, the importance to the individual and the meeting of joint worship. It is a recognition and affirmation.

Membership is not a guarantee, of course. When I am introduced to a member I can take quite a bit for granted, and get to know the other more quickly 'in that which is eternal'. Harriet Heath, of Philadelphia YM, was a family therapist who worked with Quakers and others. I asked her if she had noticed any difference. She paused, and then said that you could assume that when Quaker parents hit their children, they feel guilty, ashamed. I understood that the therapeutic process could make early progress

So yes, it is still necessary.

But I do not think our membership processes have been good for individuals and meetings in recent years. We need a revival.

If yes, what form(s) could it take?

Start by improving membership as it is currently understood:

Long distance membership is not new - we have experience

Long distance membership is not new: FWCC regularly connect with isolated Quakers round the world. Jenny Butterfield said it was the best part of her job. In this YM, I know of several young Friends who made a point of joining before they set off. In my former AM, the minute of acceptance set out how the new member and the

meeting would keep in regular contact, naming specific Friends - and including, if my memory is accurate, an annual visit to London.

At a meeting in North Carolina, 'with attention to our young folk graduating from high school' one summer, the ministry was full of appreciation, affection and celebration - beautiful! The meeting blessed them, and spoke of 'a return ticket any time' - what a pity we don't devise ways to show the young people in our meetings how much we love them. They may go - they should know that they are our Friends. And the meetings should ask how they would like keep in touch. Prayer and zoom would be good offerings.

However, if the long distance arrangement is not kept under review, with skilled letter writers or zoomers, it can fade. After some years, it is hard to keep up to date. Worship becomes thin. Affection fades. When I was eight, travel meant separation from various family members. Weekly letters to my parents were not enough to maintain a true knowledge of each other. Zoom has helped to some extent with cousins, but has not been an adequate replacement.

Head, but not heart?

I have enjoyed lectures, books, conversations, Woodbrooke or university courses, music workshops - head stuff. Some of the intellectual discussions on, for example, new atheist sites, are exciting, expanding, but they are not (in my view) community. I have discovered that heart stuff is much harder to undertake online. I was unable to engage with large numbers, such as a meeting for worship or business that goes over one computer screen. The hundreds at Yearly Meeting were just strangers on tiny icons, or black squares, not real. My Sunday meeting is now on zoom, most of us with some disability or other reason not trek to the meeting house. The technology has compensated for much, but it is still not a full substitute for face to face, or person to person meetings, however infrequent.

Digital membership? Non-attached?

Ordinary membership can already be flexible and inventive. People can be omitted from public contact lists. The confidential members lists that pastoral carers need are legal, under Data Protection. But how can responsible, appointed Friends make sure that no-one falls through cracks in our current system? Elders and pastoral carers may need inspiration and encouragement, they say they are overloaded. In my long experience⁵ it truly is rewarding to encounter Friends, soul to soul, it is time well and rewardingly spent. Those in leadership roles need to bring life back, rather than abolish what is tired and difficult.

⁵ 53 years with Friends, with long periods in the USA twice, Germany, England (3 meetings) and Wales; served, and researched with, the Pastoral Care Group of Sufferings, then the Committee on Eldership and Oversight; and other roles in meetings and nationally.

Technology can be used but meetings **must** invest in the latest technology, and the central offices must provide really good training. We need then to focus on the meaning of interaction and consider how to compensate for distance.

We do not have to invent a new category. Especially not one where distance, of many kinds, can attenuate the relationship. Or where people choose to opt out of community - avoid meeting for worship, refuse pastoral care or buddies or spiritual friends, turn down appointments. That sort of coldness is not healthy, for the individual or for the community.

Abolish membership altogether?

You'd just accept whoever turned up to any meeting? Really? Like a political rally or picnic in the park? If there is any suggestion of abolishing membership, first you need to allow those who value membership, to resign properly. I would need to leave with as much care and prayer as when I joined, thanking God, and thanking Friends, for all we have shared. Then I would need to bury my membership, and turn away from Quakerism, to find a different spiritual life elsewhere. This feels like religious suicide: I hope I never have to do it. No, please do not banish the concept of membership.

Or better, resurrect a strong and living Quakerism in our meetings, through membership, with divine help.

1. Value membership. At Quaker Quest in the first years, we learned that soft talk and lite theology just made seekers uneasy. Having come on a wintery Monday evening, they were looking for solid food - God, challenge, ultimate questions, personal experience, theirs and ours, and we learned to be more substantial. One Quaker asked, after some weeks, how one became a member. Oh you don't need to believe anything, etcetera - he burst out into laughter, and said you don't value yourselves or your theology, 'you might as well knit your own bathmat'! If Quakerism is worthing living or dying for (not just in history) then say so.

2. If it is a mutual relationship, say so, do it. What is expected of an applicant is set out in detail in *Qf&p*, but very little about the meeting's duty. The Evangelical Friends Church of the Eastern Region sets out in its book of discipline what the applicant believes and promises⁶. Here is the meeting's side of the covenant:

An EFC-ER local church makes a covenant with its members in the following ways:

1. To provide opportunity for and assistance in worship and in spiritual growth;

6

https://www.efcer.org/uploads/1/3/3/2/133267097/faith_and_practice_2021_edition_approved_7_19_21.pdf

2. To provide help in discovering each member's talents and gifts, and opportunities to express these gifts in service;
3. To provide discipleship training and instruction toward maturity in Christ;
4. To provide counsel and accountability when members are neglecting faithful fulfillment of their covenant;
5. To receive and respect the input of its members;
6. To provide a system for spiritual care of its members.

What would a Quaker meeting promise to its members?

3. The report is a record of someone's spiritual journey, but not just to inform the meeting. I've known applicants in tears reading about their Life, often saying they didn't realize, it was beautiful, such a gift. We do nowadays email them the report, to check for errors, but little is done with the final text. We should print out these reports on good paper, along with the minute of acceptance, all gracefully laid out, and hand the envelope over at their first meeting for worship, as a member. There could be a card of welcome, signed by all the members, a bookplate to stick in the front of their *Qf&p* And a cake. And the welcomer could invite them to dinner! A Kenyan Friend transferring to my old meetings felt rather unwanted - at home there'd be a party lasting all weekend for the village!

4. Follow up after a few weeks or months. Someone designated, maybe the welcomer, or an elder, should ask how the new member is getting on, ready for a conversation, maybe with a book to read, a discussion group in the meeting or a Woodbrooke course to attend, with a tactful mention of a bursary. Too often the first sign of interest in the new member is from Nominations. I have seen too many eager newbies accept a role, and leave the meeting within a year.

And finally, how will we know when membership is working well? Whether it is reformatted or revived?

Adapt questions from the mystery-worshipper pages of the Ship of Fools website⁷:

- Which part of your membership is like being in heaven?
- And which part is like being in...er...the other place?

Or maybe reflect on this letter from the Elders and faithful Brethren of Philadelphia, writing in the spring of 1683 to their friends three thousand miles across the ocean⁸.

⁷ <https://shipoffools.com/mystery-worshipper/> and scroll down to 'Looking for a church'. There are several Quaker meetings, with scores from 9 down to 2!

⁸ Christian Faith & Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends, approved by London Yearly Meeting, 1959. This passage is 677, the last in the book. It has been used several

What could we in Truth write today? To Friends in proximity, or those meeting across a distance, or online?

Oh, remember us, for we cannot forget you;
Many waters cannot quench our love,
Nor distance wear out the deep remembrance
of you in the heavenly Truth:

We pray God preserve you in faithfulness,
That, discharging your places and stewardships,
You may be honoured and crowned
with the reward of them that endure to the end.

And though the Lord has been pleased
to remove us far away from you,
as to the other end of the earth,
Yet are we present with you,
Your exercises are ours;
Our hearts are dissolved
in the remembrance of you,
Dear brethren and sisters in this heavenly love

And the Lord of heaven and earth
who is the father of our family,
Keep us in His love and power,
and unite, comfort and build us all,
More and more,
To His eternal praise, and our rejoicing,

[meeting name], 31 August 2023

This is the paper with confidential or personal examples to accompany my enclosed response to the Membership consultation. You and I exchanged emails early in July. I have spent much of the time since very troubled about my own membership. However, today, your deadline for submissions, I felt I should take the risk and write. I managed to write reasonably anonymously. If you need more information, or you query anything, do ring me on

In Friendship,
[name and contact details supplied]

times, when a Quaker working group other body has completed its service, the last minute has been agreed, and the last meeting for worship is taking place.

