

On Being a Member of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting

With this document, CPMM affirms for our members who we are as a faith community. Although it reflects our values and aspirations, we humbly acknowledge that in spite of good intentions we sometimes fail to live to up our ideals. We also hope it is helpful to newcomers and inquirers who are interested in knowing more about our meeting and how our meeting thinks about being a member of both Central Philadelphia Meeting and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). We have provided a summary directly below, but encourage you to read the entire document to better understand the basis and spiritual grounding of our expectations.

Summary

Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting views membership as a covenant, a relationship in which the members and the meeting seek to meet each other's needs under the guidance of the Spirit. Here at the outset, we would like to concisely summarize what this means, in terms of both member responsibilities to the meeting and the meeting's responsibilities to the members.

When preparing this document, we asked our young people what being a member meant to them and they summed up the member responsibility part quite nicely: meet regularly, participate, and contribute financially. But let's elaborate a little.

- **Worship.** CPMM expects members to attend meeting for worship regularly and the meeting seeks in various ways to foster deeper worship and deeper vocal ministry.
- **Fellowship.** CPMM expects members to embrace each other in a spirit of love and, when conflicts arise, to try to answer that of God* in each other in that spirit, with tenderness and forthrightness. The meeting offers pastoral care, seeking to minister to one another's needs as we are able. We also sponsor opportunities to get to know each other socially.
- **Spiritual gifts and spiritual nurture.** We ask members to share their spiritual gifts and their leadings and ministries with us and we seek to help members grow in their gifts and to provide clearness and support to all who carry a specific ministry of any kind.
- **Meeting business and corporate decision-making.** The meeting depends on members serving on its committees. Thus it is our expectation that members will serve on the committees that match their gifts and interests and will regularly attend meeting for worship with attention to business.
- **Financial support.** The meeting also depends on the members' financial support. Thus it is the meeting's expectation that members will contribute to the meeting as generously as possible.

* By "God" we mean whatever is your experience of the Divine.

- **Learning Quakerism.** Because we the members are the meeting and we have no religious professionals, we need our members to know our faith and practice well enough for the meeting to function well and to enjoy the communion we seek. To support this learning, the meeting provides religious education and other resources for learning.

The living tradition of Quaker faith, practice, and history

CPMM seeks to be an inclusive community, welcoming into full fellowship all people who find resonance with the path we are traveling. The meeting is enriched by the differences among our members. We strive for a community in which people of any race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or social circumstance contribute to and benefit from membership in our faith community.

Friends do not have a creed or a fixed set of beliefs to which one must adhere as a condition of membership. However, we do have a rich and venerable faith tradition, practice, and history and they are precious to us. Because we are all, collectively, the meeting, and we have no professional leadership or authorizing church institutions to maintain our tradition, it is essential that we, as members, become familiar with Friends tradition and steward it well for the generations that follow us.

Quakerism began in the 1650s in England as an attempt to return to what George Fox, our founder, and other early Quakers called primitive Christianity. They felt that they had been brought back to the essential truth of the Christian faith, which was direct knowledge of and relationship with the spirit of Christ himself. For many Friends, including some in our meeting, relationship with Jesus remains the cornerstone of their religious life today.

Quaker faith and practice has steadily evolved since then, and the movement has gone in a number of different directions. Central Philadelphia Meeting is affiliated with meetings that retain silent, waiting worship and we embrace a range of religious experience that reaches beyond the traditional boundaries of our Christian roots. This differentiates us from the majority of Friends in the world who have pastors and program their worship in ways similar to many other Christian churches.

However, we remain united with most of our Quaker sisters and brothers in proclaiming some essential truths, based on our common experience. First, there is within each of us a Light that enables us to commune directly with the Divine, without the need of any mediating persons, books, or rituals; some Friends speak of this as that of God in every person, some as the inward Light of Christ, and some as the Truth. Second, the worshipping community also can commune directly with God *as a community* in worship, needing no priests or outward forms of worship to do so.

Further, we find that the Spirit of Love and Truth continues to reveal itself from ancient times to today, always seeking to heal, inspire, forgive, guide, correct, and open the faithful to new Truth, both as individuals and as a community; our shorthand phrase for this experience is “continuing revelation.” Thus we do not consider the Bible to be God’s final or ultimate

revelation, but rather, as early Friends put it, we read it in the spirit in which it was given forth, seeking to be guided today by the Spirit that lies behind its revelation to understand its value for us in our time.

