

Principles and testimonies Why do we do nominations the way we do?

Summary from Woodbrook pamphlet

Quakers have been called a 'peculiar people', and there is perhaps nothing more peculiar than the way we go about pairing up people and jobs. Within our meetings we do not advertise and interview, nor do we elect candidates. Why don't we?

The answer is a positive one: because we have different criteria, different objectives and indeed a different view of the world. We see our organization not as a hierarchy but as a community shaped by a common set of values that stem from a basic belief, which recognizes the divine in everyone.

In finding the way in which individuals are paired with tasks that need doing for our faith communities to function, we are not seeking the 'best' person. If we were, the same Friend could hold a position for life, which would not be good for them or the community.

In a way, we turn the whole process upside down: there is a sense in which we are looking for jobs to fit people as well as people to fit jobs. What we are doing is nothing less than assembling our community from its component parts: this means looking at the way the jobs are devised as well as the skills of those available to fill them.

Nominations can foster spiritual growth. A nominations committee seeks to discern spiritual gifts, matching them with roles for the benefit of the individual and the community. It might search out ways in which an individual could grow, by suggesting to them a role that will develop their skills and understandings rather than giving it to someone who already has the skills.

We don't automatically put the seasoned peace campaigner on the peace committee; we might ask them to serve on the children's committee, where they and the young people may learn from each other about different ways of practical peace-making.

This is where our testimony to equality is lived out. With our belief that there is that of God in everyone, nobody should be ruled out for any job at the start of the process: every experienced clerk, after all, clerked their first meeting as an inexperienced clerk. We can look at the potential of that divine spark in everyone.

We are all different and bring different gifts; while one person may grow through being a clerk, another person may not. Nominating someone for a role using the discernment process goes deep and requires careful and prayerful consideration; we remember that being equal doesn't mean being the same and is not about 'taking turns' at a particular role.

There are two important consequences of our adventurous way of doing things. The first is that we must make it very clear to nominees precisely what the job is. Does your meeting have carefully drawn-up job descriptions for each and every appointment? And the second is that we need to offer support to a newly appointed Friend.

Underlying all of this is the importance of creating and sustaining our community: of nominations work being a practical application of faith rather than simply a matter of finding people to do jobs.

If we find people who will help the community to grow in spirit, we will be working in a way that is true to our faith.