



SPARK

New York Yearly Meeting
The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

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January 2018



A group of Friends at a Quaker Education and Discourse Day (QuED) at Bulls Head-Oswego. Photo by Gabi Savory Bailey.

The Meaning of Membership

A Modern Membership Concern

Alternate Membership Pathways Working Group

Membership among Friends for most of our history has been exclusively through the local meeting. There is a solid foundation for this practice. Without formal creed, doctrine, or required formal training, there needs to be a clearness process to discern if an applicant is aware of the history, practices, testimonies, and traditions of Friends and of the meaning and responsibilities of membership. The body that accepts the applicant becomes responsible for his/her welfare, just as the new Friend becomes responsible for the welfare of the others in the meeting. These practices have served Friends well throughout almost four centuries of our history. They are cherished practices that have proved worthy through the test of time.

Another important Quaker concept is continuing revelation. Many people become Friends because of our willingness to discard or modify past practices if they no longer pertain to the current world. We recognize that society has changed over recent generations and concerns have arisen within our and other yearly meetings regarding the process of becoming a member.

Why Did I Become a Quaker?

Dorothy S. Richards
Albany Meeting

I can answer that question in one word! "Integrity." "Quakers share a common faith based on experience that every human being can commune with God directly without the need for any mediating persons or rituals, and that the worshipping community can commune directly with God as well." While taking a University course on "Eighteenth Century Colonial Women" I was impressed by this description, and soon noticed that Quaker women were quite different from their peers of the time. I expressed my surprise and my wonderful professor gave me the task of researching the

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Marrying the Meeting

Pam Gosner

Chatham-Summit Meeting

I always told myself that if anything happened to my husband, I'd go back to meeting. This was kind of odd, because I attended meeting faithfully for the first 7 years of our marriage, with his full support, even though he was not himself a churchgoer. But then we moved to Chatham, and somehow I never transferred my allegiance to the new meeting, even though it was less than a mile from our new house.

It was partly because of the effort required to become acquainted with a whole new bunch of people; and partly because our

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Finding a Home, and Fellow Travellers

Benjamin Warnke

Brooklyn Meeting

I suspect most Quakers in New York Yearly Meeting have heard other Friends—convinced or birthright—express a reluctance at membership in anything, including membership in the Religious Society of Friends. Seekers, after all, are perhaps by definition not joiners. Even the term "convinced" carries a trace of this disinclination: many of us have struggled against our call to membership, persuaded finally by that quiet voice that continued to insist that we belong.

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New Members

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Susan Butler — Unadilla
Roman Gavrila —
 Chatham-Summit
Robin Grube — Poplar Ridge

Transfers

Jane Alexandre, from
 Chappaqua MM to
 Morningside MM

Deaths

Florence McAllister,
 member of New Paltz, on
 November 30, 2017.
Miyake Nakamoto, member
 of Manhasset, on Decem-
 ber 9, 2017.
Lucy Sikes, member of
 Brooklyn, on December 2,
 2017. *See also page 8.*

MEETING NEWS

Farmington-Scipio Youth Gathering

Farmington-Scipio Region held an all-day youth gathering in October at Rochester Meeting House. Nine youth participated from Buffalo, Ithaca, Genesee Valley, and Rochester meetings. The youth were spread in ages from 5th grade to 12th grade. Mike Clark and Chris DeRoller (Powell House Youth Program) planned and facilitated the gathering, along with Fenna Mandalong (Buffalo) and Nick Dosch (Genesee Valley).

The objectives of the day were:

- Practice listening and responding to other people's perspectives in a Quakerly manner.
- Give a process for the youth to express themselves on what activities, structure, and issues they would like in future regional gatherings and inter-visiting.

At the end of the day, the youth drew big posters of what they would like to do in the future. They expressed the desire for more chances for youth to get together like this as well as to visit other meetings. No one time of the year was seen to be best to avoid conflicts with other activities. Their suggestions included: cooking together, camping, art, making and creating with slime, how to explain what a Quaker is, and a sleepover with s'mores (and obviously a fire). One exercise was to brainstorm

Around Our Yearly Meeting

their perceptions of "What are Quakers like?" Their answers were: accepting • thoughtful • welcoming • kind • loving • considerate • simply dressed • intergenerational • alive • genuine • active, taking actions • forgiving • funny • quiet • helpful

When asked how to listen better, they said:

Concentrate on what is being said. • Do not start thinking about your response. • Leave time for their conclusion before responding. Let them finish. • Think about what they said before you speak. • Be considerate.

When asked to expand those thoughts to how to listen to someone you don't agree with, they said:

Don't assume everything they say is wrong. • Listen to why they think that way. • Don't argue and put them on the defensive • Don't assume you will disagree on everything. • Believe that what they say is true for them. • Be respectful. Don't be condescending. • Ask them "why" they think that way without being accusing. • Ask them what their experience has been. • Share hospitality, food, tea. • Share some activities or experience together.

Another question posed by one of the youth was "What do young Quakers need to know?" The things they felt they should know more about were:

- Membership—what it means; why be a member; what is the process (varies by meeting).
- How to explain what a Quaker is.
- Who is doing what (witness/ social justice/ etc.)

We shared insights, fun, laughter, some rolling on the floor, more insights and discussions, food, and a walk to a local park where even more games ensued. Youth and adults alike were very glad we persisted in getting together.



