

## Quaker Terms and Phrases

**Advices** – extracts from minutes and epistles of early Friends intended to supply guidance, caution and counsel to monthly meetings and their members on various aspects of daily life.

**Attender** - a person who worships regularly with Friends but has not joined the Religious Society of Friends.

**Birthright** - until the late 1940s a person who was born to a Quaker family automatically became a member of the Society by right of birth, hence birthright. Nowadays an application must be made to become a member of the Society. Since then the term has come to be used more loosely to describe any Friend born of Quaker parents.

**Care and Counsel** – the committee tasked with pastoral care in unprogrammed Meetings. This includes the formation and supervision of **clearness committees**, a unique and confidential process open to those who seek corporate assistance in reaching clarity in a decision. Friends form Clearness Committees for a number of reasons including membership considerations, marriage under the care of the meeting, and difficult discernments.

**Centering or Center Down** – the initial stage of worship when Friends clear their minds and settle down to achieve a spiritual focus.

**Christocentric** - a Quaker whose inspiration is essentially Christian.

**Clearness** - a process undergone to discern true leading, especially in ambiguous or complicated situations. Friends often work with clearness committees when struggling with a difficult issue.

**Clerk** - a person appointed by a business meeting or committee to take a meeting through its business; the only officer of most meetings (as there are no clergy); the person charged with making and keeping the records of the meeting (including the records of births, marriages, and deaths). The clerk's role is to serve—as an honored servant of the meeting—and, whilst revered, is not an authoritarian position.

**Committee** - a group of Friends who gather to work on a Meeting-related task.

**Concern** - an idea or prompting by the Inner Light, which leads a Friend to take on an issue as a personal calling. Friends consider carrying out a concern to be a form of ministry. Often there may be a meeting for clearness to test the concern after which the Meeting may well support the person in their concern. Many well-known organizations, such as the American Friends Service Committee, Don't Make a Wave Committee (the predecessor organization to Greenpeace), Oxfam and Amnesty International, have been founded by Friends "acting under concern."

**Continuing Revelation** – a central Quaker belief that the revelation of the inner light is an ongoing process.

**Convener** - usually applied to a person who is responsible for the organization of a one-off meeting for business.

**Convinced Friend** - a historical term for those Friends who were not born into Quaker families, but who came to Friends because of Quaker teaching and practice. The process of deciding to become a Friend is known as "convincement."

**Convincement** - a discovery of truth, as in "Quaker by convincement", one who has become convinced of the truth of the Quaker way. It is used to describe anybody who joins the Society.

**Discernment** - the process of perceiving whether a decision, direction, or leading comes from the Spirit, and for gaining greater clarity about its full character and import for a Friend, or a meeting.

**Eldering** - the process of gentle redirection of a person back onto the path of right ordering.

**Epistle** - Quaker gatherings often send a report of their deliberations to other Quakers. The best known example is the Yearly Meeting Epistle. They often start "To Friends everywhere..."

**First Day School** - Friends' designation for the Sunday religious education program provided by a monthly meeting for children and adults.

**Friend** - a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). We get our name from the original title of "Friends in the Truth." Our first loyalty is to Truth. Quakers often refer to themselves collectively as Friends and will address a Quaker as "Friend" if they don't know the person's name.

**Gathered Meeting** - a meeting for worship, where those present feel that they were particularly in tune with the leadings of the Inner Light/spirit.

**Facing Benches** - older meetinghouses often have benches on a raised platform which face the rest of the congregation where Weighty Friends (see below) who might be expected to speak would sit. Historically (and in some meetings still) these would be the recorded ministers and elders.

**Hold in the Light** - to recognize concern in one's self for another person or situation. This is often considered to be synonymous with praying for someone.

**Lay down** - the action properly taken upon a committee or meeting that is no longer needed; "to lay down" a meeting is to disband.

**Lay over** - to allow time to pass before action on a consideration, in hopes of obtaining clearness; i.e., "the transfer of Mary's membership has lain over for one month."