These are recollections of events which illustrate the relevance of membership - memories and reliable reports, gathered in three yearly meetings, three area meetings in this country, and involvement in Quaker groups.

Reputation

A member wrote obscene letters to women in the town. I assume he had been accusing them of mis-conduct. He identified himself as a Quaker. The meeting asked for advice: the response was that the meeting should deal with the writer within the meeting (the Elders of Balby's advice was pertinent), and if he didn't stop, his membership would be terminated. A letter was sent to the press, in effect 'disowning' him. I didn't hear if it was possible to contact his victims.

Note that disownment in early Quaker times did not prevent the person who was breaking the unity of the meeting from joining in worship: only that he/she/they must not come to MfWfB: they would have no part in any decisions, of any kind, in business, nor could they benefit from meeting finances. and (I think) they could not contribute financially.

'Domestic' abuse

A female member of another local meeting had visible bruises, said her partner had caused them, but she didn't feel able to leave him. One issue was, this partner was very active in the meeting, and represented the meeting ecumenically. The advice to the meeting was to find out how to help the woman consider how to escape safely (local resources such as a refuge), to speak plainly to the part-ner about his behaviour, which was not right for a Quaker or any spouse, and to release him promptly from his ecumenical role. I didn't hear what happened next in that meeting. Some months later he published an article in the magazine of another church, saying how glad he was to have left Quakers and converted...!

Termination of membership

There was a long conflict lasting several years. Membership was central: not just the status of the person at the centre, but of all the others affected, especially those in roles: some resigned, some moved to another meeting, some still feel their mental health is impacted. When the membership was terminated, following a very careful process (I read the area meeting files later), the person ap-pealed to Sufferings. The appeal group required reinstatement, which was a source of hurt and resentment for some, as the behaviours by the person which had triggered the termination continued. After years more of gatherings for worship and discussion with the person, years of trying, the area meeting agreed that resolution could not be reached. However, I believe a Sufferings review of the appeals procedure in general decided the system was working: is it time to review the appeals procedure?

How a membership ends

In considering any revision of membership, you need to consider not just how a membership begins, but how it will end. Till death do us part? Resignation when the

member decides? Dropping from the list when the member stops attending and fades away? Or a termination of membership, even a disownment? But for what kind of reason? If membership as a practice is simply abolished, or is optional, you'll have to think of some other way of saying with authority 'No, enough, you can't go on!'.

Ex-prisoners as members

Ex-offenders have joined new or returned to their old meetings: Quaker prison chaplains are the key. Meetings will agree a contract with the offender, to protect vulnerable people, young and old, and a small group for regular worship is generally established. Some meetings have felt able to welcome an ex-offender to a Sunday morning meeting, when every worshipper agrees to confidentiality. No publicity may be a legal requirement. This arrangement failed, in one meeting, when a worshipper was rude to the ex-offender on the first venture. The worshipper was not, I believe, in membership, had not participated in preparatory discussions, or did not agree with the meeting's action.

Application blocked

I heard of an ex-offender who, after 10 years of regular small group worship considered applying for membership. The eldership & pastoral care group who were first approached about this application, as was customary in that area meeting, had a majority who had not themselves applied for membership. The decision was that if the ex-offender couldn't attend MfW with the wider LM community, no-one else could get to know them, there would be no real connection, no community, and for that reason the E&PC could not, as would be the practice, support the application. The formal application never reached area meeting. This was very destructive to the ex-offender at the time, but he continued his successful efforts to change his life.

Membership and small groups

I have known worshippers whose membership was listed as at a very small, almost closed, group usually within the local or area meeting. Probably meeting at intervals, sometimes rural or hard of access. There are people whose main or only participation is in a healing group, a Light Group, an on-line worship event, the Leaveners (Qf&p 10.16), a youth group and others. I see no reason why a worshipper cannot become a member, via a special small group. Ideally isolated members should take opportunities to be in touch with a wider Quaker world. Eldership and pastoral care can already be adapted to different circumstances, to maintain the relationship and accountability of such special groups and members.

Outreach

At a series of outreach events, a volunteer Quaker speaker, the organizers learnt, had been convicted of fraud, in earlier years. It was suspected that something similar could develop again: enquirers can be very vulnerable to warm hearted, total welcomes. This speaker was asked not to come again. The organizers had limited authority over the volunteers, and local meetings were not sponsoring or suggesting

speakers. Membership is not a means of controlling bad Quakers, but it does give a basis for talking about expectations and standards.

Survivors of abuse

I understood from some women survivors that no-one in their own meetings knew they were survivors. They did not speak up in their membership visits, they had not told their pastoral care team. They did not feel able to ask for bursary help to go to meetings of QWSCSA, because they would have to admit to being survivors - financial records need a name. So though they were members, acknowledged as such, they evidently could not feel fully so. This is not a failure of the membership system, but a lapse of the individuals appointed to carry out the membership visit. The visit for membership should be an opportunity for deep worship, searching conversation, building enough trust that something so important could be shared. Those responsible for financial support could surely consider how a grant could be recorded confidentially.

Southern East Anglia AM

SEAQM response to request from Meeting for Sufferings re membership

Why have a membership?

In the very early days of Quakerism, membership was not thought necessary. But because of the need for welfare and later the then political situation it was soon necessary to commit openly to be part of a particular organisation and its principles. Now, becoming a recognised charity in the late 20th century brings the further legal responsibilities of owning property and employing people, governance documents and bank accounts. Certain officers of the charity must be members.

Membership of the Society of Friends however is associated with a definition of Quakerism then and now. It is an essential, indispensable part of our community. This separates it from membership of many organisations where membership merely adds a name and contact details to a list and indicates the need for an annual subscription of some kind to maintain the purposes of the organisation.

Being a Member of the Society of Friends in the UK requires an understanding of its spiritual and practical purposes. There is a strong spiritual bond but also a commitment to the understanding of the Priesthood of all believers – there is no laity, we are all responsible for the organisation which bring implications and responsibilities. Membership is by conviction and brings a sense of belonging, being part of a community with a purpose beyond that of the individual. We are not just meeting to share our spiritual journeys, which we clearly do; together, we act out our beliefs in action in the wider world, spelt out in our testimonies of truth, simplicity, equality and peace.

What is it for

Would a spiritual bond without formal membership be enough? The possible responsibilities incurred by running ourselves for some gets in the way of their

spiritual needs or their work with other organisation or even their lives. It is possible to be an attender, living as a Friend without formal commitment. For some, the very process of being accepted into membership is complicated because of the need to understand the organisation. But, it is this very understanding that brings a deeper understanding of what is meant by discernment and how our business method works without voting – we jointly seek the will of God. However, we are not just a worshipping community but live our lives in the world and ‘let them speak’. Seeking membership is just part of a life journey in the spirit. Our history records what Quakers have achieved in the past.

We have a responsibility to explore Quakerism, to guide a worshipping group in the Quaker approach to religion. We are the ‘Religious Society of Friends’.

Is it still necessary?

Yes, we want to uphold and encourage less experienced Friends in the journey, while recognising it is not a goal to be reached but a public commitment to move forward in the spirit with others also seeking. We have to talk through our understanding of the form and structure of the organisation with existing Friends before being accepted as it is not straight forward. Some join and later resign, some even coming back later. Membership is a way of sharing the deep processes of understanding Quakerism. The paperwork associated with the process could be simplified but not the understanding.

If so what form should/could it take

We need to recognise a fluidity and mobility of modern life that being a member in one location may not be right, particularly for students. This may even need a rethink on the geographical location of our charities, their governing documents etc. which determine membership. Different forms could be explored. This is where the ongoing debate should take place.

Southern Marches AM

AM 23/09 Reports and items emanating from them

(a) Meeting for Sufferings Minutes – report from Ann Davison

Ann Davison spoke about the Meeting of Sufferings Meeting on the 1 and 3 December by highlighting items that AM needed to know and to think about.