These photos of Godly play and First Day School were supplied by Melinda Wenner Bradley, the former NYM Children and Youth Field Secretary.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Coordinating Committee Weekend
 January 26-28, 2018, at Powell House. For more, see page 3.

Meeting for Discernment
 February 16-17, 2018, at Fifteenth Street Meeting. Please see page 8.

Workshops from the Center for the Study of White American Culture (CSWAC)

Learn how to act against racism from a position of unearned (and unwanted) racial privilege at these upcoming workshops.

What White People Can Do About Racism, Fundamentals 2
 9:30am–3:30pm on Saturday, Feb. 17 in Titusville, NJ. This workshop will provide white people with some basic knowledge about racial structure, building connections and cross-racial alliances, finding direction on your journey as an effective change agent, and organizing with others against racism. You DO NOT have to have completed Fundamentals 1. \$90 (sliding scale) includes lunch.

Raising Anti-racist White Children 9:00am–3:30pm on Saturday, March 24, in Titusville, NJ. This workshop will help empower participants to be effective anti-racists who model and teach anti-racism; learn about children's grasp of race & racism; counter the present culture of colorblindness with more effective strategies; and acquire preliminary tools to raise white children who have an aware and healthy racial identity. \$95 (sliding scale) includes lunch.

All of our workshops are appropriate for white people who are learning what to do about racism, and for people of color who support white people in taking action against racism. For more details and to register, visit www.euroamerican.org/

—Robin Mallison Alpern, Director of Training

Playing in the Light: Godly Play/ Faith & Play Training for Quakers

April 20–22, 2018 at Powell House Great for multi-generational groups, family worship, or a First Day School class, this Montessori-inspired storytelling method is open-ended and sets the stage for genuine wondering about the story! Join trainer Melinda Wenner Bradley for a rich weekend of story-

telling and nurturing teachers. We'll explore Bible and Quaker stories and practice learning and telling stories to the group. The tone and warmth of the weekend gives it the feeling of a spiritual retreat. The weekend serves as both a training and a time of spiritual retreat and nourishment for teachers. Go to powellhouse.org.

Save the Date! August 17-19!
 The **5th Annual Quaker Religious Education Collaborative gathering**—this time at Powell House!
Connect! Recharge! Renew! Join Friends from across the U.S. and Latin America to gather with our religious education community of practice for a weekend of sharing, learning, worship, fellowship, and play! More information at www.quakers4re.org.



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OPPORTUNITIES

JYM Volunteers Needed

As we look ahead to NYYM Summer Sessions at Silver Bay, Sunday, July 22 to Saturday, July 28, 2018, we are looking for volunteers to work with the Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM). Friendly adults are sought to work with young Friends from age 3 years through high school. Perhaps you, or someone in your meeting, has the gift of working with children or teens and would welcome this opportunity. It is a wonderful way to get to know the yearly meeting. We ask that meetings give consideration to providing financial assistance to JYM volunteers from their community so that they may serve the yearly meeting in this way. Volunteers may also request that part of their Silver Bay costs be covered by JYM. Friends who are not led to give the entire week to JYM may have gifts to share for an hour or so during the week. Please contact Sylke Jackson (sylkej@gmail.com) or Dawn Pozzi (quakerdawn@gmail.com), this year's JYM coordinators.

Seeking Director for Albany Peace Week

The Peace Week Committee of Albany Meeting is currently looking for a warm and energetic director for their Peace Week event, to be held from August 13-17, 2018. Peace Week will be based at the Albany Friends Meetinghouse, 727 Madison Ave., Albany, NY, and will run from 8:30 to 3:30. It will involve approximately 30 children, entering grades two through eight, split into three groups, each with a teacher, an intern, and a support pre-intern. Peace Week will offer children the opportunity to explore peace and peace-making by engaging in a community that practices listening, communication, caring, cooperation and conflict resolution. Expected qualifications of the director include support for the Quaker peace testimony, experience working with children, practical knowledge and experience with supervision, and a comfort level working with families from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. The director's first responsibility would be to develop a curriculum focused on peaceful conflict resolution, non-competitive and cooperative games and activities, appreciation of diversity, spiritual growth, and care for the environment. He or she will have full access to the curricula and

records of the previous Peace Camp, held from 2000-2009. The director would be expected to be involved in steering committee meetings as needed; participation in the hiring process of the staff is encouraged. The director would be responsible for training the teachers, plus the interns and pre-interns, in the curriculum, and supervising staff during Peace Week. The director will need to solve issues as needed during the day, and be a resource for and liaison with parents. All other responsibilities, such as enrollment, volunteer efforts, financial tasks, and care for the meetinghouse, will be the responsibility of the steering committee. The salary is \$2500. We invite interested persons to apply as soon as possible, with a view toward being involved in the planning process. Please contact Anita Stanley at 518-441-7722, or meridiancomm@earthlink.net, for an application or for more information.



Editor's Note

You, dear reader, are invited to write for *Spark*. Articles should be spirit-led and are considered a form of ministry. Your voice adds to the richness and depth of the conversation. Articles are subject to light editing.

Upcoming Spark themes:

March: Earthcare Now

Where is the life and energy in earthcare right now? Guest edited by Pamela Boyce Simms!

May: Learning from First Day School

Please send your submissions for upcoming issues of *Spark* to communications@nyym.org by the 10th of the month prior to the month of publication.

