

Establishing New Friends Meetings

Ye that are turned to the light, and gathered into it, meet together and keep your meetings, that ye may feel and see the life of God among you, and know that in one another.

George Fox, Epistle 186 (1659)

Christ Jesus ... you may see the beginning of his setting up his meetings, when he saith, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in the midst of them.'

George Fox, Epistle 249 (1667) Matthew 18:20

Few at first took care for the establishing men and women's meetings, though they were generally owned when they understood them: but the everlasting God, that sent me forth by his everlasting power, first to declare his everlasting gospel; then after people had received the gospel, I was moved to go through the nation, to advise them to set up the men's meetings, and the women's, many of which were set up.

George Fox, Epistle 373 (1681)

Southeastern Yearly Meeting (*SEYM*) encourages all who are moved to worship God after the manner of Friends to do so by participation in a Friends Worship Group, a Preparative Meeting or a Monthly Meeting.

Establishing Friends Worship Groups

In areas where no Friends Meetings exist, individual Friends and those drawn to Friends' ways are encouraged to meet together for worship and to seek Divine guidance. A natural experience arising out of this shared worship is a desire to participate in the wider community of Friends by becoming a recognized Worship Group within the Yearly Meeting.

A Friends Worship Group may also be formed when an established Monthly Meeting has grown so large that it becomes desirable for a group to meet separately, or when some of its members live a great distance from the established Friends Meeting. Such a worship group should follow a similar path as described below.

A Worship Group is a gathering of persons who meet regularly for public worship after the manner of Friends and desire to be identified as a Friends group. This Worship Group becomes part of the Quaker faith community by relating to a Monthly Meeting and the Yearly Meeting.

As a Friends Worship Group develops, it asks to be taken under the care of a Monthly Meeting. If there are no nearby Monthly Meetings able to undertake the care for the new Friends Worship Group, it may apply to be directly under the care of the Yearly Meeting (*SEYM*). The Monthly Meeting or *SEYM*

will appoint a Committee of Care (See advices to Care Committees at the end of this section.) to be available for support and guidance, but this action does not presume any particular path of development. It does, however, establish a recognized relationship with the Religious Society of Friends, establishing regular contacts within the wider world of Friends, and providing an avenue for membership of individuals, which comes only through a Monthly Meeting.

A Friends Worship Group names one of the group to serve as the convener and correspondent . It is beneficial if the convener / correspondent is a member of the Religious Society of Friends. Communications from the Monthly Meeting and SEYM (and other Friends groups and organizations) are addressed to the correspondent, who is responsible for sharing these with the entire Worship group.

Each Friends Worship Group should organize only to the degree that is right for it at a particular time, neither over-organizing nor avoiding whatever organization is needed to nurture the interests and concerns of its participants, including children. Organization also provides an avenue for contacts with other Friends groups and with the wider body of the Religious Society of Friends, both of which can enrich the life of the Worship Group.

Actions that may be carried out **ONLY** with the help and clearness of the Monthly Meeting that has care of the Worship Group include:

- receiving requests for membership in the Religious Society of Friends
- receiving or holding charitable contributions for tax deduction purposes,
- holding weddings or memorial meetings,
- or otherwise acting formally as an established Monthly Meeting.

If a Yearly Meeting Committee of Care has the care of the Worship Group, it will help the Worship Group make appropriate application to a SEYM Monthly Meeting and will assist in traditional Friends clearness process. This experience will help the Worship Group learn about and be guided in Friends practice. For a summary of this information, please read the Advices for a Friends Worship Group at the end of this section.

Any Monthly Meeting that takes on the responsibility of care for a worship group should notify SEYM and ask for a minute of recognition for this task. SEYM should then follow the development of this Worship Group by getting yearly reports from the Monthly Meeting having care of the Worship Group.

Establishing Friends Preparative Meetings

A Preparative Meeting is a Meeting for Worship that holds its own Meeting for Business and continues under the care of, and reports regularly to, a Committee of Care of a Monthly Meeting or SEYM. It looks forward to becoming a Monthly Meeting.

After a period of seasoning, the development of a Friends Worship Group often progresses in ways leading to the status of a Preparative Meeting. During this period a Worship Group is encouraged to call upon the Committee of Care from the appointed Monthly Meeting or SEYM for encouragement, advice or other help it needs. When a Worship Group feels it is ready to organize and conduct business in

the manner of an established Monthly Meeting, it asks the Committee of Care of the Monthly Meeting or SEYM for Preparative Meeting status. (Or The Committee of Care of the Monthly Meeting or SEYM can also suggest to the Worship Group that they ask for Preparative Meeting status.) The Committee of Care of the Monthly Meeting or SEYM, after a clearness process, may then prepare a minute recommending change to Preparative Meeting status. The Yearly Meeting, at its annual sessions or at an Interim Business Meeting, may approve the change in status.