In terms of needing to know: the name of Overseer is not to be used – Pastoral Friend is a possibility, but other terms may be adopted. Book of Discipline revision first draft texts are available on nominations and marriage. Friends are invited to make comments and suggestions, which Meeting for Sufferings is keen to receive. Information can be found on Revising Quaker faith & practice | Quakers in Britain

Friends are encouraged to think about the relationship between Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings. The question posed was ‘How can discernment be retrieved

from Trustees?' The relationship between Trustees and Meeting for Sufferings will be an agenda item for Britain Yearly Meeting this year.

(b) Membership

[This is a minute of exercise, which is a minute demonstrating participation in a process of discernment]

The matter of membership considered by Meeting for Sufferings at its meetings on 1 and 3 December 2022 – Minute MfS/22/12/10 refers, together with a background paper 'Membership – call for discernment by area meetings' have set the scene for a discussion today on membership.

We have been asked to focus on the questions proposed, which were

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

We explored the purpose of membership. The views expressed in ministry today distinguished between the purpose of membership for the individual Friends applying for membership and the purpose as it relates to the Quaker community.

From the community point of view we want participation in worship, participation in the business of the meeting, including committee service, and financial support. We also want their spiritual gifts. We want their leadings and their ministries, especially their Spirit-led vocal ministry. We want their prayers. We want them to enrich our collective religious life with their individual spiritual stories and gifts and strengths—and their spiritual weaknesses, their seeking spirits, their inner crying-out.

But what do people seeking membership want? They seek membership in part because they have come to realise that they are already Quakers in some degree, they already identify with this Way, and they want to take this identity to a new level, which membership in a meeting promises to confer. But what does "being a Quaker" mean? It means perhaps growing into this identity, which is undertaken by nurturing and developing growth into this identity.

People who seek membership in the Religious Society of Friends, the life of the Spirit is important to them, they feel they need to pursue it in the embrace of a community, and the Society of Friends looks like the right community.

All of us are on a journey with varying levels of uncertainty about what it means to be Quaker – for some becoming a member is a transformative experience for others there is a gradual realization that they are Quaker but can't quite understand why or use the words to describe what it means. Are these people less Quaker, than those who are more certain? It seems a matter of degree, rather like a test, but in reality it is not so.

There was much anxiety expressed about the distinction which is often made between members and attenders, and although there was acceptance of why individuals want to apply for membership, there was much disquiet expressed that some roles, such as participation in central committees, are not open to attenders.

One of our testimonies is to equality and it seems strange to distinguish in our list of Friends, members and attenders. Are both designations equally valued or is there some hierarchy at play here with one person being superior to another?

Some of the main issues raised relate to young Quakers and to non-geographic membership, which are subjects we shall return to this afternoon. Young Friends often feel isolated, and events such as link groups, Junior Yearly Meeting, Quaker Camp, and Young Friends General Meeting are very important in providing a sense of spirituality within a community of young people.

We will return to membership issues at a future in person meeting.

AM 23/13 Non geographic membership / membership for students and others

Reading 10.25 from Qf&p was read to us at the start of the afternoon, which emphasised the importance of practical commitments, a spiritual willingness to grow, to listen to one another and confirmation of the spiritual growth in our lives.

We then considered membership in these contexts through the following suggestions in break out rooms. In addition Friends were encouraged to extend the discourse developed in the morning session.

1. Categories

- Types of people who might be interested in non-geographic (unattached) membership
- For example, students, people with jobs (or seeking jobs), where they have to travel around and unattached Friends such as the Friend who joined while in Usk Prison
- Other issues that may come to mind during ministry

2. Mechanism of communication

- Electronic communication
- Among Young Friends, who are difficult to communicate with even by e-mail
- Social media

The minutes from each group are recorded below. [These are minutes of exercise]

A

Concern was expressed that HE institutions offer less opportunity for Young Friends to meet other Quakers than they did when Friends speaking were young. Quaker schools also no longer seem to want to advertise this. However Area Meeting camp is still a vibrant, all-age community.

If Young Friends are excluded from Central Committees by not being in membership, we're losing a vital viewpoint and contribution. Being recorded on LM lists, as a member or attender, offers an opportunity to express further commitment beyond your current participation. If many Young Friends don't identify with an LM, how can they register this commitment? How could people register an interest in living a Quaker life at a national level?

Another Friend suggested we should turn this around 180 degrees and look at it from a different angle. Can we go to places where young people congregate and strike up conversations which give an opportunity to explain that we're Quakers and how climate justice, equality, peace etc. are all fundamental Quaker values?

LM & AM Clerks could also make more effort to contact students from Quaker schools moving to their area.

B

We were in favour of unattached membership as it showed that somebody cared where they were and in that way cared for them as members.

Re membership – this was important as it let us be witnesses for our Faith and reminded us to Let our Lives Speak.

C

Our group concentrated on ways of engaging Young Friends (YFs) rather than membership as such. By engaging YFs we hope that it will lead to a sense of belonging and bring involvement at all levels of the S of F.

1. We suggest that our resources should go into supporting YF activities outside our LMs or even AM.
2. We should listen to YFs starting with YF central groups (Link Groups, JYM, YFGM, BYM). What do they want?
3. Develop social media to help YFs to link in online.
4. YFs are interested in the burning issues of the day and we should use outreach to help them to be involved.
5. LMs need to be more open to visiting families so that they are encouraged to come along. Quakers and ice cream rather than 'no children's meeting'. Each meeting should be prepared to greet families and be able to hold a YFs meeting.

D

"We believe that Friends should be able to offer their gifts to the benefit of the whole community, irrespective of whether they are 'members' or 'attenders'. The important criterion is that the Friend should have shown commitment and willingness to contribute, plus a good understanding of the Quaker approach. We are aware that formal membership is no guarantee of the above.

“We warm to the approach of Young Friends (outlined in Qfp 10.25). We would welcome the development of a form of non-geographic 'belonging to Quakers' which is applicable to young people for whom the current structures are not appropriate, and which we hope would be extended to Quakers of all ages.

“We consider our annual AM Camp to be an example of a flourishing Quaker community, where the age range is often a few months to 80 plus, but few are formal Members of the Religious Society of Friends. Second and third generations of families show their commitment not only by coming along each year but also by taking on roles and responsibilities.

“We understand membership to be part of our spiritual journey, not a destination. What is needed above all is some continuous process of nurture and spiritual development which extends beyond the initial stages of becoming part of the community. Whether someone is a member or attender is not as important as whether they show commitment to the Quaker way. Some sort of structure is still necessary to enable Friends to 'belong' to a Quaker community.

“Qf&p 11.11 describes two routes to membership. We have heard of an AM where individuals are supported by mentors in a process of learning and development; a letter of application for membership is sent when the person and their mentors consider the time is right. However, we appreciate that our traditional process for membership application works well for many people. A range of approaches is needed.

“Our group came up with one suggested approach for a continuous process of nurture: the idea of 'spiritual care groups' or 'spiritual friendship groups' (small 'f') of about three Friends each, into which a meeting could be divided. The groups would meet regularly to air problems informally and explore aspects of Quakerism. They might be selected by a process of appointment or self-selected, ie Friends could team up with those they feel most comfortable with. The practicalities of setting up such an arrangement would need careful thought, and it might not work for everyone; no-one should be pressurized into it.”

E

We talked about how meeting Friends from anywhere in the country automatically gives us a connection to them and a wider community, finding there others whose values we understand and share.

Closer to home in our local and area meetings we find ourselves in a place where our skills can be recognised and nurtured and put to good use, and where our spiritual lives can be tested and extended. This experience is very different for Friends who for many reasons are unable to be attached to one AM, specifically students.

This issue of where we 'belong' has come to the fore again during the time of Covid when Woodbrooke started and continues to offer daily online Meetings for Worship. These meetings continue to attract Friends worldwide and many of those attending have forged a commitment to each other that is akin to that in our Local Meetings.

They are now beginning to ask how their experience of belonging to a Quaker community can be formally acknowledged? If they and we see ourselves as Quakers does it matter if we aren't tied to a physical location, or don't see the need for the distinctions of Member or Attender?

We send this minute to Meeting for Sufferings.

Staffordshire AM

This part of the response, is the report summarising responses from local meetings in Staffordshire, which was agreed and accepted at SAQM business meeting on 9th September 2023.