In between issues of *Spark* we distribute InfoShare, NYYM's e-newsletter. **Share your meeting's news and events** by sending them to communications@nyym.org. They will appear in InfoShare or *Spark*, whichever is more timely.

Keep up to date with NYYM by checking facebook.com/NewYorkYearlyMeeting/

Follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/NYYMTweets

And you can manage your NYYM email list settings at **NYYM Connect!** Go here: www.tinyurl.com/nyymconnect

—Sarah Way

Coordinating Committee Weekend

January 26-28, 2018
(Friday dinner through Sunday lunch)
Powell House

Join Friends from around New York Yearly Meeting at Powell House for what has become known as Coordinating Committee Weekend. The weekend is open to anyone: please come to join in fellowship by the fire, worship, and worshipful (and at times light and lively!) consideration of the structure of our yearly meeting. There will be coordinating committee business but you don't have to be a part of a coordinating committee to come! You can attend committees that interest or excite you, but much of our time will be focused on finding a structure that best supports our lives as Friends.

In order to make the best use of our time together, we (the YM clerk, assistant clerk, and general secretary, with input from Liaison Committee) are providing a means of sharing ideas ahead of time. This link, <https://goo.gl/TskuZg>, will open an online form that asks a series of questions both specifically about Nurture Coordinating Committee (which is without a clerk) and more generally about yearly meeting structure. We will collate these ideas into a report which will be shared by email during the week before we gather. Then we can all begin the weekend knowing the variety of ideas already on each other's minds. We can then use our group time together to expand, revise and discern. We will not be making any decisions about the long term structure of the yearly meeting during this weekend but we are likely to start shaping it. We may, out of necessity, make some immediate decisions about temporary fixes to the problems facing the Nurture Coordinating Committee.

Please take the survey and please come! Register now at www.powell-house.org.

For further information contact Lucinda Antrim, NYYM Clerk, lucindaantrim@gmail.com or 914-473-2981.



Consider Endorsing the Baltimore YM North Korea Minute

In solidarity with all the peace workers we work with in Korea, and all of humanity, we call on all Friends everywhere to consider endorsing the minute from Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) calling for diplomacy with North Korea. Read it online here: nyym.org/content/spark-january-2018

—Diane Keefe

NYYM Peace Working Group

Summer Sessions Planning

Dear Friends, as you may know, Sessions Committee is creating a Pay as Led process for our Summer Sessions, but the software logistics are more complex than we expected. We are working with the YM staff to settle on the most efficient and cost-effective software, which will likely take all year to complete. Ergo, Pay as Led is now planned for our 2019 Summer Sessions. For 2018, please remember you can ask for assistance from the Equalization Fund—and make donations to the EQ any time to help provide that assistance!

Also, for your 2018 Summer Sessions planning: online you will find the registration fee chart, room rates, and “week-at-a-glance” schedule. Registration does not officially open until May, but we hope that having this information now will help you plan for your participation. nyym.org/session/summer-sessions-2018

In the meantime, please do keep an eye open for the information on our Spring Sessions being hosted by New York Quarterly Meeting. Details are being worked out daily—look for them online and in the March *Spark*! nyym.org/session/spring-sessions-2018

As always, feel free to contact me with any thoughts or concerns regarding NYYM sessions.

Melanie-Claire Mallison
NYYM Sessions Committee,
Clerk
607-280-8182
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The Meaning of Membership



Jane and Max Carter and Robin Mohr relax on a porch after speaking at a Quaker Education and Discourse (QuED) event during Buffalo Meeting's retreat. Photo by Gabi Savory Bailey.

Marrying the Meeting

Pam Gosner

Chatham-Summit Meeting

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new neighborhood provided such interesting things to do outdoors on weekends; and partly because the Vietnam War was winding down. But I always knew that if I needed it, I'd find a spiritual home at Friends meeting.

Twenty years after our move my husband died, and two weeks later, still shaky, I went to that meeting-house less than a mile away. Over the next seven years I did indeed find a home there, and people who helped me form my new identity and life. I served on committees, attended business meetings, and was very much a part of the wider Quaker fellowship. But I didn't feel moved to become a member.

It began to bother me more and more that I didn't feel any sort of a call, and I journaled, prayed, and discussed my lack endlessly. Slowly, the whole tangle unraveled.

Part of it was guilt; that I had spent 20 years not going to meeting, even though I knew that was where I belonged. And part of it was loyalty to my husband. I became aware that I would never have become a member if he had still been alive; it was too much of a step away from him and from our marriage, and there was no hope that he'd become part, even peripherally, of the life of the meeting. I had grown to realize the importance of a shared spiritual life for couples, and I began to feel

that this was so important for me that I couldn't entertain the idea of caring for someone who couldn't share my Quakerism with me, at least to some degree. One of my F(f)riends asked me, If I were ever to remarry, would I want to do it under the care of the meeting? And when I said "Yes!" he said, "Why not marry the meeting, then?"

To my mind this meant that if I joined the meeting I'd be saying that I wouldn't consider remarrying unless it could be someone who shared an interest in Friends. And by extension, this meant it was unlikely that I'd ever remarry, since I was drastically cutting down the pool of eligible men. I prayed to become willing to turn this over to God, and slowly, I felt more and more comfortable with the idea. So I applied for membership and was accepted.