**Leading** - a prompting thought to be received from the spirit; a course of action, belief or conviction that a Friend feels is divinely inspired. It can turn into a concern. A leading may arise from a concern.

**Lift Up** – to emphasize or make explicit a particular point or concern.

**Meeting** – a term used in different contexts, and thus, confusing. It can be as shorthand for Meeting for Worship, or it can refer to a meeting of Quakers that has gathered for business and administrative matters, for example: Preparative Meeting, Monthly Meeting, Quarterly Meeting and Yearly Meeting.

**Meeting for Worship** - the great mystery of Quakerism: what happens in Meeting for Worship? We don't actually worship using a liturgy, agreed words or ritual in the way that other traditions do. Quakers believe that when we gather together in silence we can engage in a direct and personal relationship with what goes by terms such as God, Inner Light, etc. (But we disagree on its nature!)

**Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business** - a meeting for business administration and decision making.

**Meetinghouse** - a place where Quakers gather for worship, though not the only place that they may do so.

**Membership** - what you request instead when you decide to want to join Friends.

**Ministry** - many Friends use the term broadly to mean living the testimonies in everyday life. Vocal ministry refers to the act of speaking during a Meeting for Worship.

**Ministry and Worship Committee** – the committee charged with overseeing the worship and the spiritual support of the Meeting. Individual Friends are also encouraged to carry this concern.

**Minutes** - these are the record of the proceedings of a business meeting written by the clerk or convener of that meeting. Quaker minutes are written and agreed to as the meeting proceeds with its business.

**Monthly Meeting** – what a standard congregation of the Religious Society of Friends will call itself. It designates how often they meet for business, not how often they meet for worship.

**Opening** – a term often used by early Friends to designate a spiritual opportunity or leading.

**Outrun One's Guide** – used to describe actions or words that while a Friend started within the Light, they then go beyond that guidance.

**Peace Testimony** – the corporate commitment of Friends to pacifism and nonviolence.

**Plain Dress/Speech** – the witness of early Friends to the testimonies of equality and integrity by dressing and speaking simply. These served into the 20<sup>th</sup> century as outward symbols and reminders of our distinctive beliefs.

**Preparative Meeting** - preparative meetings are smaller meetings that join in the meetings for business of a larger monthly meeting. They are "designed" to grow into monthly meetings.

**Proceed as Way Opens** - to undertake a service or course of action without prior clarity about all the details but with confidence that divine guidance will make these apparent and assure an appropriate outcome.

**Programmed** - describes a Meeting for Worship that has an order of service and is led by a pastor. Two thirds of Friends world-wide belong to Yearly Meetings that hold programmed meetings. Also known as a **Pastoral Meeting**.

**Quaker** - originally a pejorative name for a member of the Religious Society of Friends, now a title worn with pride and probably more widely known by the public than the more correct term of Friend.

**Quaker Faith and Practice** - a book which seeks to express in words the workings of the Spirit as experienced by Quakers over three hundred fifty years. It is both an anthology of Quaker thought and guidance on the right ordering of Quaker affairs. It is revised every generation to reflect the continuing revelation and understanding of the Spirit.

**Quarterly Meeting** - quarterly meetings are made up of a number of monthly meetings and meet quarterly for business and worship.

**Queries** – a set of questions, based on Friends' practices and testimonies, which are considered by Meetings and individuals as a way of both guiding and examining individual and corporate lives and actions. As such, they are a means of self examination.

**Recording Clerk** – the person appointed by a Meeting to take minutes at regular and called meetings for business of a Meeting or other Friends body.

**Released Friend** – a Friend whose leading to carry out a particular course of action has met with approval from a Meeting which then promises to provide such support as would enable the Friend to follow that leading.

**Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)** - the correct title of the organization to which Friends/Quakers belong.

**Rise of Meeting** - this phrase describes the end of worship in an unprogrammed meeting, usually signaled by a designated Friend shaking hands with a person next to him or her.

