



Yearly Meeting of  
the Religious Society  
of Friends in Britain

# Organising a Meeting for Worship with those from other Churches and other Faiths

Quaker Meetings for Worship offer great potential as a form of worship that is acceptable to those from other denominations or faiths. Not having set prayers or statements makes this a neutral forum in which people can worship together. However, in welcoming a large number of people who have never been to a Quaker Meeting for Worship, more preparation is required than for a regular Meeting.

This leaflet gives some thoughts on both the practical arrangements as well as some ideas that can be incorporated into a leaflet to distribute to all those who attend.

## Thoughts on practical arrangements

Prepare the room appropriately for the number of people expected to attend. Arrange for refreshments and flowers as needed.

Sufficient Quakers need to be around to welcome people as they arrive and to chat to those who are perhaps anxious about what to expect.

Those arriving need to be informed that there are no special seats and that they can sit anywhere.

Some Quakers should be encouraged to sit silently in the Meeting Room early so that newcomers do not enter an empty room, and so they can follow the example of those present.

A Quaker should be responsible for closing Worship at the appointed time and should sit next to another Quaker so that a newcomer is not faced with having to be one of the people initiating the closing handshake.

Quakers present at the meeting should not feel that many items of spoken ministry are necessary. We hope that those present will appreciate the quality of the silence; too much spoken ministry defeats this purpose. However, one other possibility is a partly programmed meeting.

Some thought needs to be given to the written material that will be distributed around the Meeting House. Copies of *Advices and Queries* and *Quaker Faith and Practice* would be appropriate. In an inter-denominational Meeting copies of the Bible can be made available. If the meeting is an Inter-Faith event, should the Bible be prominently displayed or not? Perhaps literature from all the faiths likely to be represented could be available, but this should be checked with the faith groups in advance.

If you produce a leaflet explaining the procedure then these can be placed on each seat and/or handed out as people arrive. Indeed they can even be distributed in advance to those who have indicated an interest in attending. Alternatively you may wish to use the leaflet '*Your first time in a Quaker Meeting*' and supplement this with someone announcing what will happen early on in the proceedings. Think about what you should do if any of the attenders are visually impaired or have difficulty in reading or understanding English.

Bear in mind that if at the start of the Meeting someone stands to explain what will happen, this will interrupt

the developing silence of the Meeting. Depending on the context of the Meeting such a person may be necessary, but if leaflets can be used instead, the silence is not broken.

Below are some thoughts that could form part of your introductory leaflet. It is most unlikely that you will want to use this in its entirety but ideally it would be re-written to suit the particular Meeting you are planning. Aim for brevity, but be comprehensive enough so that people are not left with unanswered questions, which can create anxiety.

## What is a Meeting for Worship?

The Quaker Meeting is based on silence. It is a silence of waiting in expectancy. The silence may last for quite some time, perhaps even the whole meeting. That doesn't mean that nothing is happening. All of us are trying to come nearer to each other and to God as we are caught up in the still spirit of the Meeting.

We do not worship in isolation. We try to become aware of all those gathered with us, uniting in a common purpose, so that the waiting and listening becomes an act of sharing.

Each person can worship silently in his or her own way but worshipping corporately is a powerful experience unlike that of private prayer and meditation.

The Meeting starts as soon as the first person has sat down in the silence. It lasts for an hour (*or however long has been specified for this particular Meeting*) and then the people who have been appointed to close the meeting will shake hands.

## What do we do in Meeting?

We find a sitting position in which we feel comfortable, and don't worry if we need to shift in our seat from time to time. Bow your head if you wish. Close your eyes or keep them open. Sit down and relax.

Some find it easy to relax in the silence and thus to enter into the spirit of the Meeting. Others may be disturbed by the strangeness of the silence, by distractions outside, or by roving thoughts. Don't worry about this, we all find it difficult to settle at times, but we try to return again and again into the silence, where the presence of God can be known. Try, if only for brief periods, to be quiet in body, mind and spirit. Bring whatever is pressing on your mind to the Meeting. It can be a time of insight, revelation, healing, or calm.

## Silence or speaking?

The Meeting for Worship can be entirely held in silence. Each person is contributing silently and this contribution is important.

Sometimes individuals will feel that they are called to make a spoken contribution or 'ministry' as Quakers call it. Breaking the silence is not to be done lightly, and historically Quakers 'quaked before the Lord' before they spoke (and so were given their nickname). However, spoken contributions to the Meeting can enrich the worship of others; if you feel prompted to speak, please stand and offer your contribution so as to be heard clearly, and speak briefly. This is not an opportunity to deliver a lecture or sermon or to get your point of view across. If you feel you should 'minister' ask yourself if you honestly feel it is for the benefit of the Meeting as a whole or whether it is honestly more for your own benefit.

A clear period of silence of several minutes between spoken contributions is very helpful, to allow those present to reflect on each contribution. A Meeting for Worship is not a debate or a discussion and this should be born in mind if responding to a previous piece of spoken ministry. Please do not speak more than once during the Meeting. Silence is the norm in Quaker meetings, but some spoken ministry can be of great value.

A leaflet from the Quaker Committee for Christian and Interfaith Relations (QCCIR).

QCCIR can provide advice and support to Quakers and Meetings who want to broaden and deepen their encounters with other churches and faiths.

Contact: QCCIR c/o Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ. Email: marigoldb@quaker.org.uk Telephone: 020 7663 1060