People ask me where I get the idea that I'd have to marry a Quaker. Indeed, the days are long past when members are read out for marrying out of meeting, and that is as it should be. This really has nothing to do with Quaker faith and practice; more with a willingness to give up my hope of remarrying, and with a willingness to grow away from my past marriage. The things that hold us back from applying to join the meeting are many and varied, and it can take seven years—or even 27 years—to discern what they are. As it happens, deciding that I'd probably never remarry still left room for many good things in my life. I am content now, and feel that I've come home.



A Modern Membership Concern

Alternate Membership Pathways Working Group

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We are being called to faithfully review and reconsider this exclusive process.

We face decreasing membership and work hard to welcome new and returning young and older attenders. We also have set up barriers to membership for many who bring valuable gifts to our communities. Many active and committed Friends have few or no ties to local meetings due to increased mobility or affinity with alternative spiritual homes like Powell House or wider Quaker bodies. Young adults (and people in general) are less likely to remain in one community for longer than a few years. Some are raised as children in a local meeting then move away for college and then move again for new work opportunities. Other Friends with no Quaker upbringing have discovered Friends as adolescents or young adults and may have never had a meaningful relationship with a local meeting or do not expect to remain where they currently live. Many Friends may actively participate in the life of many meetings while never identifying any as "home." They may regularly attend meetings and even support committee work and live in observance of Quaker values and practices, yet may not feel it natural or authentic to pursue membership at a given meeting.

Barriers to membership exist for others who have found a spiritual home in Quakerism and who may be unable to apply for membership for various reasons. For prisoners, clearness committees may not be permitted to enter the prison. For students at Quaker schools or for regular attenders at Powell House (both youth and adult programs), there may never have been a connection to a local meeting. There are those who grew up as Friends and have lived their lives committed to Quaker service and values but whose circumstances made it impossible to attend meeting for worship and find a spiritual home.

There are many for whom our current systems do not work and in response to these concerns, a

working group of mostly active young people became the Alternate Membership Pathways Working Group of Ministry Coordinating Committee in 2016. We are exploring ways not to replace existing membership processes but to add to them in a way that improves inclusivity and relevance for Friends who do not have, but are seeking, ways to pursue membership without necessarily affiliating with a single local meeting. The working group has recently proposed alternate pathways for membership through the yearly meeting as what we are calling becoming an itinerant Friend. Ministry Coordinating Committee is currently discerning our recent report. If you are interested in joining our work, please contact one of us.



—Marissa Badgley, Jennifer Swann, Jillian Smith, Jeffrey Aaron, active members of the working group

Why Did I Become a Quaker?

Dorothy S. Richards
Albany Meeting

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Religious Society of Friends and giving the class a presentation on my findings. Pendle Hill was my source of information and history and I am still grateful for their accommodation.

Not having had the opportunity to further my education after graduating from Catholic high school, I took advantage, at age forty-two and married with seven children, to apply to Empire State College, one of the first online higher education schools in the country, and part of the New York State SUNY system. It was an exciting experience and I obtained my degree four years later.


Twenty busy and fulfilling years passed, and in fulfillment of our dream, my husband and I retired on Cape Cod and built a home in Harwich. At this point I was looking for a faith and in a short time I dropped in one Sunday morning at Quaker worship in the village of South Yarmouth. I opened the door to a simple wooden building and observed a silent group of men and women with downcast eyes sitting side by side on facing

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The Meaning of Membership

benches in an unadorned welcoming room with crackling fireplace. I noticed there was no altar or pulpit. But what stays vividly in my mind to this day was the sudden recalling of that college course and the “Inner Light” belief held by the Friends. God!not in a tabernacle or in a chalice in the hands of a priest. These Quakers were actually doing what they believed! Having communion and listening to the Divine. Integrity! That was the powerful word that moved me and still does today.

I joined happily in the gathered quiet and recall when suddenly the silence was broken and someone spoke saying, “Good morning, Friends.” A woman in front of me turned around, smiled, and held out her hand. Emotion prevented my replying but she quickly said, “I know, I understand—I had the same reaction at ‘my’ first Quaker worship!”

I became a member of the Religious Society of Friends a year later and am an active and grateful Friend. I have come to understand how important the Friends’ testimonies of simplicity, peace, community, equality, but most especially ‘integrity’ mean to me. This faith that I love informs my entire life. 

Finding a Home, and Fellow Travellers

Benjamin Warnke
Brooklyn Meeting

(continued from page 1)

There is another common thread in conversations about membership: we recall that moment, sometimes immediate, sometimes after months or years, when we realized in meeting that we were “home.” For many of us this homecoming hardly seemed possible. We had spent too many years searching for the Spirit and too many years finding ourselves again adrift and alone. This was all true for me. I started attending Quaker meeting twenty-one years ago, when my wife, our two daughters and I moved briefly to Washington, DC, and I, struggling through what seemed an interminable stretch of profound uncertainty, walked into a meeting for worship and discovered that I was where I belonged.


My journey to membership has been both brief and prolonged. I joined Brooklyn Meeting, after some hesitation, two years after finding Friends; I have embraced the full meaning and joys of membership only recently. When I joined meeting, I was not entirely certain what I was joining. In my letter for membership, I expressed my doubts about the existence of God. I also wrote of my appreciation for the wisdom and faith of others in the meeting and my hope that their example and instruction would lead me.

I felt then as if I were signing on to a pilgrimage without a set destination but with some general agreement on protocol and direction. It seemed like an acceptably loose compact, with few obligations and personal entanglements, as if we had all agreed to pool our resources and head towards Canterbury. It would be fine if some of us ended up in London instead and fine also if we kept to ourselves for the entire journey.