A Preparative Meeting has the continuing care and counsel of its Committee of Care appointed by the Monthly Meeting or Yearly Meeting. A Preparative Meeting has officers and committees as needed, and holds monthly Meeting for Business. A Preparative Meeting has a budget that is a sub-budget of the budget of the Monthly Meeting that is caring for the Preparative Meeting. Each month it sends a copy of the minutes of its Meeting for Business to its Committee of Care. Both the original and copy sent to its Care Committee should be on acid free paper. When the Preparative Meeting begins the practice of Meeting for Business it should also follow the same practice of caring for minutes as a Monthly Meeting.

Actions that may be carried out only with the help and clearness of the Monthly Meeting that has care of the Preparative Meeting are receiving requests for membership, receiving or holding charitable contributions for tax deduction purposes, holding weddings or memorial meetings, or otherwise acting formally as an established Monthly Meeting. If a Yearly Meeting Committee of Care has the care of the Preparative Meeting, it will help the Preparative Meeting make appropriate application to a SEYM Monthly Meeting and will assist in traditional Friends clearness process. This experience will help the Preparative Meeting learn about and be guided in Friends practice. For a summary of this information, please read the Advices for a Friends Preparative Meeting at the end of this section.

Preparative Meetings can also be formed by a Monthly Meeting under a wide variety of circumstances, but generally such meetings will develop in order to meet the particular spiritual needs of a geographical group of Friends. Usually a definite group of Monthly Meeting members will assume responsibility for organizing the Preparative Meeting and for reporting frequently to the Monthly Meeting.

Any Monthly Meeting that takes on the responsibility of care for a preparative meeting should notify SEYM and ask for a minute of recognition for this task. SEYM should then follow the development of this preparative meeting by getting yearly reports from the Monthly Meeting having care of the preparative meeting.

Preparative meetings are encouraged to send a delegate to SEYM meetings, and to prepare the annual "state of the meeting" reports to be included in the documents in advance for SEYM annual sessions. With the guidance of the Monthly Meeting having care for the Preparative Meeting, Friends will determine which group is responsible for paying the annual assessments to SEYM, and other functions typical of a monthly meeting.

Preparative Meetings look forward to such growth and development as may enable them to become Monthly Meetings. This process depends upon many factors and there may be great differences in the time required.

Establishing Friends Monthly Meetings

A Monthly Meeting is usually established upon the initiative of a Preparative Meeting, and the process follows similar paths whether it is under the care of a Monthly Meeting or SEYM.

When a Preparative Meeting under the care of the Monthly Meeting feels ready to become a Monthly Meeting, and its Committee of Care, after a clearness process, agrees, then the Preparative Meeting sends a letter to the Clerk of the Monthly Meeting requesting change in status and asking that its letter be forwarded to the Yearly Meeting. The letter includes a statement telling why the Preparative Meeting wishes to become a Monthly Meeting and why it feels it is ready for this step. If the Monthly Meeting concurs, it forwards this request and a minute of agreement to the clerk of SEYM.

If the Preparative Meeting has been under the care of a Yearly Meeting Committee of Care, it sends the above-mentioned letter to the clerk of that committee. If the Yearly Meeting Committee of Care, after a clearness process, agrees with the request, it will forward the letter and a minute of agreement to the clerk of SEYM.

The Yearly Meeting Clerk will then appoint a Visiting Committee of Care of four or five Friends to discern with the Preparative Meeting their readiness. This committee should include one or two members of the earlier Committee of Care of the Monthly Meeting or Yearly Meeting, along with suitable and experienced Friends who have not been closely associated with the Preparative Meeting. Because they have already established relationships with the preparative meeting, the remainder of the Committee of Care continues its work of nurture and support during the same period that the Visiting Committee is in discernment of clearness of the preparative meeting regarding becoming a monthly meeting. The Committee of Care is also available to consult with the Visiting Committee as needed. The Committee of Care is laid down when SEYM accepts the report of the Visiting Committee recommending recording of Monthly Meeting status.

In either of the above cases, the Visiting Committee of Care meets as often as possible with the Preparative Meeting, making sure its attenders are aware of the responsibilities of a Monthly Meeting and giving all possible guidance. All necessary time should be taken. Great care and deliberation at this stage may prevent serious complications later. The Visiting Committee regularly attends Meetings for Worship and Meetings for Business and visits with attenders of the Preparative Meeting.

