

Alternative Membership Pathway Proposal

Ministry Coordinating Committee, the Committee to Revise Faith and Practice, and the Alternative Membership Pathways Working Group are *deeply grateful* for the questions, feedback, and ministry received from individuals and monthly meetings regarding the proposed alternative pathway to membership with New York Yearly Meeting. Since 2016, we have lovingly labored with how to best address the barriers of traditional membership to some Friends while honoring the rich tradition of local meeting membership in New York Yearly Meeting and the wider Religious Society of Friends. We have heard and held each of your concerns and are prepared to offer a second reading of the proposed revision to Faith and Practice at Fall Sessions 2019.

To ensure that we as a Body are prepared for this item of business, we would like to offer responses to some of your most frequently asked questions and explain how we have addressed your feedback. We also encourage you and your Monthly Meetings to refresh your memory and understanding of the [background](#) and [timeline](#) of this work.

Background: <http://bit.ly/backgroundampwg>

Timeline: <http://bit.ly/timelineampwg>

Your Questions and Concerns Answered

1. *Monthly Meetings are the basic unit of our Society. Doesn't that mean that membership should always live there?*

For many, Monthly Meetings remain the basic unit of our Society, and through our discernment we have learned that for many others this is not the case. Initially, there was no membership in our Society and identification as a Friend was that of a declaration of inward connection to the Light (God). Formalized membership was created in 1737 to ensure welfare was more carefully distributed to those who were an active part of the faith as well as to provide Committees for Sufferings for persecuted Friends. This formalized membership also sought to ensure leadings could be tested and corporately discerned. The new membership pathway does not take away the sacredness of membership with a Monthly Meeting; it instead offers an additional pathway for Friends who believe that the Yearly Meeting can and in many cases already does serve these functions for people who have not found a home in a Monthly Meeting.

2. *What happens with all our other practices that are linked to membership (marriage, religious education, transfer of membership, etc.)?*

This proposal only offers a process for membership with the Yearly Meeting and does not seek to address any related concerns. Additional revisions to Faith and Practice will take more time and require more discernment from our Body. We understand that this change might affect many areas of our practice and have faith that we can move forward without having every detail worked out. This is the beginning of an experiment in continuing revelation.

3. *Our Monthly Meeting hasn't experienced this concern. Where is this coming from?*

The people for whom this new pathway is most relevant often have not found a home at a Monthly Meeting. Therefore, it makes sense that you have not experienced or heard this concern firsthand. Since 2016, the Alternative Membership Pathways Working Group has held workshops, traveled to Meetings, and collected stories from dozens of people who are not currently members but who are Quakers in faith *and* in practice. This new pathway seeks to invite people in from the margins and to tell them, "yes, you belong here with us."

4. *In the text of the first reading, there was no mention of regular worship, before or after someone sought such affiliation, nor was there any mention of a spiritual dimension of any kind in an applicant's process of seeking membership in the Yearly Meeting.*

When we presented the first reading, we neglected to include the full membership section of Faith & Practice where worship and spiritual grounding are emphasized as a part of membership. This was an oversight and led to misunderstandings. We have added some language to the Yearly Meeting Membership section itself to address this concern. However, this new pathway should be seen as a second option to membership with the same functions and accountability structures as membership with Monthly Meetings. We have included the full membership section with the second reading. It is important that we understand that this larger section is not being revised at this time and should we seek to redefine membership at large, we should follow our process to revise Faith and Practice to do so.

5. *I joined a Monthly Meeting and membership has been so important to my experience as a Quaker. Why are we making exceptions to our practice? Are the people seeking this new form of membership trying to circumvent tradition?*

It is so important to understand that most of the people with whom we have spoken wish that they could become a member of a Monthly Meeting. Since 2016, the Working Group has identified several barriers that exist for those who are seeking to either enter Quakerism or remain within it but are isolated from or prohibited from attending regular Monthly Meetings. Some of these barriers are schedules, differences in culture, differences of theology, incarceration, not being understood on one's spiritual journey, scheduling, distance, and caretaking responsibilities. This proposed pathway does not in any way diminish the importance of membership with local meetings. Instead, it seeks to bring people into a different type of spiritual community that is more accommodating to certain people's lives.