Despite my involvement on a variety of a committees, over the years I have mostly kept to myself. In recent months, however, I have become convinced that a part of the promise of Quaker practice lies in a far deeper engagement with other Friends. The men and women I listen to in meeting or in committees with interest and admiration—often with wonder—are not just my guides and teachers, but my vital and necessary companions in our mutual search for the divine. If the essential Quaker revelation is that we are all invested with a portion of the Light, perhaps we are most transformed by this bright fragment

when we are in community, moved by what love can do.

Early Friends travelled together to spread the word that the Spirit was available directly to all of us. Part of this practice of companionship was practical, spurred by concerns about safety and mutual care, part motivated by a corporate concern about spiritual discipline, but part was surely informed by the knowledge that our spiritual lives blossom when the Light is active in us in ways that only love can engender.

Quaker practice invites us to participate in each other’s journeys; perhaps it demands that we do, but I think that our discovery that love is available to us, and infinite, and that we are, after all, home, allows us to walk along our spiritual paths with courage and joy and sometimes—or often—hand in hand. Perhaps that’s the essence of membership. 

A Journey in Faith

Dick Lopez
Manhasset Meeting
(attender)

The Lutheran Church has always been kind and generous to my family and me. For this, I will always be grateful.

A few years ago our minister abruptly took leave for another calling, leaving many of us feeling betrayed and abandoned. For a time, it felt like being on a ship without its captain, navigator, or rudder, with little hope of finding ourselves. For me, little did I realize that it was a blessing for it came at a time when I was questioning and

The insistent questioning of the seeker, the fire of the rebel, the reflective contribution of the more cautious thinker—all have a place amongst us.

—London Yearly Meeting statement, 1966

coming to terms with a few issues of faith—*seeing God as revealed to us by the Lutheran Church and other religions, and seeking to understand my relationship with God.*

My journey took me to a place where I questioned everything: the teachings and traditions of the Lutheran Church, its organization, leadership, human frailties, politics, liturgy, and most important, how its members and clergy respond to God’s will.

As I reach the twilight of my life, I realize that I must come to terms with myself and my personal relationship to God. While I am a slow learner, I believe that I am getting the message and beginning to hear and respond to God’s will. Maybe I have been doing that all along without realizing it.

While I will always be a Roman Catholic and a Lutheran at heart, I know that God brought me to the Manhasset Quaker Monthly Meeting. I now gather there with a small group of people every Sunday, in silence to eliminate the superficial chatter of the mind, calm the heart, and seek the source of love and truth in our lives. Friends describe this source in various ways: God, the Spirit, the Inward Light, The Divine, the Christ Within, the “still small voice.” What I like about this “unprogrammed” approach to worship is that there are no prearranged prayers, readings, sermons, or hymns. We just wait for divine guidance. What I love most about this worship is the responsibility that it places on me, the individual. During worship, anyone may rise to give a spoken message. When I go home, I feel energized, like I have been spiritually lifted and blessed.

I have tried sharing this Good News with those-in-charge of the Lutheran Church, but with limited success. So I am now content knowing that I have been blessed with a quiet place where I can worship. 




Robin Alpern and Melanie Claire Mallison share a laugh at lunch at Fall Sessions, held at Caldwell University, Caldwell, NJ, November 11, 2017. Photo by Sarah Way

The Meaning of Membership

Claiming a Place at the Table

Robert Renwick
Morningside Meeting

When I considered the idea of membership, what popped into my mind was the novel *A Member of the Wedding* and its exploration of our need to feel included. My memberships in meetings have been essential to my sense of belonging. My first experience of meeting was a profound sense of relief at last finding a home for my restless spirit. When, much later, I moved to Brooklyn after years living in places with no meeting, I recall the then clerk, Larry, welcoming me and inviting me to consider transferring my membership. FLGBTQC (just Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns when I discovered it) doesn't involve a formal process. You show up and "voila." For some years I attended feeling envious of that core group who had belonged longer and had assumed various organizational roles. I finally realized that I simply needed to claim my place at the table. It was entirely up to me to redefine my relationship to the group.

The membership question often seems presented in terms of a member's responsibilities and the needs of a functioning Society. This issue's theme opened the opportunity to reflect on the benefit to each one of us to have these open doors: open to apply, meet with a committee of Friends to examine one's application before consideration in a meeting for worship with a concern for business, or as an "attender" to know full acceptance and care regardless. No treatment of second class citizenship here. 

When early Friends affirmed the priesthood of all believers it was seen as an abolition of the clergy; in fact it is an abolition of the laity. All members are part of the clergy and have the clergy's responsibility for the maintenance of the meeting as a community.

—*Quaker Faith and Practice*,
Britain YM, section 11.01

A Request for Membership

Ted Ehrhardt
Brooklyn Meeting

The following letter was submitted to Brooklyn Meeting in 1999. Ted is currently the clerk of the meeting.

Dear Friends,

I am writing to ask if I can be a member of Brooklyn Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. I have been attending for four years and would like to share some of what I have learned in your company during that time.

In an introduction to Quakerism course I learned that I would have to overcome my fear of being considered crazy were I to take our practice seriously. This is now a risk I will hazard.