The following guidelines and queries are suggested for consideration by the Preparative Meeting and the Visiting Committee of Care:

1. **Recording.** The Preparative Meeting compiles a complete list of names and addresses of its regular attenders, noting those who are members of the Religious Society of Friends and indicating in which Monthly Meeting and Yearly Meeting, if other than SEYM, their memberships are held.
2. **Spiritual Condition.** Does the Preparative Meeting function under divine guidance? Is the Meeting for Worship the center of life of the Preparative Meeting? What is the vitality of the

Meetings for Worship? Are they held in the spirit of expectant waiting and communion with God?

3. **History and Experience.** How long has the Preparative Meeting been meeting? What relations does it have with other Meetings? What geographical area does it serve? Where and when is its Meeting for Worship? What is the usual attendance? How many Friends, regular attenders and children are there in the Meeting? Of the individuals and families taking responsibility for the Meeting, how many appear well settled in the area? How do the lives of the people in this meeting speak to the outside world? Are responsibilities for the meeting's business and activities shared fairly by all? The responses to these and similar questions need to be recorded and saved to begin the history of the new monthly meeting.
4. **Evidence of Good Order.** Has the Preparative Meeting studied the Faith and Practice of SEYM? Does it hold a monthly Meeting for Business in the manner of Friends? How are the minutes taken and approved? Are the functions of Clerk and other officers understood? What Committees does the Meeting have? Are the functions of the Committee(s) on Ministry and Counsel understood and carried out? Are financial matters being handled in a competent manner according to Friends' principles? How are the Meeting's officers and committees and Nominating Committee selected? How are children included in the life of the Meeting? Are there religious education programs for children and adults?

If the Visiting Committee of Care agrees that the Preparative Meeting is ready to become a Monthly Meeting, it prepares a written report, including evaluation of fitness in reference to the above guidelines, and presents this report at the next session of SEYM Interim Business Meeting or Yearly Meeting, with a recommendation to become a new Monthly Meeting in SEYM. At this session of Interim Business Meeting or Yearly Meeting, the report will be reviewed. It will be accepted for submission to the Yearly Meeting annual sessions, or the Visiting Committee of Care may be requested to obtain additional information (and the application will be considered at a subsequent Interim Business Meeting or Yearly Meeting annual sessions).

After the Visiting Committee report has been accepted by SEYM, a minute of recognition of Monthly Meeting status for the requesting Preparative Meeting will be prepared by the Executive Committee. The minute will be submitted to the next annual session of the Yearly Meeting.

After approval of the minute of status change by the Yearly Meeting, SEYM formally records Monthly Meeting status for the requesting meeting. The minute will be conveyed to the Preparative Meeting and a date set for a "meeting for organization and celebration", at which the Visiting Committee of Care is present. Prior to the meeting for organization and celebration, the Preparative Meeting now may accept applications for new or transferred membership, and Friends membership procedure will be followed with the guidance of the Visiting Committee of Care. Memberships are recorded at the organizational meeting. The Visiting Committee of Care continues to be regularly available to the new Meeting for consultation for a year or more following its recording as a Monthly Meeting.

SEYM has always been blessed by the presence of seasoned Friends who come into our area. At times, these seasoned Friends may make up the majority of attenders of a new worshiping group or meeting. This group, seeking together, may be led to request a different path for becoming a Monthly Meeting affiliated with SEYM. They will seek guidance from a wide variety of seasoned Friends in SEYM to discern whether Monthly Meeting structure and status is appropriate for their worshiping group. When the SEYM Friends and the worshiping group are satisfied that their knowledge and practice in Quaker principles and procedures is of a sufficient depth and duration, they may directly request that SEYM under Divine Guidance work with them to devise a procedure other than that described above for them to become a Monthly Meeting.