6. *Won't this take people away from our Monthly Meetings which are already struggling to find members?*

No, and we hope that the opposite will be true. Monthly Meetings will remain the primary and most central entry point for new Friends and we do not expect for very active members to have any desire to transfer their membership to the Yearly Meeting. The people for whom this pathway would be relevant are mostly not members or not active members in Monthly Meetings. By providing an alternative pathway to membership, we anticipate welcoming more people into our Beloved Community and providing more opportunities for these Friends to interact with and potentially find a home in a local meeting.

7. *Will members of the Yearly Meeting eventually become members of a Monthly Meeting?*

Some members of the Yearly Meeting may eventually find membership in Monthly Meetings, but this is not a requirement of membership with the Yearly Meeting.

8. *What does accountability look like for members of the Yearly Meeting? How do we know that they're "in good standing"?*

Membership with the Yearly Meeting will follow the same accountability standards as Monthly Meetings. Ministry and Pastoral Care will provide oversight of membership, help members discern and test leadings, and offer mentorship, eldership, and support as needed. Members will contribute to the Yearly Meeting as they might to a Monthly Meeting by serving on committees, attending Sessions, and donating time and resources as appropriate.

9. *Who will be the people seeking membership in the Yearly Meeting?*

We haven't tried it yet so we don't quite know who will be led to take this alternative pathway to membership. However, we expect that this pathway will be most appealing to people who are already involved with the Yearly Meeting and who are more transient, isolated, or unable to attend their local meetings. Some of the populations we have identified as likely to pursue this option are young adults, people who travel or move frequently, people who are incarcerated, and people who live far from a local meeting. In all cases, people seeking membership will participate in a clearness process to discern if membership with the Yearly Meeting is in good order.

10. *Will this be the only pathway being added?*

For now, this is the only alternative pathway being presented for approval. As we learn and grow, other forms may emerge in the future.

FAITH & PRACTICE REVISION FOR CONSIDERATION AT FALL SESSIONS 2019

- *New sections in red*
- *For purposes of consistency, "Ministry and Pastoral Care" is used to mean any committee with those functions, including Ministry and Counsel, Ministry and Oversight, and other such usages*
- *The proposed pathway revision being considered begins [HERE](#)*

2. MEMBERSHIP

Friends accept into active membership those whose declarations and ways of life manifest such unity with Friends' views and practices that they may be expected to enter fully into religious fellowship with the meeting. Part of the essential genius of the Society is the experience of growth through common worship and the loving acceptance of an individual by the group. It is an open fellowship that recognizes that of God in everyone.

Those inclined to join us should review carefully this entire book of *Faith and Practice* and other Friends' literature so as to gain an understanding of the basis of the Quaker faith, mode of worship, and manner of transacting business. They should attend meetings for worship and for business for a sufficient period of time to become convinced that membership will nourish and enrich their continuing growth in the life of the Spirit. They should be aware that this growth may entail changes in every aspect of their lives.

There are two paths to becoming a member of the Religious Society of Friends in New York Yearly Meeting. The first is to apply to a monthly meeting or executive meeting. Membership in a monthly or executive meeting includes membership in the quarterly or equivalent meeting, the New York Yearly Meeting, Friends United Meeting, and Friends General Conference.

The second path is to apply directly to the Yearly Meeting without specifying a monthly meeting. The application, addressed to the Clerk of Ministry & Pastoral Care of New York Yearly Meeting, should include the applicant's spiritual journey, their involvement in a Friends organization, and why applying to a monthly or executive meeting is inappropriate or impossible at this time. As with membership in a monthly meeting, membership in the yearly meeting includes membership in Friends United Meeting and Friends General Conference.

All applicants for membership should have knowledge of the Friends World Committee for Consultation, the American Friends Service Committee, and the Friends Committee on National Legislation.

Whichever path is chosen, membership is a privilege and entails a corresponding responsibility. Members should be prepared to give resources of time and money. The shared ministry of the Society and the importance of the proper functioning of committees and meetings demand participation and cooperation. Membership is a commitment to enter wholeheartedly into the spiritual and corporate activities of the Society and to willingly assume responsibility for both service and support as the way opens.

APPLICATION TO A MONTHLY MEETING. A person applying for membership should address a letter to the monthly meeting, stating the reasons for wishing to join the Religious Society of Friends and indicating the extent of unity with its principles and testimonies. This letter, addressed to the monthly meeting, is forwarded to the meeting's committee on ministry and pastoral care, who should acknowledge it promptly.