I have learned that it is necessary for me to sit in the presence of God every day. I am called to do this even though I fight against it. When sitting I experience confusion, fear, all sorts of complex emotions over which I have very little control. But I do sense the presence of God and am confident that I am doing just what I should be doing.

I cannot do this alone. Alone I am selfish and hysterical. Your companionship keeps me focused and more able to sit and listen and obey.

Thank You. 

Membership: a Lifelong Journey

Robin Mallison Alpern
Amawalk Meeting

I have a unique membership story among modern Friends.

My parents, Carolyn and Glenn Mallison, joined the Religious Society of Friends at Rochester Meeting in 1956 when I was two. They enrolled me as an associate member. I grew up proud of my Quaker family. I loved telling friends about awesome Quaker practices and principles. I went with my family to meeting for worship, quarterly meeting, Powell House programs and every yearly meeting at Silver Bay.

During college at SUNY Fredonia, I decided to declare I was a member of the Religious Society

of Friends not because my parents brought me, but because I chose this. It was important to show commitment to my faith community, and express my sense of belonging. When Fredonia Meeting accepted my request for adult membership, I felt faithful to my religious life.

A few years later I was living in Ithaca and attending meeting regularly. Laura Gaeddert, wife of Fredonia Meeting's clerk, gently suggested I transfer my membership. Retaining membership at Fredonia out of loyalty was inappropriate; joining Ithaca Meeting was a way of being fully present and engaged in my current meeting. I requested transfer and was accepted. Laura was right that membership allowed me a greater sense of aliveness and responsibility.

After being married under the care of Ithaca Meeting in 1985, I moved with my husband, Bowen Alpern, to Westchester County, in Purchase Quarter. We quickly settled into a warm meeting. Unfortunately, serious tensions between us and the meeting arose over the years, without resolution. The final straw for the meeting was when I said I had let go of belief in God. Without discussion, I was removed from membership.

Disownment devastated me. The day after, I found myself scanning my skin for spots or some other anomaly. Because I surely couldn't be me if I were no longer a Quaker. For months I slept poorly, and had trouble concentrating by day. I flinched each time someone brought up the subject, for fear they would disown me too.

Grateful that Friends don't practice shunning, I continued as actively as before, but now attending a different meeting in Purchase Quarter. Although modern U.S. Friends hardly distinguish between attenders and members, I felt stung every time I had to check the "attender" box. It didn't represent my commitment, passion, lived experience and identification with Friends.

After nine years I received a spiritual message that I belonged in membership. With enormous joy and relief, I joined Scarsdale Meeting. (I recounted this story in more detail in an essay published in *Godless for God's Sake: Nontheism in Contemporary Quakerism*, ed.

Boulton.)


One of many lessons I drew from my experience was that it might be useful if Quakers had a clearness committee annually, or every three to five years, to review our membership status. It's easy to stagnate. Harsh as it was for me to be removed from membership, that period did give me profound opportunity to assess my relationship to Quakerism. Membership is a way of expressing our connection to the faith community. Friends and our meetings deserve regular review, to consider where the life is in our connection. 

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand

—Isaac Pennington, 1667

Member of a Family

Richard Morgan
Conscience Bay Meeting

I have been a convinced Friend for about 7 years. The difference between being an attender and being a member boils down to the difference between watching a movie about a family (a loving, functional, and imperfect one—with equal numbers of roses and thorns—and with a lot of unknowns and uncertainty thrown in for good measure) and being a member of that family. Being a family member, a father/mother/brother/sister/cousin, in-law, or any blood relative or loved one, includes a sense of belonging and identity; a responsibility for taking care of each other in the good and bad times; and acknowledging and accepting each other's vulnerabilities. In the confusion of our modern world, where the ONLY thing that is constant is change (and growth, which is always optional) being a member helps me through growth that is sometimes vexing, and occasionally painful. Most importantly, as a member I am constantly learning from other Friends by their examples of "what they DO and don't do"—and learning by what they say and do not say. 

2017 Year in Review

Looking back on all that happened in New York Yearly Meeting in 2017, the three broad themes that emerge are how we communicate, nurture each other's gifts and understand community and justice.

How we communicate

We explored how new technologies could benefit us. New York Yearly Meeting launched a new website (nyym.org) designed to increase accessibility and ease of use, and work well on mobile phones. In social media, our Interim Young Adult Field Secretary, Emily Provance, ran the **Facebook Ads Experiment**, helping 18 monthly meetings try out advertising on Facebook. As a result, approximately 32,000 people who live near those meetings now know that Quakers are alive and worship nearby. Along with Gabi Savory Bailey, Emily organized monthly **Quaker Education and Discourse** (QuED) days at meetings around our yearly meeting, featuring speakers, a live audience, and an internet audience who could ask questions via Facebook Live. We increased our use of video conferencing. Robin Whitely and Arlene Johnson of the **Outreach Working Group** facilitated quarterly conference calls where Friends engaged in the ministry of outreach share stories and ideas. And Friends gathered online in videoconference **Conversation Circles** facilitated by our Children and Youth Field Secretary, Melinda Wenner Bradley, to share joys and concerns in the ministry of supporting First Day programs and families in local meetings.

