

The Purpose of Quarterly Meetings in NEYM

adapted from a document presented at NEYM Annual Sessions in 2018

... with the aim of maintaining good order, comforting and instructing all within the society, and keeping us in the ways of truth, meetings of our members are called to provide care and conduct business. These are held monthly in each district, quarterly within each region, and yearly for the whole nation. These [meetings] are held to ensure accurate communications with each other on those things that sustain us in piety and charity. ... Thus, Reader, you can see the character of the people called Quakers in their doctrine, worship, ministry, practice and discipline.

p. 337, in *"Twenty-first Century Penn"*, Paul Buckley, 2003.

[From *Primitive Christianity Revived in the Faith and Practice of the People called Quakers* [First published in 1696]

The Monthly Meetings in each county made up a Quarterly Meeting, where the most devoted and well-known Friends of the county could meet to talk with each other and to offer advice or assistance to each other – especially when a particular piece of business seemed especially difficult or when a Monthly Meeting was unable to settle a matter.

pp. 382, in *"Twenty-first Century Penn"*, Paul Buckley, 2003

[From *A Brief Account of the Rise and Progress of the People called Quakers* [First published in 1694]

There have been ongoing tensions between an emphasis on maintaining order and discipline, and an emphasis on empowering individuals on their spiritual journeys, between authority centered in leaders and authority centered in the general membership. Many from Liberal meetings in the late 20th century have tended to resist anything that hinted at authority by the quarterly or yearly meeting over the separate monthly meetings, and look on QMs/YM as, at best, "useful groupings for common work & fellowship."

p13 *Quaker Process for Friends on the Benches*, Mathilda Navias, 2012

This structure was not merely a pragmatic way of balancing the "prophetic" or charismatic functions of preaching and witness and the "priestly" or institutional function of maintaining unity and order... Friends understood that individuals could misinterpret leadings, fall into pride or self-will, run off into notions. The discernment of the broader community was a surer guide to Truth.

p. 4-5, *Fellowships, Conferences, and Associations: The Limits of Liberal Quaker Reinvention of Meeting Polity*, Elizabeth Cazden, BHFH Quaker Issues, 2003.

In his writings, Penn describes how Quaker "doctrine, worship, ministry, practice and discipline" is rooted in direct experience of God, of Spirit at work in hearts and lives. Quakerism first spread through the fiery work of ministers who shared the prophetic truths revealed to them. They kindled fires around which local meetings emerged, where Friends shared ongoing openings, witness and ministry. Over time, processes and structures arose to formalize and "maintain good order, comfort and instruct all within the society, and keep us in the ways of truth." There remains a living and dynamic relationship between individuals' direct experience of God, of Spirit, and the ongoing care and accountability needed to maintain unity and order. Friends today are still called to engage fully and faithfully, with Spirit and with one another.

The Purpose of Quarterly Meetings in New England Yearly Meeting today

Quarterly Meetings are regional groupings of Monthly Meetings which generally meet four times a year, and which aim to help individuals and meetings grow in healthy relationship with one another. In this, Quarterly meetings have five areas of ongoing purpose, which are not separate and distinct, but rather are entwined and in creative, living tension:

- (1) Quarterly Meetings help cultivate social and spiritual connections between the Friends and meetings in a particular geographic region of NEYM;
- (2) Quarterly Meetings facilitate communication in person, in writing, and through social media;
- (3) Quarterly Meetings encourage inspiration, spiritual counsel, and mutual support between member monthly meetings, to comfort and instruct, to keep us in the ways of truth, faithfulness (piety), and love and compassion (charity);
- (4) Quarterly Meetings provide care and conduct business; QMs season and test in corporate discernment matters arising from MMs, QM committees, regional Quaker bodies, and NEYM, to enable us to do together what we cannot do alone;
- (5) Quarterly Meetings maintain good order, keeping us in the ways of truth through mutual accountability in matters of Quaker Faith and Practice.

(1) Quarterly Meetings help cultivate social and spiritual connections between the Friends and meetings in a particular geographic region of NEYM, prioritizing inclusion and encouraging relationships to grow and flourish between individuals of all ages, enabling meetings to undertake work together.

To this end:

- ❖ Quarterly Meetings offer regional opportunities for coming together in one place
 - By holding periodic Quarterly Meetings, generally four times a year, for worship, fellowship, and learning, as well as shared business. These meetings are generally held on set dates, for consistency, and are hosted by different meetings within the Quarter, on rotation, with financial support from the QM available. They may be planned and hosted in partnership with neighboring meetings.
 - By facilitating QM-wide gatherings, retreats and workshops, often with multi-meeting planning groups and QM financial support. These may be planned by and for particular ages & stages (youth, young adults, elderly, etc), or by and for multi-aged groups focused on particular areas of concern.
- ❖ Quarterly Meetings strengthen connections between meetings in the region by encouraging
 - Intervisitation: individuals and groups traveling within the region for worship and programs.
 - Welcome: meetings inviting Friends and seekers from around the region to participate in their programs and events.
 - Cooperation: two or more meetings coordinating and/or planning programs or events together;
 - Through regular meetings of Friends with similar callings, interests and concerns, both in-person and virtual meetings.
 - Engagement with Quaker and non-Quaker organizations in the state or region, including local offices of AFSC, state level policy work with bodies like Friends Committee for Maine Public Policy and FCNL Quaker outreach, state ecumenical and interfaith bodies, etc.