The committee on ministry and pastoral care will appoint from among their members a clearness committee, which has the responsibility to evaluate an applicant for membership. Monthly meetings without a formal committee on ministry and pastoral care will undertake this responsibility directly. Although not requiring acceptance of any specific statement of faith or theological formulation of belief, the clearness committee should ascertain by personal visits the religious background and views of the applicant and the person's knowledge and acceptance of Friends' principles and practices. In particular, the applicant should be acquainted with the varieties of religious interpretation existing throughout the Society and with its emphasis on the loving spirit and teachings of Jesus. The applicant should discuss frankly with the clearness committee any reservations concerning Friends' beliefs and practices.

The clearness committee will explain the responsibilities and opportunities inherent in membership. These include faithful attendance at meetings for worship and business, service on committees, sharing in financial support of the

meeting, and involvement in regional and yearly meeting activities. The clearness committee will report to the monthly meeting's committee on ministry and pastoral care who will then make a recommendation to the monthly meeting. If the committee reports that they find no obstruction, the monthly meeting may immediately receive the applicant into membership. If the committee feels that the applicant is not yet ready for membership, they may postpone recommending action until a subsequent meeting. It is then their responsibility to become better acquainted with the applicant and to offer such instruction and guidance as seem appropriate.

When the monthly meeting accepts an applicant into membership, the clerk records the action and furnishes the new member a copy of the approving minute. The meeting may appoint a welcoming committee.

Each meeting has a corporate personality of its own, so it is inevitable that there will be local coloration in the interpretation of membership requirements. This should not be construed, however, as license to impose additional requirements for membership or to set aside the guidelines in this Discipline. The receiving meeting must be mindful of the fact that it acts not only in its own behalf but in the name of the Religious Society of Friends in its entirety.

APPLICATION TO THE YEARLY MEETING.

An adult who applies for membership "at large" in the body of New York Yearly Meeting is expected to have been actively involved in the yearly meeting business, committees, communities, worship, events, or sessions. Sometimes life circumstances make it difficult or impossible to join or regularly attend a monthly meeting. Applicants may be incarcerated, living in remote locations, frequently traveling, working as caregivers, or simply not finding a spiritual home in a nearby monthly meeting. Those seeking membership by this path should be prepared to give resources of time and/or money, and to participate in the work of the yearly meeting through committees, task groups, sessions, and Powell House. A commitment to enter wholeheartedly into the spiritual and corporate activities of the Society and to assume responsibility, as way opens, is expected.

The prospective Friend should write a letter addressed to the clerk of the Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee of New York Yearly Meeting stating the reasons for joining the Religious Society of Friends and why membership under the care of the yearly meeting is sought at this time, rather than membership through a monthly or executive meeting. The letter should include the applicant's experience in worship, how the applicant is in unity with Friends' testimonies and principles, and how the applicant envisions being involved in New York Yearly Meeting.

A designee of Ministry and Pastoral Care and at least one other Friend with a seasoned understanding of New York Yearly Meeting will consider the application letter and appoint a clearness committee of at least three people. If the applicant is recommended for membership by the clearness committee and the Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care unites with that recommendation, the clerk of Ministry and Pastoral Care will advise the clerk of Ministry Coordinating Committee and the New York Yearly Meeting office to record the new friend as a member. Ministry Coordinating Committee may appoint a welcoming committee.

CHILDREN. Friends have a particular responsibility to bring children under the loving care of the meeting. Friends should be sensitive to the needs of these young people, nurturing their spiritual well-being and helping them grow into mature and concerned members.

Meetings differ in the ways in which they encourage children's participation. Some monthly and executive meetings record children as members at birth or adoption when both parents are members, unless parents request otherwise. Meetings may also extend membership to children under age 18: a) by written request of both member parents; b) by request of a member parent and written consent, if possible, of the nonmember parent; c) by request of a guardian; OR d) by request of the child upon recommendation of the committee on ministry and pastoral care. Some meetings record children as associate members.

[It is] our desire that all persons on whom involuntary membership has been conferred, either by birth or through entrance of parents into membership, be reaffirmed by commitment at an age which would make this appropriate.