How we nurture each other's gifts

Our Children and Youth Field Secretary, Melinda, began a partnership with Wilton and Montclair meetings for year one of the **Monthly Meeting Partner Project**, funded by a grant from the Shoemaker Fund. Those meetings are walking new paths where children and families are at the center of thinking about outreach, as well as imagining new ideas for inclusion. Additionally, families in quarters and regions have gathered for **Quaker Family**



Family Meetup, Purchase Quarter. Photo: Melinda Wenner Bradley

Meetups, casual opportunities for fellowship and worship together. Farmington-Scipio Region hosted a **Youth Institute** in March where yearly meeting and Powell House staff who support youth programs led a day full of modeling, processing, and planning how to support youth work in local meetings and the region. At Summer Sessions, a gathering of the reinvigorated **Youth Committee** dreamed together about how to help young Friends grow through Quaker spiritual formation programs and transition to young adulthood in our Society. Fourteen local meetings hosted programs where yearly meeting staff offered resources and challenged Friends to find new ways to involve younger Friends in our faith and practice, including worship. We gathered for multigenerational worship at Spring and Summer Sessions, where **Community Worship** included diverse voices across ages and affinities this year.

We substantially **simplified our finances**. In an effort to clarify and streamline our financial operations, our treasurer, Mary Hannon Williams, consolidated and reorganized our accounting. This will significantly reduce the cost of auditing our books and will lead to smoother expense reporting and reimbursement. Our **Financial Services Committee** not only budgeted for 2018 but also looked ahead at opportunities and challenges over the next few years. This work, and the work of other administrators, in turn, supports the gifts and work of individuals in NYYM.

In July, **Christopher Sammond** stepped out of his role as General Secretary after thirteen years of service, during which he facilitated the **naming and development of spiritual gifts** of many people. He played a role in most of the

highlights listed in this article. In August, **Steve Mohlke** of Ithaca Meeting became our General Secretary. He began **listening for Spirit's call** as heard through the gifts and ministries of Friends in NYYM.

How we understand community and justice

Many of us continued to hold **Alternatives to Violence** (AVP) workshops in prisons. Shirley Way and Fazilee Buechel (Ithaca Meeting) traveled to El Salvador to hold AVP workshops in that strife-torn country. Chatham-Summit Meeting sponsored its third AVP day camp this year. Old Chatham Meeting continued its successful **peace and justice** film and discussion series. Wilton Meeting continued its work to **abolish solitary confinement**, and Rochester Meeting supported the **Gandhi Institute**.

The **Friends Center for Racial Justice**, led by Angela Hopkins and joined by people from around the yearly meeting, celebrated one year since that ministry officially began. Through a careful process, community, leadership and accountability are being cultivated so as to not re-create the patterns of European dominance that has colonized all of us.

Spurred by young adults who identify as Quaker but for whom the traditional process of becoming a member isn't working, the **Alternate Paths to Membership** working group started exploring what it means to be a member and whether membership needs to be tied to a specific monthly meeting.

The men in our **prison worship groups** were thankful for their extended Quaker family—the “wonderful and compassionate volunteers” who “deal with the rules and frustrations of prison life in order to comfort us and pray with us.” There was also a yearning for connection to the wider Quaker community.

In early July, the annual **Friends General Conference Gathering** took place in New York State for the first time in sixteen years. More than 20 NYYM Friends joined with Friends from our co-host, Canadian Yearly Meeting, in planning and organizing this event for the 1100 Quakers who gathered in Niagara Falls. Friends from NYYM led two of the plenary programs. Vonn New organized a highly participatory, multigenerational music

and movement experience. And Pamela Boyce Simms inspired and invited us to let go of old ways that aren't working and live into a new paradigm that cares for the earth.

At Summer Sessions in July, the assembled body approved a bold experiment in faith and community called **Pay as Led**. In the summer of 2019, people who choose to pay more for sessions will allow us to offer lower fees to people for whom it was previously too financially challenging to attend.

Our **Aging Resources Consultation and Help** (ARCH) program continues to encourage us to help each other in ways that may seem small, but have a huge impact—accompanying a Friend home from surgery, helping a couple complete their health care proxies, or calling a Friend who hasn't been to meeting lately. These small acts are adding up to communities that embrace Friends regardless of age. The ARCH program provides education, support, and resources to the people doing these small acts. ARCH offered a Visitor Training to Friends in New York City and facilitated workshops for groups around the Yearly Meeting about growing older, clearing clutter, and



ARCH weekend at Powell House. Photo: Callie Janoff

advanced directives. ARCH Visitors began meeting regularly with older incarcerated Friends, and brought programs about life stories and grief to Attica Prison Worship Group. We enjoyed a weekend together at Powell House that deepened our commitment to **dismantling ageism**—not just for the benefit of older people, but for us all.

It was a year, like any other year, in which we lived as faithfully into spirit's call as best as we know how. **May we continue to grow in spirit and witness together.**

—Steve Mohlke

NYYM General Secretary



Lobbying workshop with Christine Ashley from FCNL during a QuED day at 15th Street Meeting. Photo: Gabi Savory Bailey

Meeting for Discernment

**February 16-17, 2018
Fifteenth Street Meeting**

**How do I prepare myself to be receptive to the Light, in worship and in the world?
How does this experience affect my life?**

How does my meeting support me and other Friends to test and support the leadings that arise in the Light?

The next Meeting for Discernment will take place at Fifteenth Street meetinghouse, 15 Rutherford Place, New York, NY 10003, on Saturday, February 17, 2018, from 9:30am to 5:30pm, hosted by Fifteenth Street Friends. (Rain Date: March 3, 2017).