Qu 1 & 2 Why do we have membership and what is it for?

Becoming a member shows a commitment to and acceptance of Quaker ways. Application for membership is a significant spiritual decision and being a member is a recognition of one's Quaker identity, allowing one to say "I am a Quaker". Becoming a member is a way of giving back to the Society.

Those in membership very largely think that membership is a good thing but recognise that some show their commitment through attendance and involvement and feel themselves to be 'member' though they are not in formal membership. Some members see membership in terms of their local or Area meeting rather than of BYM.

Some recognise that membership is needed for legal reasons and the operation of our charity, though for most membership is much more than a legality.

We need a structure that can accommodate us all and we would be concerned if the distinction between members and attenders reduced inclusion of any

Qu. 3 Is membership still necessary?

Some feel that they are 'members' without the need for formal recognition of a membership process. Some long term attenders see no need for membership.

But many of us say that yes, membership is still needed, to ensure the continuing spiritual basis of the Society and to distinguish us from just being a campaigning organisation.

We recognise that there are many committed attenders faithfully playing their part in their local meeting.

Some think that roles such as trustee or Elder require membership whilst we accept that the diminishing numbers of Friends available to serve means that this is not operated as an absolute rule.

4. If yes, in what form ?

The membership process has changed in recent years and rather than being a 'test to pass' becoming a member is more like a transitional step, when feeling ready, in a personal spiritual journey.

We see no great demand for the membership process to change further.

Responses from individual LM's

This part of our response gives the responses from individual local meetings as received by SAQM.

Lichfield LM

Lichfield LM held a discussion on membership on 20th August 2023.

There were four of us in Martin Heath Hall, and two on line, following MfW.

Everyone present contributed to, and agreed to this record.

We tried to answer the four questions put by MfS.

We were not in unity on question 1.

Membership can be seen as a recognised commitment and acceptance of Quaker ways. Some, show their commitment through attendance and involvement and feel themselves to be members though they are not in formal membership.

There are some people who have an easier feeling about belonging to an LM and seeing membership in those terms.

Those in membership thought membership is a good thing.

Perhaps membership direct to BYM might be considered.

Our practice in our LM and AM is of not distinguishing between members and attenders when the latter are clearly committed to Quaker values and practice.

However, after reading the thoughts of five Friends, which had previously been circulated, and having some discussion, we realised that an answer needed to be gained to this point, raised by one of the five:-

"one of the issues is around the management of our 'outward affairs'. The right ordering of our finances and property calls for transparent legalities, (where these do not infringe on our deeper practices): can our society at local, area and national level be a legal corporate entity without formal membership? Is having a formal body of

trustees without recorded membership sufficient to serve as responsible and answerable management of our outward affairs?”

Membership is more than a legality.

Could trusteeship now give us a framework which could free up concepts of membership?

Is charity law consistent with gospel order?

We feel the nature of those new to Quakers into Quaker ways is vitally important.

We need a structure which can accommodate us all as best as possible.

We need to know each other and “know one another in that which is eternal’

Stafford LM

We are asked to respond to the following questions. 1. Why do we have membership? 2. What is it for? 3. Is it still necessary? 4. If yes, what form? 1. It is a commitment, a way of giving back for what we have gained. It is a feeling of belonging, being home. Membership provides a structure for the Society which enables us to have influence in the wider world eg United Nations. 2. Some roles require a formal membership. We need a core of people to get things done. 3. Yes, to ensure the Society continues with a Spiritual basis. Without the commitment of membership we could become simply a campaigning group of likeminded people. We acknowledge that there are many committed attenders faithfully playing their part in Meeting.

Uttoxeter & Burton LM

Report from Uttoxeter and Burton Meeting, discussed at Uttoxeter on 20th August 2023 and at Burton on 21st August 2023, and agreed by both.

We are agreed that Membership shows a commitment to the Quaker Movement and a conformance to a recognised structure.

We feel that Membership is necessary, because we agree that those holding the position of Trustee and Elder should be Members rather than Attenders. However, as a Local Meeting we appreciate the contribution which Attenders can make and have no objection to their being nominated for posts, other than Trustee and Elder, within both Local and Area Meetings.

Wolverhampton LM

Consultation about membership

There were 7 responses , 3 from members and 4 from attenders. This report brings together the comments made in the responses (the full comments have been circulated separately).

1. Why do we have membership?

Membership is part of the heritage of Friends and for some links to their family history and Quaker values held through generations. For Friends joining Quakers later in life (i.e. not birthright Friends), membership can formalise commitment to the Society or Quaker meeting and allows public identification with Quakers and their beliefs and values. Membership provides common ground for our way of life based on our testimonies.

Some attenders question the need for membership and feel that they would gain nothing by becoming members. One Friend feels that becoming a member would separate them from the commonality of beliefs we share with other faiths.

2. What is membership for?

Many view our spiritual life as a journey and becoming a member is seen as an important step on this journey. Membership allows each of us to say “I am a Quaker”.

Whatever is the perceived importance of membership, there are some things that make some question its continued importance. One Friend thinks that our commitment to equality is relevant here and believes that those in the categories ‘member’ or ‘attender’

should not be treated differently. Many feel that committed attenders can make just as significant a contribution as members make to the life of the meeting and in service on behalf of the meeting. Once experienced in the life of Quakers, all are capable of committing to serve at any level – in local , area or BYM nationally.

Two Friends made reference to the idea of different categories of membership. The Iona Community has ‘members’ and ‘associates’ with the latter not following the rules of the community as rigorously as the former. It is not clear that the Friends responding would view the categories of ‘members’ and ‘ attenders’ in the same way as this and some would not welcome such a distinction as they feel such a distinction is not valid in terms of the spiritual contribution made by both members and attenders.

3. Is membership still necessary?

Respondents feel that membership is still necessary. Even those who personally see no need for membership recognise the value of membership for others and it is difficult to see other ways in which Friends can make such a public commitment.

The situation has been changed by fact that attenders have been treated as ‘honorary members’ when they are appointed to roles previously restricted to members, this change being driven by the shortage of Friends to serve in all the roles we have.

Membership is viewed as a process in which we sign up to agreed beliefs and ways of worship even if we have no creeds. But this view has become confused by the

diversity of beliefs of 21st century Quakers e.g. the distinction between theism and non-theism.

4. What form should membership take?

Many think that the current process for membership is fit for purpose. One Friend pointed out that membership in our new times should not be seen as a 'test to be passed' as it used to be. The grounds that were used to reject membership 30 years ago e.g. an applicant's beliefs were not sufficiently Christian, seem no longer appropriate. Another Friend says that a member joins in and contributes whatever suits their particular skill or abilities ; they just 'belong'.

But if we retain membership we should be happy with those who choose to remain attenders, recognising their reasons for this.

Surrey & Hampshire Border AM

23/03/02 Quaker membership – the way forward

We have heard the thoughts on 'membership' from our Local Meetings when they considered what it meant to them.

For some, it is important for practical reasons such as counting Friends, administration, budgeting and organising. It is seen as a necessary, and even a mandatory, part of being a Society and a charity. In contrast, there were suggestions on how practical matters, such as counting and charity status, could be handled without formal membership.

There were Friends for whom membership means belonging. A home with warmth like a 'wonderful cloak'. A core part of one's identity. A spiritual belonging.

Becoming a member can show commitment for some. Standing up and being counted. Showing a willingness to help and be actively involved in the running and organising of the Society. A leading to providing 'service', with an ensuing sense of belonging. An expression of their life and commitment to the local Quaker community.

There can be an expectation that members will take on (what can be seen as) the "burden" of running the Society, although this is an expectation seldom expressed. In practice the expectation is usually that Friends will help to the extent their circumstances allow.

It was noted that the membership process itself focuses on the spiritual and not on the practical matters. This, it was felt, is as it should be.

To become a member is challenging, however expressed. There is a sense that we are never really good enough (to qualify) - we are all still seekers. Our corporate testimonies can be challenging and daunting for some considering membership.

Being a membership of an Area Meeting was felt to be correct.

There was a sense that membership is not always explained to Attenders, such as, the process, the difference between members and attenders and so forth.

There is concern that a consequence of having no membership could be that the meeting conforms to the vision of those it has admitted. Our faith becomes unclear.