– Yearly Meeting Minute #13, 1976

All members age 18 and over are considered adult members for statistical and financial purposes.

SOJOURNING MEMBERSHIP. Friends who expect to be residing temporarily within the limits of monthly meetings not their own may request from their own meetings recommendations of sojourning membership. If their meetings approve, they may issue certificates commending these Friends to the other meetings and stating the lengths of time during which the sojourning memberships are to be effective. This temporary residence may include intermittent periods, such as that of students attending school or college or of Friends working under concerns that take them from home. Following the general procedures for membership applications, the meetings with which they wish to associate may accept Friends into sojourning membership, according them the same privileges and responsibilities as full members but not including them in the total membership of the meetings for statistical reports.

A certificate of sojourning membership does not terminate the membership in the originating meeting.

ATTENDERS. Attenders are those who manifest a continuing interest in the life of the meeting. Friends should welcome their participation in activities of the meeting, but they may not serve as clerks of the meeting, treasurers, elders, trustees, or members of ministry and pastoral care, or on the Finance, Advancement, or Nominating Committees, and they should know that it is the members who must make the decisions in the meetings for business.

TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP. **When a monthly meeting or the yearly meeting receives a request for transfer** from one of its members, the relevant Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care should carefully inquire into the condition of the member's religious and temporal affairs. If, on such inquiry, it seems proper to do so, the meeting should direct its clerk to issue a minute of transfer and promptly forward it to the monthly or yearly meeting to which transfer is desired. Transfer minutes for those recorded in the gifts of ministry should so state. If objection to a transfer appears, the clerks of the meetings involved should confer.

When the meeting to which the member wishes to transfer receives the minute, its clerk should refer it to the relevant Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care. Unless objection appears, the meeting should accept and record the Friend as a member. Until this is done, the Friend remains a member of the former meeting. The clerk of the meeting accepting the transfer should notify the former meeting of that action. One or more Friends should be appointed to visit the transferred member and extend a welcome.

JOINING OTHER DENOMINATIONS. If a member wishes to join another religious denomination, **the monthly or yearly meeting may grant a letter of recommendation and remove the individual's name from membership.** When any member has joined another denomination without requesting a letter of recommendation, the monthly or yearly meeting should remove the individual's name from the list of members, and the clerk should send notice of this action to the person concerned.

RELEASE FROM MEMBERSHIP. **When a member requests the monthly meeting or yearly meeting to release her or him from membership,** the meeting should appoint Friends to visit (or write to) the member and to inquire sensitively into the matter. If the member does not reconsider, the meeting should release that Friend from membership. The clerk should write to the former member, quoting the minute of release. For reinstatement, the applicant must follow the usual order of application for membership.

DISCONTINUANCE. After having made sustained and diligent efforts to reclaim the commitment of those Friends who have lost touch with meetings, **monthly meetings or the yearly meeting may discontinue their membership.** Before taking that action, the meeting should have sent letters of loving inquiry to such members at least once a year for a period of three years. Having received no satisfactory replies, the monthly meeting clerk or the clerk of the Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care may make a minute discontinuing membership and so inform the person(s) concerned.

DISOWNMENT. Whether at the monthly or Yearly Meeting level, a meeting should not disown a member until every method of reconciliation has been exhausted. Formal complaints against a member should be considered

prayerfully by the Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care. A committee appointed to confer with the member should labor in love to try to resolve the problem. Care should be taken to distinguish between the deed and the doer. If the committee is unable to restore the member to fellowship with the meeting, the matter should be brought before the monthly meeting or the Yearly Meeting's Committee on Ministry and Pastoral Care which will, if it still be unresolved, prepare a minute of disownment. The member shall be given a copy of the minute and the membership records updated accordingly.

A disowned member of a monthly meeting may appeal the disownment to the appropriate regional meeting within six months for a review. If the regional meeting upholds the decision of the monthly meeting, the individual can still appeal to the yearly meeting. Likewise, a disowned member of NYYM can appeal to Ministry Coordinating Committee and then the yearly meeting. When there is a review before a quarterly or the yearly meeting, a committee of three should be appointed to represent the membership body from which the appeal is taken. Review may, by common accord, be conducted before a judicious and representative committee appointed by the meeting to which appeal is made rather than before the entire meeting.