Advices for a Friends Worship Group

- ◆ Worship Groups may find Meeting for Worship their only group activity. It is acceptable to continue in this fashion for an indefinite period of time.
- ◆ Some Worship Groups may have shared meals, reading groups, study groups, and discussion groups. With the guidance and support of their Monthly Meeting or Yearly Meeting Committee of Care they may have service projects, religious education, public witness or worship sharing groups.
- ◆ Worship Groups need to be mindful of the dangers of attempting too many things during their initial enthusiasm or of having an individual or couple carry all of the responsibility. Be mindful that Quakerism is a group religious responsibility.
- ◆ It is essential that those who participate in a Worship Group be dedicated to the leadings of the Light and that the group be devoted to growth in the Spirit.
- ◆ Worship Groups will inevitably suffer discouragements and setbacks due to the departure of participants or other difficulties that may arise. This is an opportunity for patiently working through setbacks or conflicts in a loving manner. It is important to persevere and continue to meet regularly for worship at the appointed hour even though only one or two are able to meet. In doing so, hold absent attenders in the Light and in the prayer that all may come to know the comfort of an ongoing Worship Group.
- ◆ Worship Groups are encouraged to maintain regular contact with the Committee of Care of the Monthly Meeting or Yearly Meeting and ask for help as needed. The purpose of a Committee of Care is to nurture and guide the Worship Group.
- ◆ It is important to keep corresponding bodies informed when a new contact / correspondent is chosen or the contact / correspondent's address changes.
- ◆ If the Worship Group needs to receive and distribute charitable contributions for tax deduction purposes on behalf of its attenders, it must ask a SEYM Monthly Meeting to act as its financial representative. Until it becomes a Monthly Meeting, the Worship Group is unable to apply for non-profit status from the government.

Advices for a Preparative Meeting

- ◆ It is essential that the Preparative Meeting be dedicated to the leadings of the Light and devoted to growth in the Spirit.
- ◆ A Preparative Meeting, when organizing itself, should first appoint a clerk and recording clerk, and then hold Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business monthly. The recording clerk will prepare the minutes from the Meeting for Business and send them to the Committee of Care of the Monthly Meeting or Yearly Meeting.
- ◆ A Preparative Meeting appoints committees and committee clerks as needed to accomplish its goals. Establishing an effective method of communication, such as a newsletter or website, is an advisable way to further contact with Friends.
- ◆ Preparative Meetings should be large enough to be able to undertake, with the guidance and support of their Monthly Meeting or Yearly Meeting Committee of Care, such activities as service projects, religious education, public witness or worship sharing groups.
- ◆ Preparative Meetings need to be mindful of the danger of *having too many activities* or having an individual or a very small group carry all of the responsibility, for this can invite exhaustion and disillusionment.
- ◆ Preparative Meetings will inevitably suffer discouragements and setbacks due to the departure of participants or other difficulties that may arise. It is important to persevere and continue to meet regularly for Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business at the appointed hour.
- ◆ Preparative Meetings should maintain regular contact with their Committee of Care. The committee's purpose is to nurture and guide the Preparative Meeting and can be of service if it is able to participate in joint corporate discernment with the Preparative Meeting.
- ◆ If the Preparative Meeting needs to receive and distribute charitable contributions for tax deduction purposes on behalf of its attenders, it must to ask a SEYM Monthly Meeting to act as its financial representative. Until it becomes a Monthly Meeting, the Preparative Meeting is unable to apply for non-profit status from the government.
- ◆ It is important to keep corresponding bodies informed when a new clerk or corresponding clerk is chosen, or any addresses change.

Advices for the Committee of Care and the Visiting Committee

- ◆ The Committee of Care and the Visiting Committee affirm that this work is undertaken in a spirit of celebration with an eye upon how each committee can best serve and facilitate the joyous event of forming a new Friends Monthly Meeting.
- ◆ The Committee of Care and the Visiting Committee have the responsibility to nurture the growth and education of the nascent worship group or preparative meeting in Friends practice.
- ◆ The Committee of Care should monitor the progress of the worship group or preparative meeting and encourage them to request the next level of formal status, e.g. move from “worship group” to “preparative meeting” when it appears suitable to do so.
- ◆ The work of the Committee of Care ends when SEYM accepts the favorable report of the Visiting Committee. After that time the Visiting Committee continues to nurture and support the Preparative meeting and be available for guidance.
- ◆ It is important that the worship group or preparative meeting understand that the community is a group responsibility. The Committee of Care and the Visiting Committee are charged with helping them accept their role as loving ministers to each other in the blessed community.
- ◆ The greatest gift the Committee of Care and the Visiting Committee can give to this work is their loving presence in the lives of the worship group or preparative meeting. Both committees should be prepared to have at least one member of either present as much as possible throughout the worship group’s or preparative meeting’s process of becoming a new Friends Monthly Meeting.
- ◆ After formal recording of Monthly Meeting status, the Visiting Committee should continue to nurture these relationships and be prepared to be present for guidance for the new Monthly Meeting for at least one year or longer.
- ◆ The Committee of Care and the Visiting Committee will make regular reports to the Monthly Meeting having the care of the worship group or preparative meeting and to SEYM.