We heard from those for whom the status of 'Attender' felt excluding. A feeling of in-groups and out-groups. This feeling is not helped by a number of conventions, such as, the need to ask permission to attend business meetings, or being excluded from appointment to certain roles (being a member does not equate to ones availability, gifts and abilities). Some did not wish to "sign-up" - are not "joiners". In other cases membership had echoes of more formalised religion with creeds which they were trying to leave behind. For some it seems unnecessary.

Membership for some did not feel very Spirit led (not part of our 'Gospel Order'). It was felt that we should be about welcome, fellowship, community and relationship.

Sussex East AM

Why have membership?

Outward sign of Inner Commitment

Public Statement

Legal role appointing Trustees

Consider committed Attenders in Good Standing

Core Decision-making Body.

What is it for?

Charity Commission requirement

Trustees legal role & Duty (Quaker Law Breaking?)

Safeguarding issues

Minute of Decision - Legal Liability

Is it still necessary?

Charity Commission requirement.

Hold yourself to Account.

Mutual Support in Troubled times

To show Commitment

Pastoral Care by the Meeting

If so, what form could it take

What is difference between Members & Attenders?

The discussion around the above points was lively and explorative, many members saying they would attend Eastbourne FMH next weekend.

Additional point

Should we be a charity??? One key point voiced by several participants was the willingness to be prosecuted for breaking the law and this may mitigate against Charitable Status. where protest action may be dumbed down by Trustees of the Charity].

We discerned the difference between a spiritual, functional and a corporate sense of 'membership'.

Regular attenders share spiritually in our worship but may not wish to join or be identified as Friends.

Attenders have freedom of choice whether to remain attenders or become members.

Another suggestion was that, instead of Quakerly navel-gazing, we should actually ask our attenders to express openly their concerns about issues such as 'exclusivity'. Meeting by meeting could then become knowledge-based instead of vague self-flagellation because of worry about our declining membership.

There is yet another point to consider and that is the sense of commitment both financial and of service on committee. This comes to the fore during the process of visiting aspiring members – but even that process could be considered a sign of 'exclusivity' of Quakers.

Membership of the CofE electoral roll is also open to members in good standing of a Church not in communion with the Church of England" just as Quaker Area Meetings are open to Attenders of Good Standing.

When too few hands are willing, the unshared task is onerous. Yet to outsource and call in help is the start of a slippery road, one that can tear the heart and lose the soul of what it means to be a Quaker... So, what's to be done?

If the present trend of membership decline continues with our ageing demographic, we have to face the possibility of organisational failure, a winding-up or a merger in business terms.

We become a remnant church, holding the ground until the Spirit is renewed and the relief force reaches us - loyalty to a cause when all seems lost, except for our faith that the truth will one day prevail; not in our time though, not in our time.

1. Attenders can feel hurt and excluded when herded out of consideration of an item on the agenda of Meeting for Business. Isn't Quakerism an inclusive faith?

2. For some who attend Meeting that is enough. They may choose to exclude themselves from the management of the local meeting.
3. An organizational structure does need some boundaries to operate. This is not exclusion.
4. Perhaps we might have a category of Registered Attenders?
5. Membership is not about enabling people to take on tasks but a commitment being made and a responsibility undertaken.
6. All, whether a Friend or an Attender, are responsible for the Meeting for Worship which is the heart of our faith.
7. Why is membership tied to a local and area meeting? Young Friends in particular are often very mobile.
8. Our attenders are as important to our meeting as our Members are. Nominations Committees should be empowered to make the decision that an attender can fill a role in the meeting.
9. The process of becoming a Member can be perceived as fearsome and judgmental. It is not so and is often a sharing of questions in a warm and gentle way. The recommendation to Area Meeting is not a judgement on the virtue of the applicant for membership. Some attenders have felt they were not good enough to be Quakers.
10. Attenders who have taken up tasks in our meeting have given good service to us.
11. Some attenders may be seekers but perhaps we all are.
12. If we believe that there is that of God in all of us, why do we create barriers instead of looking for the good? The “silent assemblies of God’s people” should be available to all.

Reflections on Membership – extracts taken from the SEAQM study afternoon in February 2021 held in preparation for compiling the SEAQM Membership Matters leaflet.

What does Membership mean to you?

- Greater sense of commitment; of involvement; not just an observer
- Sense of belonging.
- Membership can be the glue joining the meeting together.
- Overcoming a fear of rejection (when applying).
- Overcoming a fear of being visited and judged (when applying).

- Membership is a confirmation of a journey; a journey away from something to something (Friends).
- Membership enables Friends to grow even further on their spiritual journeys.
- Membership gives a sense of identity: no longer ‘them’ but ‘us’; no longer ‘them’ but ‘we’.
- Becoming a member creates a strong sense of family.
- MfW is the most important thing in bringing Members and Attenders together.
- Roles and responsibility – what does one need to know about being a member?
- The many gifts attenders bring to meeting.
- Time as an attender is of great importance – it isn’t a ‘blank’ time.
- Applying for membership can seem a ‘big deal’ but actually easier than initially thought and there is no judgement in the process.
- Sense of obligation and commitment important in membership.
- Advice needed for potential new members about what obligations or expectations come along with Membership – some people felt they were put off applying for membership because they had no idea what expectations or obligations they would then find themselves involved in.
- Diversity of views between members is one of the strengths of Friends.
- Explorer’s groups create the opportunity for stretching one’s mind.
- Roles – it has been known for 1 attender to be brought into membership to fulfil a particular role but this is not usual practice.
- Attenders don’t have to feel that they are ‘perfect’ before applying for membership.
- Membership not only about people but also spirituality.

Sussex West AM

Minute 23.33 Feedback on Membership: Meeting for Sufferings’ call for discernment by area meetings

We have considered the questions raised by Sufferings in its consultation document about membership. In doing so we felt that the position of those Friends referred to as “unattached” or “non-geographic” were particularly relevant to our consideration of the four questions set out in the document. This reflects the importance of having a Society that is truly welcoming, supportive, and inclusive and in which membership, if it is to continue, can be seen as an opportunity rather than a barrier to participation. Friends in our Area Meeting expressed a wide range of views, and we are not in unity in our responses to the questions raised.

We are aware that these are complex matters about which many members and attenders feel strongly, and which goes to the heart of being a Quaker. For some membership was an important statement of identity while others questioned if membership was necessary, especially as in practice attenders could be as committed to Quakerism as members. While membership was seen an important

public declaration of commitment there were also fears that it creates an unhealthy 'two tier' structure of members and attenders within meetings. Differences were expressed about where membership should be located within the Society and whether it could be held at nationally or internationally rather than at area level. The rapid increase in the use of the internet may offer ways for membership to no longer be tied to one geographical location although this might have consequences for meetings being able to develop as local worshipping communities.

We considered the idea that as attenders and members were felt to be of equal value then it followed that attenders should be able to perform all Quaker roles if they were in accord with Quaker values. We did not come to a conclusion. We identified some practical difficulties without finding ways of resolving them. We noted that membership was originally the basis for pastoral care and financial support to members which made the position of "unattached" Friends of particular concern.

Another issue was that one of the roles of Pastoral Friends is to support attenders into membership which may be problematic if they were not in membership themselves. Questions about the extent that membership was required for certain posts in the local and area meetings and the extent to which this determined who could speak on behalf Quakers were also important. In our discussions a common thread was the importance of making our Quaker communities places where people and their contributions are valued, and their needs recognised and supported. To achieve this we need a level of organisation and administration carried out in a way that reflects our Quaker values.

We are unresolved as to how far membership of the Society is necessary to achieve these aims. We are concerned that, as part of this consultation, the voices of those members and attenders who have not taken part in our discussions so far are heard.

Swarthmoor (South West Cumbria) AM

Teesdale & Cleveland AM

MfS asked for these membership questions to be discussed :

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes – what form(s) could it take?

We have spent some time expressing views on these questions from the point of view of members and attenders. We have appreciated all views.

"Membership is a multi-faceted gem which is viewed differently from different sides"

“Is making a statement of commitment good enough”

!What is the relationship between membership and faith and membership and practice?”

“11.01- read it changing membership to Quakerism. How does it change the meaning?”