This experience, then, calls us to live our outward lives in accord with the inward truths that have been opened in us; we seek to make all our actions in the world opportunities for channeling God's love and justice. We try to ground ourselves in simple living, recognizing that the complexity and demands of the world can be an impediment to our relationship with the Divine.

Friends have found that certain Truths have emerged and endure; we have named these Truths "testimonies". The word Testimony is understood to mean that we seek to live our lives in a way that 'gives testimony' to that Truth. The CPMM community seeks to embrace these principles and to live into them until our lives are congruent with the words we speak. While we continue to receive new guidance about how to live in the world, we've become clear about the testimonies on racial, gender, and social equality, care for the earth, community, peace and nonviolence, simplicity, and integrity.

While we have found these testimonies, these experiences, answer our yearning for intimacy with the Divine, for close fellowship, and for guidance in our shared journeys, we also remain seekers. We are a living religion. We seek to grow in the Spirit together. We seek new opportunities to serve each other. We seek new ways to heal the world. And we seek the joyful experience of the Spirit in our midst.

Community—Fellowship in the Spirit

Membership as covenant/relationship

A Quaker meeting is a fellowship *in the Spirit*. We understand membership in the meeting as a covenant among the members, and also a covenant with God.

By "Spirit" or "God" we mean the Mystery behind both individual and collective spiritual and religious experiences. We call that Spirit or Mystery by many different names, knowing in truth that that Mystery is ultimately unnamable and beyond our capacity to fully comprehend. The meeting welcomes the wide range of religious temperaments, experiences, and ways of speaking about religious and spiritual experience that members and attenders bring to the meeting when they find that their own journey resonates with the Quaker path.

We understand a "covenant relationship" to entail a set of mutual responsibilities that the members and the meeting seek to fulfill with the guidance and support of the Spirit. As members we seek to bring the gifts of our time, talents, and resources to the meeting in a spirit of generosity, to nurture the spiritual, social, and material life of the meeting and of each other, just as the meeting community seeks to nurture the spiritual, social, and material lives of its members.

We are the meeting

In practice, this means that the members serve each other. Without paid religious professionals, the members and others active in the life of the meeting do everything needed to sustain the meeting and to minister to each other as equal participants in the life of the meeting. Together and individually, we are co-creators with the Spirit in generating the character and spirit of the meeting, and together we carry that spirit into the world.

Most of the spiritual and temporal affairs of the meeting—worship, spiritual nurture, attending to the business of the meeting, pastoral care, community activities, social action, meeting administration—are conducted through committees and through named officers of the meeting.

It follows that the meeting community can only be as healthy and strong as the love and commitment that each of us brings to it. Collectively, it is the time, talents, and treasure of the members and attenders, their spiritual gifts and experience in service to the meeting and its various needs that defines who we are.

Fellowship

Friends find great joy in the fellowship we share with each other, when we take the time to simply be together, in the social hour, singing before meeting, or the special events the meeting plans throughout the year. CPM is a large and organizationally complex meeting and these informal times make space for the members to know each other more deeply and beyond the roles we carry. And, while this document may make us sound like a pretty serious group, we also have a lot of fun together.

While our differences bring us joys, they also bring challenges. We recognize that different perspectives and even conflict are normal to life in any vital community. When this occurs we seek to engage one another forthrightly, in a spirit of openness and love, to look for that of God in each other. We are given to each other in community to support each other's growth in the Spirit. This is the heart of what we mean by covenant.

Children and families

Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting eagerly welcomes families into our fellowship. On Sundays we offer childcare for the very young and First Day School (Sunday School) for older children. In First Day School, we seek to create a safe loving community in which children can explore their own spiritual gifts and gain skills and knowledge to lead lives of integrity. We also encourage young people to attend meeting for worship if they wish and we host intergenerational gatherings throughout the year. In our relationship with families and children, we seek to listen thoughtfully and with complete respect to the voices of young people in our community, answering that of God within them, and ask members to let us know how else we might nurture their families, especially in their spiritual lives.