**Seasoning** - a period of waiting, where action is not taken because the "way" has not yet "opened" or some other "stop" is felt.

**Sense of the Meeting** - clerks of committees and Meetings are tasked with discerning the "sense of the meeting" that develops over the course of a Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business; to capture (and at times record) any truths or decisions in which those present have come to unity.

**Speak Truth to Power** – from Larry Ingle's article "[Living the Truth, Speaking to Power](#)" as published in Chuck Fager's The Best of Friends, Vol. 1, Kimo Press, 1998: *"The phrase 'speaking truth to power' goes back to 1955, when the American Friends Service Committee published Speak Truth to Power, a pamphlet that proposed a new approach to the Cold War. Its title, which came to Friend Milton Mayer toward the end of the week in summer 1954 when the composing committee finished work on the document, has become almost a cliché; it has become common far beyond Quaker circles, often used by people who have no idea of its origins.*

**Speaks to my condition (speaks my mind)** - a phrase commonly used during meetings for business to express that another Friend has spoken what is in the mind of the speaker; used to help add weight to the statements of others.

**Standing Aside** - among Friends, this phrase is used during meeting for business when the speaker does not agree with the decision being made by the meeting, but does not sense that they should stand in the way of the decision moving forward.

**Testimonies** - the cumulative lived witness of generations of Friends. They include community, equality, integrity, peace, simplicity.

**Testing a concern** - a process of deliberation by a Monthly Meeting to examine whether a Friend's concern has validity and should be promoted and supported by that meeting.

**That of God in everyone** - the belief in the presence of God within all people. Also referred to as the Inner Light.

**Threshing** – a gathering of Friends to consider in depth a controversial issue but without the necessity of reaching a decision.

**Under the care of the Meeting** - when couples wish to be married under the care of a meeting, the meeting appoints a clearness committee to ascertain that both are free to marry, that any difficulties or objections are worked through, and to advise the meeting that the marriage can proceed with no known impediments. At least one person in the couple must be a member of the Religious Society of Friends for this type of marriage to be legally recognized. If neither are members, then the couple may be married “in the manner of Friends,” but they must also hold a civil ceremony for the marriage to be legally recognized.

**Under the care of** – describes an activity, program, or event for which a Meeting takes responsibility and to which it gives oversight: thus, a marriage, a preparatory meeting, specific programming, or a school might be said to be under the care of a monthly meeting or a committee of that meeting.

**Unity** – when coming to a decision, unprogrammed Friends seek unity. Unity is different from unanimity in the democratic process and from a consensus. A single dissent may result in the decision being held over for further discernment. Clerks of meetings and committees are designated to "discern" the sense of the meeting. A Friend can stand aside to allow the motion to move forward, even if they do not personally agree and wish to have that recorded in the minutes.

**Universalist** - a Quaker who believes that there is a universal truth that may be found in all faiths.

**Unprogrammed** - describes a Meeting for Worship where all ministry and prayer is inspired by the Spirit rather than by a predetermined order of service.

**Vocal Ministry:** The sharing of a message or prayer during a meeting for worship.

**Weighty Friend** - one who is influential (i.e.: their opinion carries weight) within the Society (while remaining consistent with our testimony on equality, of course); a Friend who is respected for their experience and ability over their history of participation with Friends, whose opinion or ministry is especially valued.

**Witness** – to testify to or take action based on religious conviction, often at some personal cost. Bearing witness to one’s beliefs through action is central to Quakers’ practicing their faith and is a direct expression of their faith.

**Worship Sharing** – a group practice in which participants share personal and spiritual experiences, thoughts, and feelings, often in response to a prearranged theme or questions, and in a manner that acknowledges the presence of the spirit.

**Yearly Meeting** - 1) a regional group of Friends composed of several Monthly Meetings. 2) A yearly gathering of Friends, usually located on a small college campus, for business, workshops, worship, etc.