We ask Local Meetings to consider these questions and bring any thoughts back to March Area Meeting for a more considered discussion.

Consideration of Membership from Teesdale and Cleveland Area Meeting 18th March 2023

Local Meetings have been further considering the questions about Quaker membership that Meeting for Sufferings asked us to discuss:

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes – what form(s) could it take?

We have received minutes from 5 Local Meetings on their discussions and these are attached.

Today we've spent time in small groups, reflecting on the questions and the local meeting minutes, before returning to this matter as an Area Meeting in session.

We have heard of the personal importance of membership to Friends and how much making a formal commitment can mean to us. But we've also heard that we do not feel comfortable distinguishing between members and attenders in our organisational affairs, and for some of us this seems to mitigate against our testimony to equality.

We have valued the time we've had to reflect on these matters in the different parts of our Area Meeting. The discussions have been rich and have sometimes involved Friends sharing very personal feelings and experiences. Friends have at times spoken bravely and been able to listen deeply and lovingly. On the matter of formal membership, and the personal decisions we make to seek it or not, we have come to know one another a little better.

We feel this minute forms just part of our response to the questions and should be read alongside the minute from January Area Meeting and the minutes from Local Meetings to give a fuller picture.

Darlington LM

Darlington Friends held a discussion about Membership, in accordance with Area Meeting's request, prior to a shared lunch on February 26th. We were pleased to be

joined for the discussion by Alison Tarpey-Black, our new Local Development Worker.

After a short introduction, we divided into two groups to consider first the advantages of having the present system of membership, and then to consider its disadvantages. Below is a summary of the notes made by each of the two groups.

Advantages

Both groups felt that it was good to have a means of making a public declaration of commitment to the Society. We felt that this helped applicants to be clear about who they were and the kind of life they were trying to lead.

Having a named membership also gives the Society a pool of committed people to help ensure its functioning and continuation. This happens at every level, local, area and Yearly Meetings: in each of these, Friends are needed to fulfil roles, because we have (except at Friends House) few or no paid staff.

Membership also helps to maintain our internal discipline and our external reputation: Friends can be gently reminded just what it was they decided to take on in joining.

Disadvantages

Membership divides our communities into two 'classes', members and non-members. This was seen as divisive and was by far the greatest objection to having a named membership. Some other disadvantages (e.g. people fitted for roles but unable to fulfil them) derive from this.

There is also a sense that in joining, a person is asked to 'sign up' to the whole Quaker package. This is not so much in following our Peace and other testimonies, where there is some flexibility, but in following our business method and the discipline of our silent worship.

Problems with the present form of Membership

The main problem seen was that it is geographically located, and not everybody is. Students, in particular, are often located both at home (during vacations) and at College or University during term time: they do not want to give allegiance to one Meeting over another and prefer to belong to a Young Friends group (YFGM) which functions well with no formal membership.

Our discussions did not seek to take a view one way or another, but simply to identify the reasons on both sides of the question as to whether to have a formal membership. We think that our findings may well duplicate what others have found: but the question may be one with no answer.

Report of discussions on Membership at Great Ayton Meeting

Area Meeting has asked that we consider our thoughts on membership on the following headings

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes – what form(s) could it take?

We have had an inspiring meeting with many contributions as we try to answer the questions put to us by Area Meeting. The clerks will take time to write a full report to be approved by our next Meeting for Business

Report

About 13 Members and Attenders were present most of whom spoke of their experiences and gave valuable testimony. They included lifelong Members, those who have applied for membership over the years and others who are and are not considering membership.

Becoming a member was considered to be an important decision, not to be taken lightly, but to have been something aimed for over time as a commitment attenders wished to undertake. It gave identity and purpose to their lives and confidence in answering the question, “Are you a Quaker?”

We also had testimony from those who had searched through many Christian groups and were strengthened by becoming members. Others, whose allegiance was to other churches, felt they would be uncomfortable as members and were happy to remain attenders. They recognised that the Quaker experience supported their faith in both groups.

Some felt anxiety in the process of becoming a member, which threatens non acceptance. Much of this was allayed during the meeting with appointed Friends while some were disappointed that they were not more closely examined. Do we care enough for both applicants and appointed Friends? Acceptance by the Meeting was to all a joy.

We conclude that Membership is important and necessary:

that it serves to give confidence, strength, and faith to those who become members.

that it is and will remain necessary.

that the methodology of becoming a member needs to be considered.

Should Attenders be encouraged to apply for membership?

Do applicants and those Friends selected to report to Area Meeting need help to understand the function of, and prepare for, meeting?

Middlesbrough LM

We welcome the opportunity to discuss our current practice of having members and attenders in our Meeting.

We remind ourselves of the history of Friends in the 17th century who responded to the harsh treatment and loss of liberty by making a personal commitment to membership.

In our consideration of what membership offers us in the present day we acknowledge that it forms part of a structure that enables us to provide Pastoral care, Eldership and financial help.

Some members described how their decision to become a member was a commitment to themselves and formed an important part of their spiritual journey. One Friend described the commitment she valued that was offered by Meeting when she came into membership.

We strongly affirm that there is no difference in the faith and level of commitment between our Members and Attenders. We have long term Attenders who have served in roles in Meeting with loyalty and dedication.

We heard from one of our attenders that our Quaker terminology and methods can be confusing and challenging to understand. We ask ourselves whether we are offering enough guidance, nurturing and explanations to meet our attender's individual needs.

We strive to make the process of applying for membership a nurturing one but could it be perceived by some as a test to pass? Does it make attenders wonder whether they are good enough or will they be accepted?

We discussed whether having a perceived hierarchical structure is in keeping with Quakers.

If membership is a prerequisite for certain service then is this upholding our non-hierarchical society? Some of our practices were described by some of us as uncomfortable, for example, listing the numbers of members and attenders separately in minutes or not being able to consider someone to serve in a job because they are not a member.

We wondered whether being a member made us feel more obliged to take on a role in Meeting. Also did being an attender deter someone from taking on a role?

We found the following helpful. *Quaker faith & practice* 10.25

When we consider the criteria for, membership, the two greatest factors are community and commitment. Not just the a practical commitment, but a spiritual willingness to grow and learn ,out of which our practical commitment will evolve which in 1993 became YFCC Young Friends Central Committee, which in 1993

became Young Friends General Meeting has demonstrated that it is possible today for a large Quaker meeting to operate without any formal membership whatsoever. Our membership is more positive: simply our commitment to participate as “Young Friends of the Truth”.

We discussed whether it could be helpful for young Friends whose lifestyle leads them to living in lots of different places to be members of BYM rather than be attached to one local Meeting.

Osmotherly LM

At our Spiritual Exploration session we considered the meaning and nature of Membership.

We were reminded that early Friends did not feel the need for formal membership.

They had a close bond with each other through suffering and spiritual experiences.

Once life became easier in the early part of the 1700's membership was introduced to emphasise the commitment and discipleship. There were practical reasons for ensuring discipline and pastoral care including the support of the poor.

We considered how as individuals we view membership and we shared some deep and very personal experiences. Generally we felt that membership implies responsibility and duties as well as a feeling of belonging.

We are heartened by the blurring of the distinction between Members and Attenders today where both can take on roles to serve the Yearly Meeting, the Area Meeting and the Local Meeting.

Membership is still an essential step on our path towards belonging whereby we accept involvement, integrity and respect,

We value the discipline which membership requires of us.

Times do change and we may need to reflect on the challenges of the involvement of Friends through the use of Zoom Meetings or the position of Young Friends who are not yet settled in their life's journey and who may lack a settled Meeting for Worship to be part of. Their worshipping group may not fit in with the present patterns of membership based on the constraint of the Area Meeting structure.

Sometimes members may feel a wish to be released from membership (i.e. by resignation) to allow them freedom to explore and 'play'.

Cotherstone LM

Eight Friends (6 members, 2 attenders) met after MfW on 23rd April 2023 to reflect together on the membership questions posed by Meeting for Sufferings. Our process flowed back and forth between the spaciousness of worship sharing and the give-and-take of discussion. We noted that membership is with AM, not LM; and that

attenders and members are equally welcome, valued (and needed!) as LM role holders.

Friends shared about their own ongoing spiritual journeys. An attender challenged members to make the case for membership. Friends spoke of the value they find in making a commitment to the Quaker path.