Caring for Each Other—Pastoral care in the meeting

Being there for each other is essential to our life together as a community. The meeting seeks to support our members in all aspects of their lives, to the degree that we can and as it seems appropriate and welcomed. As individuals, we try to pay attention to how each of us is faring at

any given time, and to reach out to each other when it seems appropriate and/or Spirit-led to do so. The meeting provides pastoral care through a Membership Care Committee, but we recognize that the Spirit may move any one of us to reach out to another in love when we see a need.

The meeting also serves its members in significant life passages. For example, we conduct marriages in the Quaker manner under the care of the meeting, we conduct memorial meetings for members who have died, and we celebrate special occasions in the life of the members.

The Life of the Spirit

Worship

Worship is the foundation of the life of the meeting. Just as Friends know that each of us individually can commune directly with the Divine, so also it is our experience that the worshipping community can commune directly with God. There are times when this communion is felt very powerfully by at least some of the worshippers, when there descends upon the meeting a deep peace and awareness of each other in the Spirit and of something even deeper, bringing with it extraordinary joy and gratitude; we call this experience a gathered or covered meeting for worship.

Friends worship in silent expectant waiting for this Presence in our midst. The meeting does not have a religious leader who conducts the worship and the worship does not have the elements that most other churches have in their services, such as hymn-singing, scripture readings, sermons, and so on; thus it is called ‘unprogrammed worship.’ This radical simplicity in the worship is intended to create openness to inward communion without outward distractions, intrusions, or external suggestions.

For Friends, worship does not start and stop with the meeting for worship, but our gathering together for corporate worship is precious to us. It is a joyful expectancy from the heart, openness to the movement of the Spirit within us and among us. From a place of centeredness in the Spirit, some Friends may rise during the worship and speak with vocal ministry that comes from the Spirit and leads us deeper into its Presence.

It is important to the life and health of our community that each of us makes worship the foundation of our own spiritual life and attends meeting for worship regularly. Similarly, it is important that members become familiar with the conventions that make for a well-ordered and Spirit-led worship. Knowing that the Spirit may call any of us into vocal ministry in meeting for worship, we seek to be ready to answer that call faithfully when so prompted. We also recognize the essential importance of those who, through their presence, attention, and silent participation, uphold our meetings for worship. It is Friends’ experience that the Spirit, however we experience it, moves more deeply amongst us when worshipers come prepared for worship. Arriving on time to worship together supports a deeper communion.

Spiritual nurture

Quakerism offers a unique pathway to the life of the Spirit. To some it looks like Friends eliminated the clergy, but in fact Quakers have eliminated the laity—every Friend is called to be

a minister, seeking to serve God and each other in many ways and all the time, as we are led. Our meeting is rich and abundant to the degree that each of us explores and develops our particular gifts.

We seek to support our members in their spiritual journeys with both personal discernment and support for their spiritual lives and with programs designed to deepen their faith and practice. Being a member, then, is an invitation to the meeting to pay more than just passive attention to one's spiritual life and to support one's spiritual journey, as the meeting is able.

Ministry

We believe that each person is endowed with gifts of the Spirit and that from time to time and in various ways the Spirit may call any of us into specific service. Sharing our gifts, leadings, and ministry (service) with each other is one of the most important ways Friends build fellowship and deepen the life of the community.

Quaker ministry takes many forms. These include vocal ministry, the prompting to speak in meeting for worship or in the meeting for worship with attention to business, a particular calling to pastoral care, bringing religious education to our children, working to better our world, and many other manifestations. We seek to be as faithful as possible in discerning whether our own ministry is Spirit-led, and to answer that call as faithfully as possible when it comes. Earlier generations of Friends have taught us the wisdom of helping those who feel a call with discernment in clarifying the nature of the call and with support for the work. CPMM's Gifts and Leadings Committee serves members with help in discerning a leading and provides ongoing spiritual support to them in that ministry.

Meeting for business

Friends carry out their business in monthly meetings conducted in a spirit of worship. In the meeting for business in worship, the Quaker faith finds concrete expression in the world. Friends do not vote. Rather, we seek to make decisions under the guidance of the Spirit, seeking to follow the guidance we receive through the Spirit-led contributions of individuals during the meeting. With the clerk's facilitation, the meeting eventually comes to unity about its direction in matters both significant and mundane.

The meeting expects members to attend business meetings faithfully and to treat their own contributions to our decision making as part of a collective search for Truth. During the meeting, we seek to attend to the movement of the Spirit among us, and to bring hearts and minds that are open to divine guidance, releasing one's own expectations and agendas about the matters the meeting is considering.