(2) Quarterly Meetings facilitate communication in person, in writing, and through social media

To this end Quarterly Meetings:

- ❖ invite wide participation in all their events and activities

- ❖ lift up and draw attention to what is happening in the region, sharing the good news and building connections between Friends and meetings
- ❖ help to bring the news from annual sessions back to the local meetings. This is especially important for those meetings without representation at yearly meeting sessions or on yearly meeting committees
- ❖ Help local meetings contribute to and access the resources available from around the Yearly Meeting; encouraging active connections with Yearly Meeting leadership, programs, committees and staff

(3) Quarterly Meetings encourage inspiration, spiritual counsel, and mutual support between member monthly meetings, to comfort and instruct, thereby strengthening the life of meetings in the region, with particular concern for meetings which are lacking in leadership, and small worship groups & meetings with widely-scattered or declining membership. (Some of this.)

To this end Quarterly Meetings:

- ❖ Attend to and support the spiritual life and condition of the constituent meetings. Meetings in the quarter, work together through Quarterly Ministry and Counsel Committees – or this work may be undertaken in other ways
 - Offer mutual assistance in matters of ministry, eldership, and pastoral care
 - Extend help to meetings in trouble, lovingly addressing challenging behaviors and embracing conflict
 - Engage in mutual seasoning and testing of emerging ministries: naming, nurturing and supporting gifts of vocal ministry and other ministries rising in the Quarter; sharing and learning together how to do this better
 - Support youth, young adult and multi-generational religious education
 - Receive and read State of Society and other statistical reports from Monthly Meetings; reach out to and encourage Meetings who have not contributed reports
 - Care for new and unaffiliated worship groups as they arise when they don't have a relationship with a monthly meeting
 - Serve as a resource to local clerks, providing peer support, and nurturing and mentoring emerging leaders

(4) Quarterly Meetings provide care and conduct business, QMs season and test in corporate discernment matters arising from MMs, QM committees, regional Quaker bodies, and NEYM, enabling meetings to do together what they cannot do alone.

To this end:

- ❖ Quarterly Meetings empower the work of the quarter by pooling spiritual, human, and financial resources, towards healing and cultivating the Beloved Community, maintaining the life of the yearly meeting in right relationship with creation.
- ❖ Quarterly Meetings for Business engage member monthly meetings in discernment to
 - Prepare and season concerns rising from member monthly meetings, as well as concerns shared by other QMs and coming from NEYM; when clear to do so, endorsing minutes to be sent to PB or to NEYM annual sessions
 - Engage with concerns and ministries which have been embraced by YM sessions in response to Spirit promptings to healing, wholeness, and transformation
 - Receive reports and engage in discernment on matters brought by Quarterly Meeting Ministry and Council, Finance, and other Quarterly Meeting committees and groups of concern.
 - Consider endorsing Travel Minutes for Friends seeking to travel outside the quarter under a concern or in ministry, when these are brought forward by Monthly Meetings; when clear to

do so, endorsing Travel Minutes and forwarding them to NEYM Permanent Board. (see PB and NEYM M&C procedures for Travel Minutes).

- Consider endorsing the naming, recognizing or recording gifts of ministry, when these are brought forward by Monthly Meetings. When clear to do so, endorsing the naming or recording and informing the NEYM Permanent Board when they have done so. (see F&P)
- Receive and read memorial minutes submitted by monthly meetings; endorse those to be forwarded to the Yearly Meeting
- Nominate and appoint Quarterly Meeting clerks and officers, as well as any representatives to Quaker bodies and organizations; and supporting all of them
- Nominate representatives to state ecumenical councils; and supporting them. Note: Representatives to state ecumenical councils serve as representative of NEYM
- Maintain minutes of Quarterly Meeting proceedings and archive them in accordance with procedures set out by NEYM

(5) Quarterly Meetings maintain good order, keeping us in the ways of truth through mutual accountability in matters of Quaker Faith and Practice. Quarterly Meetings have limited but important authority in some matters, as stated in *NEYM Faith and Practice*. Ongoing care in many of these matters are functions of QM Ministry and Counsel, with members appointed by Monthly Meetings. Some work may be entrusted to individuals appointed by the Quarterly Meeting for Business. As necessary and appropriate matters are reported to QM Meeting for Business for approval or for information. Quarterly Meetings are responsible for:

- ❖ Maintaining financial oversight of Quarterly Meeting funds and the finances of member meetings
- ❖ Preparing annually a Quarterly Meeting State of Society report, to be brought to Quarterly Meeting for Business for approval, shared with meetings in the quarter, and sent to NEYM Ministry and Counsel
- ❖ Establishing and laying down Monthly Meetings; ordinarily this involves mutual discernment with the local meeting. This includes reviewing the status and spiritual condition of Monthly Meetings and discontinuing Monthly Meetings that have ceased to function in good order. The QM may determine that, in the best interests of the Society of Friends as a whole one or more MM may be joined/divided/laid down (see F&P pg. 220 – 221)
- ❖ Recognizing gifts in ministry as these are brought forward by Monthly Meetings in the Quarter; supporting and holding accountable those with recorded gifts in ministry; and rescinding recognition when gifts in ministry have come to an end (see F&P pg 246 on naming/recording gifts of ministry)
- ❖ Seasoning Travel Minutes for Friends seeking to travel outside the quarter under a concern or in ministry, when these are brought forward by Monthly Meetings. When clear to do so, endorsing travel minutes, and informing Permanent Board. QM endorsement permits travel within the yearly meeting. For travel outside the bounds of the yearly meeting, Travel Minutes must be sent to Permanent Board for their consideration for endorsement.
- ❖ Supporting and holding accountable those with QM endorsed travel minutes is primarily the responsibility of the monthly meeting. When there is an ongoing care and support committee it can be helpful to include one or more members from outside the meeting.