We heard of deep valuing of the freedom of conscience and the diversity of views within Quakerism; of discomfort with “weighty Quakers” speaking for “we Quakers” as if we are a monolith; and of concern with resistance to change.

We heard of experiences of feeling pressured to join; of feeling less than fully accepted in the absence of an invitation to join; of not moving to join until invited; and of proactively enquiring how to join. We heard of eagerness to invite people to join and of the active discouragement of such outreach. We heard that our membership process is not necessarily clear to attenders.

We considered the self-reinforcing momentum of an institution with membership to promote the same for self-validation, aside from any intrinsic spiritual value. We heard of the conscientiously held perspective that the very existence of membership undermines our testimony of equality. We heard that many Quaker charities restrict their grants to members only; we wonder if that criterion will be revisited as this exploration unfolds.

We considered the suggestion that membership might be framed as being with BYM instead of with an AM, to accommodate Friends not geographically settled or otherwise not connected with a LM. We also acknowledged the value of the pastoral care handled by AMs and LMs and recognise the practical challenge of carrying that out on anything but a local or regional basis.

We are grateful for the opportunity to share our perspectives on these questions in a way that would have felt unimaginable a few years back.

Thaxted AM

Wensleydale & Swaledale AM

23/33 Meeting to discuss Membership

As recorded in our minute 23/9 10 Friends met online to begin initial discussion about Membership as requested by Meeting for Sufferings. Our feedback sent to meeting for Sufferings has not been recorded amongst official minutes sent by other Area Meetings, and so we agree to send this minute which includes our initial response below:

We met on Zoom on 28 November to begin initial discussions on membership.

Via worship share and then general discussion we had deep sharing. We were equally split between finding membership to be bonding and give a sense of belonging to thinking it was unnecessary and divisive. We aim to revisit the topic

West Kent AM

West Scotland AM

West Somerset AM

23.01 The Meeting is a time for Friends to consider the questions received from Meeting for Sufferings:

‘Why do we have membership? What is it for? Is it still necessary? And, if yes, what form(s) should it take?’

It has become clear that all these questions are interconnected and the answer to one affects the answers to the others.

Discussing these questions there was some uncertainty about the necessity of membership for legal or charity law reasons.

It is felt that:

- If the collective decision-making forum of Area Meeting can and does safely function without the need for membership with Trustees being responsible to Area Meeting.
- And if the situations where presently membership is considered essential are self-prescribed by the Society, and so could be changed, (apart from the position of Registering Officer which would need to be legally investigated.)
- Then, if this is correct, Membership is probably not necessary.

Membership has always been a two-way responsibility, originating in the requirement to account for those in need of support during times of persecution.

It is also important to keep track of those who do not attend MfW but who wish to keep their Membership.

If it is found that Membership is discerned to be necessary, then there is a strong feeling that any perceived hierarchy within the Quaker community, is artificial and detrimental.

If membership is to continue then it is felt that the membership process should be reviewed and simplified. It is felt that at present the process could be seen as daunting, off putting and even exclusive. We suggest for instance: -

- A model letter of application.

- A Spiritual mentor or companion for enquirers.
- The removal of the distinction between attenders or members in the roles they can fill.
- The acceptance of new ways that Friends can belong – such as through Woodbrooke.
- An option to follow the Young Friends concept of Membership through attendance, with an opt out option if required.

We are of the opinion that we need to get to know each other in the things that are eternal, to build and to nurture our community, and the question arises - Is formal membership still necessary for this?

West Weald AM

Minutes of Area Meeting for Consideration of Membership and Belonging held at Dorking Meeting House on 11.02.2023 in person and via zoom.

23/8 Membership is valued by Friends in membership as a commitment to the Quaker community and way of life.

We recognise that many friends not in membership also contribute greatly to our Meetings and show much commitment to our worship.

The membership process can be instrumental in helping us be clear about what it means to be part of the Religious Society of Friends and our lives of service, underpinned by our spiritual foundation.

We respect the reasons why some Attenders might not wish to, or have thought of, applying for membership. Exploring this more proactively with Attenders could prove helpful to us all.

23/9 Given that we feel both Members and Attenders can contribute equally to the life of both Local and Area Meetings, we suggest the importance of gifts and commitment friends bring are as important as formal membership.

Discernment of the appropriate friends to fill roles is at the heart of our Meetings being served well.

We need to know each other well before this discernment can take place and some guidelines might be useful here.

West Wiltshire & East Somerset AM

Wirral & Chester AM

Worcestershire & Shropshire AM

23.42 Response to Meeting for Sufferings' consultation on membership

We have considered, collectively and individually, the four questions about membership posed by Meeting for Sufferings last December. Written responses have been collated, and a summary considered at an open meeting of members and attenders held online on 3 July. We found that responses to qu.1 'Why do we have membership?' and qu.2 'What is membership for?' overlapped. We have therefore addressed qu.1 in terms of historical and organisational reasons for membership and qu.2 in terms of reasons important to each of us as individuals.

1. Why do we have membership? Historical and organisational reasons

Membership acknowledges that there is a core theology behind Quakerism, even if it is flexible at the boundaries.

Historically we kept records of members so that support could be provided to those in need/suffering, and this continues to be an important function. Another reason that remains as important today as throughout our history is the reputation of Quakers, nationally and internationally, as upholders of truth, equality, peace and justice; this is strengthened because we are known as a membership organisation.

In the UK, operating under the legislative framework of the Charities Act 2011, membership is necessary for CIO status.

2. Individual reasons for membership

For individuals, membership confers a sense of belonging and identity as a Quaker. The process of applying for membership focuses the applicant's attention on questions of faith and values, and becoming a member reinforces commitment to the purposes of the Society of Friends. Membership can be seen as a public declaration of a personally held belief, a form of witness, which is then recognised by a wider body of Friends.

3. Is membership still necessary?

A range of views were expressed, largely centring on the member/attender distinction. Some feel that the distinction between members and attenders is arbitrary and many attenders have found from personal experience extending over many years that it is not necessary to be a member in order to serve. Others feel that, although attenders are always welcome and often play a significant part in their Quaker community, certain roles, such as elder, should be undertaken by people who have made a public commitment (i.e. members).

4. If membership is still necessary, what form should it take?

Our reflections on qu.3 prompted another question, namely: why aren't attenders becoming members? We support the current range of possible ways of becoming a member, all thorough-going, but foregrounding shared awareness between the applicant and the community they seek to join.

We also feel that there needs to be a form of 'unattached membership' that is not geographically based. This might be more suitable for those who are committed to

their identity as Quakers but whose circumstances make regular affiliation to a particular meeting unfeasible; it might also be more appropriate to Friends who are more active in online Quaker communities.

We ask our clerk to send this response to Meeting for Sufferings.

York AM

2023/26 Membership

Further to minute 2023/6 the four questions circulated by Meeting for Sufferings about membership have been discussed by Friends in all our Local meetings. Relevant minutes were circulated with the agenda for this Area Meeting.

In their discussions Friends expressed a variety of views and we think it right to share all the minutes received with Meeting for Sufferings. Here are some general observations:

Membership, including the process of becoming a member, means much to many Friends and is seen as a commitment to shared values and principles. The Society of Friends has found it helpful and at times important to know how many members it has.

Other Friends who are very much involved in things Quaker are not 'joiners'.

Attendees should not be regarded as in any way inferior to members. We are all Friends at different stages of our spiritual journeys.

For many roles within the Society membership is not needed.

Some creative thinking is needed about the membership of younger Friends.

To conclude, whilst membership remains important it should be seen as one aspect of a worshipping community of Friends, the cohesion of which and sense of belonging are more important than its division into members and attendees.

We thank Friends for responding so thoughtfully to this request from Meeting for Sufferings.

1. Why do we have membership?
2. What is it for?
3. Is it still necessary? If yes,
4. What form(s) could it take?

Acomb LM

We note that Local Meetings have been asked by Meeting for Sufferings to consider the question of what membership of the Religious Society of Friends means today and to record a minute to evidence this, to be sent to Area Meeting.

We therefore note that at our Shared Lunch on 16 April 2023, John Guest led a session in which the participants considered the four questions that had been offered for discussion. The responses were circulated prior to the Meeting and are attached to these Minutes. We ask our clerks to forward our comments to the Area Meeting Clerk.

