

## **Background: The Alternative Membership Pathways Working Group**

The Alternative Membership Pathways Working Group (AMPWG) under the care of Ministry Coordinating Committee (MCC) began out of a 2016 Summer Sessions Quakerism 101 course about the importance of membership in the Religious Society of Friends. Young Adult Friends spoke to barriers they faced in traditional membership and in response, the AMPWG was born to discern new pathways to membership within New York Yearly Meeting and beyond.

Quaker history was reviewed by the group. We learned that initially, 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 prevent ranterism, ensuring leadings could be tested and corporately discerned. Taking into account this history, the AMPWG worked to identify 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 incarceration, schedules, differences in culture, theologies, not being understood on one's spiritual journey, scheduling, distance, and care-taking.

The working group met regularly between 2016 and 2018 and reached out to a wide variety of members and attenders both online and at many a Friends' gatherings. An AMPWG email account welcomed the diverse stories of those who had membership process successes or difficulties. An article was published in Friends Journal presenting different viewpoints towards membership with a call for stories from readers. A Powell House weekend of over 30 people later brought together representatives from three different Yearly Meetings to reflect on and re-envision membership pathways through centered worship and numerous topic explorations. AMPWG additionally facilitated a day of worship sharing at the Friends Center for Racial Justice, holding space for Friends in Western NY, with questions such as: "Knowing that racism has always impacted membership how do we invent new pathways?". Finally, AMPWG also received feedback from the Attica Friends Worship Group and continues to explore ways that alternate pathways can more fully support incarcerated Friends. AMPWG has discerned this attached process to be a new path that we can learn from due to who applies for it and how Friends utilize it to describe their relationship with their spiritual home (even by and under utilization of this process). AMPWG will use this path as continuing revelation as we seek to ensure all Friends, especially those who are incarcerated, have a path to membership.

After this presentation, AMPWG encourages members and attenders to conduct their own discussions on membership and what types of alternative pathways could exist for people who are isolated from or prevented from regularly attending Monthly Meetings. We invite Friends to review Faith & Practice's entries on membership and see how your meeting's culture uses that guidance and what may be left unaddressed in both the text and in the proposal that follows.

The following process is the first alternative pathway put together by AMPWG, presented at both 2017 Fall and 2018 Summer sessions for approval by MCC. We welcome Friends' feedback, ideas, questions, and look forward to moving forward in discernment together about how to be more inclusive to all. Please join us in creating this path and seeing what we learn as we walk down it.

## **Membership Under the Care of New York Yearly Meeting**

### **Criteria for Applying**

- Friend is actively involved in New York Yearly Meeting business, committees, communities, worship, events, or sessions;
- Friend's life circumstances make it difficult or impossible to regularly attend or find home at a Monthly Meeting (people in remote locations, caregivers, incarcerated Friends, etc.); or Friend feels as though New York Yearly Meeting is their spiritual home;
- Friend is able to give resources of time and/or money to the work of the Yearly Meeting or the entities therein (committees, Powell House, Sessions, etc.);
- Friend is committed to enter wholeheartedly into the spiritual and corporate activities of the Society and willingly assumes responsibility for both service and support as the way opens.

### **Process within Ministry Coordinating Committee**

1. The Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee of Ministry Coordinating Committee considers requests for membership under the care of New York Yearly Meeting.
2. The designee of Ministry and Pastoral Care, with the help of a well-connected Friend, considers application letters and appoints a Clearness Committee of at least three people for each applicant. When selecting Clearness Committee members, attention is paid to geography, needs of the applicant, familiarity, diversity and inclusiveness, and representation from multiple bodies within New York Yearly Meeting.
3. Should the Clearness Committee find the applicant clear for membership under the care of the Yearly Meeting, the Clearness Committee reports back to Ministry and Pastoral Care committee with their recommendation that the applicant be approved as a member under the care of the Yearly Meeting. Upon unity with the recommendation of the Clearness Committee, the Clerk of Ministry and Pastoral Care advises the clerk of Ministry Coordinating Committee and the Yearly Meeting offices to record the new Friend as a member.
4. On final approval, the new member is welcomed appropriately and is matched with an agreed upon Friend (or two) to guide the new member. The Friend(s) are responsible for support, advice and oversight of the new member, and are expected to maintain contact with their designated Friend regularly for the first two years of membership.
5. Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee receives an annual check-in letter from the Friend and responds as led.

### **Process for Prospective Members**

1. The potential Friend seeking membership writes a letter of application addressed to the clerk of Ministry and Pastoral Care. The letter should include:
  - a. why membership under the care of NYYM is sought at this time;
  - b. why this process was selected by the applicant instead of applying through a Monthly Meeting;
  - c. how the applicant is in unity with Quaker or NYYM principles and testimonies;
  - d. ways that the applicant anticipates involvement in the Yearly Meeting;
  - e. whether the applicant is interested in being a member in perpetuity or for a set period of time; and
  - f. suggested Clearness Committee members.
2. The prospective member is contacted by Ministry and Pastoral Care, to consider the application letter and appoint a Clearness Committee of at least three people. When selecting Clearness Committee members, attention is paid to geography, needs of the applicant, familiarity, diversity and inclusiveness, and representation from multiple bodies

within New York Yearly Meeting.

3. The Clearness Committee meets with the applicant (the Clearness Committee may find it necessary to meet without the prospective member at some point).
4. Should the Clearness Committee find the applicant clear for membership under the care of the Yearly Meeting, the Clearness Committee reports back to Ministry and Pastoral Care committee with their recommendation that the applicant be approved as a member under the care of the Yearly Meeting. Upon unity with the recommendation of the Clearness Committee, the Clerk of Ministry and Pastoral Care advises the clerk of Ministry Coordinating Committee and the Yearly Meeting offices to record the new Friend as a member.
5. The new member is welcomed appropriately and is matched with a Friend (or two) to guide the new member. The Friend(s) are responsible for support, advice and oversight of the new member, and are expected to maintain contact with their designated Friend regularly for the first two years of membership.
6. The new member submits an annual check-in letter to Ministry and Pastoral Care to let them know what has been going on for the past year, whether they need any kind of specific support, or if they would like to adjust their membership status in any way.