Friends aspire (in Rufus Jones's words) to be "a living body of Christ in the world to-day [by] coming into union with God in our gatherings." Twice a year, a large body of NYYM Friends gather to experience "the tremendous power of silent community fellowship with God." No business is considered; the work of the day is simply extended worship on the basis of silence. Through prayerful discernment, those in attendance listen for God's guidance in what is rising at the monthly meeting level and through-

out the yearly meeting body.

All monthly meetings and worship groups are asked to appoint at least one person to attend. Appointees are asked not to bring prepared messages, but to speak as moved in the moment by Spirit, by God, by the Inner Christ. By meeting this way in the fullness of our community, we hear that which might not be heard in the midst of committees and attending to business.

Friends are invited to arrive soon after 8:30. Coffee, tea, and snacks will be provided. Worship will begin at 9:00, with lunch provided at noon and resumption of worship from 1:00 p.m. Please indicate on your registration form if you will be present for morning snacks and/or lunch. A donation of \$20 per person, paid on-site, will help defray the cost of childcare, lunch, and other necessities. Please be advised that the donation is suggested and not required.

You may register online at nyym.org/event/meeting-discernment-winter-2018 or request a registration by emailing office@nyym.org or calling 212-673-5750. For information regarding financial assistance for travel expenses, contact Jeffrey Aaron: (732) 247-9430 or jephreyaaron@aol.com. Local contact person is Chloe Tomlinson: chloe.e.tomlinson@gmail.com, 516-778-7718.



I Can Now See the Sun

Yohannes "Knowledge" Johnson, Bulls Head-Oswego Meeting

"Nothing, I believe, can really teach us the nature and meaning of inspiration but personal experience of it. That we may all have such experience if we will but attend to the Divine influences in our own hearts, is the cardinal doctrine of Quakerism."

—Caroline Stephen

Peace and Greetings to All,

As I sit here contemplating my future, I think of you and what you have brought into my life. I now look forward to tomorrow. Before now, I was filled with a weary sense of being, trying to understand how I came to be in the situation I find myself in. It is strange how, when a person is young, one can become so self-assured and -centered and content with what life seems to offer. Yet, little does one know that there are so many different roads and paths that inter-change with others, and the more we move forward, the greater the distance to be travelled becomes. One is not aware of what lies ahead until one gets there and then at times we may ask, "How did I get here?"

These were times when I found myself at these crossroads, wondering, "Where do I go now...what shall I do now?" In the meantime, everyone in the world finds themselves on the same route, establishing themselves and paving their way into tomorrow.

It seems as if I have been searching for my entire life to find myself, not so much as an individual but as a person who is a part of the whole. I have travelled and witnessed much of the "blind view" in the "ocean of darkness" which has led me to experience a not-too-enjoyable life.

But the Sun came out, bringing Light and Life to my weary Soul; engulfing me in its warmth and tender embrace. I don't know when it happened but once I took that step I knew I was on a path that would lead me to the sense of comfort I sought. So now I am coming into knowing how to live; that what I do now is only a small but significant part of a larger role

in the scheme of things to come towards a greater glory. I recognize that I have been placed here as an example to others so they may know the path I walked is not the road to take. I allowed myself to become one with what was around me instead of blazing my own individual path. And that now it is to be understood that our life, like all other lives, is a gift we should not take lightly, not to be wasted or put on the shelf for some future usage. That our collective future is now to be embraced, to be grabbed with both hands and lived for today, as today is only our preparation for tomorrow. One should learn from the past, not dwell in it. And so life goes on.

I am a part of the bigger picture and must realize that I have a strong sense of self-worth, if I would only look inside me to see who I really am. I now recognize that what I do today can hurt or help another in life—and I am tired of the hurt I have caused in the past. I have carried this burden since I have begun to hurt others, not knowing what it was nor its cause. But now I have come to realize that I, too, have the power to heal and I feel good about it. I've learned that knowing I had the fortitude to endure this experience has built my character and has helped make me a better person. And for that, I am thankful!

I can now see the Sun and enjoy its warmth and life-giving rays to help me better navigate my way through dark days that may lie ahead. Yes, I even have a sense of understanding the parable "I was blind but now I see..."

Thank you for allowing me to share this with you. It is not often I am able to speak to such an attentive audience who express appreciation for what I may have to say. I shall always work to make you proud. In The Spirit! Peace.

Knowledge

Yohannes "Knowledge" Johnson (82A1913) is currently imprisoned at Green Haven Correctional Facility, located in Stormville, New York. A member of the Green Haven Prison Worship Group (Clerk), he was introduced to the Quakers in the mid-1980's, participated in AVP training (basic and advance) and first became Clerk around 1993-5. Transferred in 1997, he returned in 2014. In 2016 he was accepted as a member of the Bulls Head Oswego Monthly Meeting and is active as a member.



Lucy Sikes, 1937-2017

Lucy Sikes was an artist; an advocate for neighborhood preservation, the environment, and social justice; an active member of a chorus; a mother and grandmother and friend. And she was a devoted Quaker. Lucy was an integral part of Brooklyn Meeting, where she served in many capacities, including keeping the directory and the Light list. For decades she supplied *Spark* with her observational drawings of Friends, often drawn during New York Yearly Meeting sessions. Lucy's memorial meeting was held at Brooklyn Meeting on Jan. 13, 2018. She is deeply missed.

Some drawings by Lucy Sikes.