We thank John Guest for his imaginative work on our behalf.

1st part. What were the criteria we were using for in/out

- Whether people come to meeting
- Whether they have an active connection
- A living relationship
- All of these “except where prevented”

What are we a member of?

- Should not be a belief test
- It’s about belonging

Q1. Why do we have membership? produced the following comments.

- It’s being part of
- Need to define who we are
- Habit; it’s expected of organisations
- It’s what you do, not what you are

Q2. What is it for?

- The ability to exclude people
- Filtering

Q3. Is it still necessary?

- Filtering-excluding those we do not wish to remain Quakers, as in cases of abuse. (again)
- A list is necessary

Q4. If yes, what form(s) could it take

- National membership (how would we filter?)
- Cash and card (would they also need to attend?)
- YFGM becoming an AM for membership

Friargate LM

Whilst time does not allow us to consider each of these complex topics in detail today, we will attempt to bring together our main thoughts for Area Meeting.

- Membership is a declaration of commitment to the values and life of the Society and the
- collective response that that brings.
- We recognise that there are attenders who do not feel able to apply for membership, but who are committed to Quaker values and the Quaker way.
- Membership of the Society is not an award. It is, however, a sign that we believe ourselves to be on a spiritual journey and that we are at a particular stage on that journey.
- We are aware that, as an inclusive Society, membership may seem to be discriminatory. Nevertheless, for those of us in membership, it does matter, and that membership is important to us.
- There is a sense that as far as service is concerned, for most roles membership is not necessary, but rather a suitability to serve.
- We have been reminded of the deeply personal nature of belonging to a Quaker meeting, and that this is in turn enriched by the variety of that experience.

Harrogate LM

We dislike feeling any possible distinction between members and attenders, as fostering inequality; implying boundaries and exclusivity rather than openness and connection. Some people identify as non-joiners and resist pressure to become members.

The decision about when or whether to apply for Membership is very personal and meaningful.

Becoming a member is just one stage of a person's spiritual journey. Some Friends have been long term attenders without feeling any call to membership, others have been living the 'Quaker Way' for many years as non-members. Many enjoyed 'membership visits', both as visitors and applicant, as a good opportunity to talk deeply and explore our spirituality.

Many felt that 'Membership' was to be able to say with confidence 'I am a Quaker'; a commitment to shared values and principles; a way of identifying ourselves to others, and a solid foundation for discussions and personal decisions. But, importantly, we are all part of a much bigger movement with similar ideals rather than just being 'Harrogate Quaker Meeting' on its own. Some form of membership or commitment is probably necessary to enable wider communication with Britain Yearly Meeting. We recognise and accept the need for 'Quakers' as a body to have organisational structure and that some form of tabular/membership statement is probably an essential aspect of this. For counting, accounting and accountability purposes there does need to be some way of knowing who is a Quaker, who can speak and act on our behalf and what are the shared values and principles we are 'signed up to' as a body. Formal membership works as a 'rough guide' in these respects but it is perhaps too restrictive nowadays.

There is also the issue of younger Friends and people whose work or family lives mean they move around more and do not feel a stable connection or wish to 'belong to' one Local or Area Meeting. An affiliation or membership system that allowed Friends to be identified or consider themselves as Quakers without having to have formal Membership of an Area Meeting might work well for younger and more transient people and also provide an option for committed Attenders who do not feel that formal membership is right for them.

In practice we do not feel there is any sense of distinction between Members and Attenders in our Meeting, although there have been occasions when a 'technicality' has been highlighted in considering a particular role, in that some 'rules' suggest certain roles are only open to formal Members. But such rules could be changed if necessary.

We feel that the idea of Membership is not redundant. The journey, process and decision – either way – about membership remains significant for many of us albeit for wide ranging reasons.

23.15 Minute for York Area Meeting regarding the future of Membership

We have heard the report from Teresa Rose regarding the future of membership. This was in response to a minute from Meeting for Sufferings to consider the following: Why do we have membership? What is it for? Is it still necessary?, and if yes, what form(s) could it take?

We acknowledge that a distinction between Members and Attenders could be seen as divisive. Some Attenders are highly committed to serving our Meeting without feeling the need to become Members.

Many Friends see membership as part of their identity and welcomed engaging with the process of becoming a Member. We recognise that membership is also significant for administration. It may be possible in the future for Young Friends and committed Attenders to be regarded as Quakers without formal affiliation to a particular Area Meeting. We feel that membership is not redundant but there is scope for redefining the roles that Attenders can undertake.

We thank Teresa and the Pastoral Group for facilitating meetings to discuss this issue and Teresa for the preparation of the report which is appended to these minutes. The report has already been forwarded to Area Meeting, as it was required in preparation before today's date.

New Earswick LM

The following are some of the points made during our discussion. They are in no particular order but do give a flavour of what Friends said.

- Belonging is very important – if you are part of something it brings responsibilities.

- Our responsibility to those coming to meeting for the first time should last from their first day to their last,
- Being an attender enables the friend to learn about Quakerism and the responsibilities membership brings. The process of becoming part of a Quaker meeting reflects the Quaker approach to life. The visit can be mutually educative and revelatory for both the visited and visitor.
- If Membership was at BYM level rather than at AM and LBM level the process of visitation would be difficult and would need to be rethought. Is there a need to visit a friend who has been attending a Meeting for a long time and knows of the benefits and responsibilities of Membership?
- The process of joining is invaluable, it is a learning process,
- Membership is a signifier – telling ourselves and others of what we are.
- But Membership needs to be reviewed. The geographical basis of being a member at AM and LM level is inhibiting and needs expanding/
- Why are we asking the question? Is it because of the issue of roles and responsibilities requiring Membership? Is it because many meetings have a high proportion of attenders?
- The relentless fall in membership is a driver. The present geographically based process of becoming a Member is maybe inappropriate for the younger generation and others and for those who do not have a settled base.
- It is important not to apply pressure on attenders to join.
- It is important that the contribution to the life of the Meeting of Attenders is not overlooked or undervalued.

We confirm our commitment to Membership but hope the process can be reviewed, updated, expanded and improved in the light of a changing and more mobile society.

It is important that we constantly review what our membership gives us and requires of us and how membership supports us on our spiritual journeys.

Thirsk LM

We discussed membership matters and here are some of the findings:

Some of us felt enfolded by membership of the Society of friends and one attender said she felt she would feel hemmed in by membership.

We felt it was very much a matter of perception. Some people are joiners and others like to feel more free.

We felt liberated by the thought that even within membership we were not committing for life and that being a Quaker might be a part of a spiritual journey but not the destination.

We discussed whether we were part of a two-tier system which was at odds with inclusiveness.

Some felt very empowered by membership while others felt that membership would bring a requirement to take on roles.

Membership visits need to be done sensitively as at least one person felt that they were being examined!

We felt that membership of the society, rather than a local meeting, was especially appropriate for those young people at the point of leaving home and maybe moving to university or to another town where it might take time to establish links with the Quaker community.

Young Friends General Meeting

2023.05.01 Membership

In December 2022, Britain Yearly Meeting's Meeting for Sufferings issued a call for discernment, asking its members and their associated meetings to consider four questions regarding membership:

- Why do we have membership?
- What is it for?
- Is it still necessary?
- If yes, what form(s) could it take?

YFGM has engaged with these questions through a series of Special Interest Groups at our recent gatherings. Within YFGM, we do not practise membership in the same way that Area Meetings do; ours is a simple consequence of attending YFGM's events.

Although 'membership' for us is primarily administrative, rather than a public and personal commitment to the community, many YFGMers come to have a powerful sense of belonging. Traditional membership structures can present practical barriers to many younger Friends, and we feel that these difficulties need to be considered in the wider discussion around membership.

Our Special Interest Groups have had wide-ranging conversations but were not led to bring forward specific answers to the questions posed. There are many experiences of belonging among our membership and our discussions reflected the passion that many of us feel.

We are aware of our ability as YFGM to bring a unique perspective, reflecting both the perspective of our age range and our different existing approach. We are grateful for the consultation and look forward to engaging with ongoing discussions of this topic within the wider Yearly Meeting