Working for Social Change—Fruits of the Spirit

For Friends, the life of the Spirit is not one of withdrawal from the world but of engagement with it, seeking to further peace, justice, equality, and care for the earth. The impulse to social change expresses itself in both service and advocacy, and we incorporate regular service opportunities in our First Day School programs. The meeting offers support for Friends who feel

led into social change work as individuals. The Peace and Social Concerns Committee provides pastoral care to members engaged in social change witness in the world, guides the meeting in exploring new concerns, and acts on behalf of the meeting when asked to do so by the meeting for worship with attention to business.

Living a life of integrity is not easy. Each of us is still on a journey in the process of understanding both the depths of what is wrong in ourselves and our world and understanding the potential for wholeness. Some of the priorities in our community are ending mass incarceration, addressing the issues of climate change, and encouraging fair trade.

We are committed to ending the structures of oppression within CPMM. We seek to become a place of nourishment for all who have been hurt by racism, sexism, classism, and those hurt by transphobia and homophobia, recognizing that our beloved community and all of us as individuals have been injured by structures that foster oppression.

We feel a special call to end all vestiges of racism within our own community. The meeting has been working to challenge white supremacy in the world and to actively unlearn the falsehoods about race that we ourselves have learned from our culture. The Racial Healing and Wholeness Committee has taken leadership in this task, inviting members to be courageous in addressing racism in our community.

The Life of the Meeting—The Spirit in Action

The structure, operations, and finances of the meeting

As mentioned before, most of the work of the meeting is done through committees (though some specific tasks are in the hands of paid employees). Thus the meeting needs members to help the Nominating Committee match their individual gifts with the work of the meeting. CPMM also expects its members and attenders to contribute financially to the meeting as generously as their circumstances allow. Our meeting operates a burial ground and holds Friends Select School under our care. We are an equity member in the Friends Center complex and we make the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting library available to members.

Friends beyond CPMM

When one joins Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, one also joins a wider fellowship of Quaker meetings and enters a broad constellation of other Quaker organizations. CPMM joins with other meetings in Philadelphia to form Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting, which meets four times a year to conduct its affairs. The Quarterly Meeting joins with other such regional meetings to form Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, which meets for several days once a year to conduct its business, with some interim meetings throughout the year. In turn, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting affiliates with other like-minded yearly meetings to form Friends General Conference.

For more information about these and other Quaker meetings and organizations, visit quaker.org.

Inactive members

We seek to maintain a viable and meaningful relationship between all our members and the meeting. When a member lives geographically close enough to be active, but has ceased to be active, we reach out to them to understand why. Has some hurt occurred that perhaps can be healed? Is it due to illness or aging? If so, how might we help? Or perhaps their spiritual path is leading them in a different direction and connection with the meeting is no longer meaningful?

Our goal is the same when someone no longer lives geographically close enough to be active. We ask whether the member still wants to remain in relationship with the meeting. Friends who still value the relationship typically try to follow the activities of the meeting, maintain contact with some people in the meeting, and contribute financially as they are able. We ask whether they have explored becoming involved in any meeting nearer to their new home and, if not, what the obstacles might be.

If our good-faith efforts to reach out to an inactive member do not draw the person back into our fellowship in any substantive way, then Membership Care Committee considers whether to recommend to the meeting for business that we release the Friend from membership. The business meeting has the final word.

In conclusion

If you have read this document in order to learn more about how members of this meeting understand living our faith and if what you've learned appeals to you, we hope you will continue to get to know us. Should you eventually consider applying for membership, you can find a link to our Guide for Applying for Membership in the resources listed below.

Other meeting resources on membership

[A Guide to Applying for Membership in CPMM](https://www.fgcquaker.org/cloud/central-philadelphia-monthly-meeting/resources/guide-becoming-member-central-philadelphia)—how to apply for membership.

[<https://www.fgcquaker.org/cloud/central-philadelphia-monthly-meeting/resources/guide-becoming-member-central-philadelphia>]

[CPMM Committees](https://www.fgcquaker.org/cloud/pages/committees-1)—a description of what our committees do.

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[Faith and Practice on Membership](#)—the section on membership in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's book *Faith and Practice*, a description of our yearly meeting's approach to Quakerism that is revised every generation or so.