

# Principles and testimonies

Why do we do nominations the way we do?



The process of appointment starts when the meeting identifies the need for a task to be performed.

*From Quaker faith & practice 3.23*



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 organisation not as a hierarchy but as a community shaped by a common set of values that stem from a basic belief, which recognises 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.

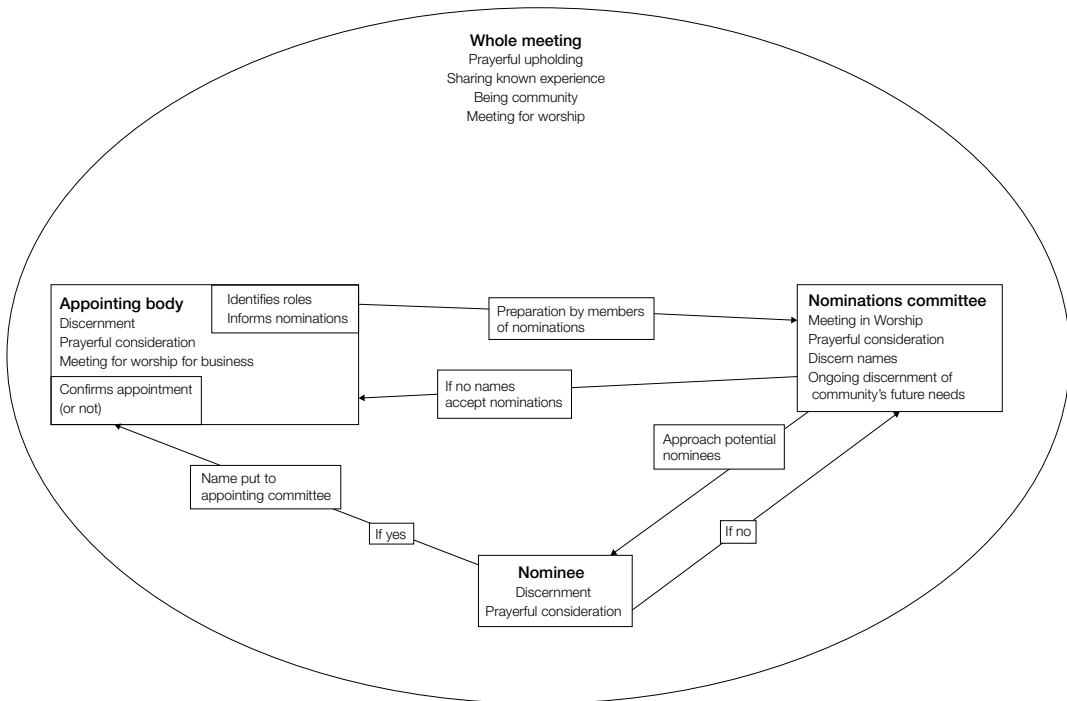
This is where our testimony to equality is lived out. With our belief that there is that of God in everyone, nobody should be ruled out for any job at the start of the process: every experienced clerk, after all, clerked their first meeting as an inexperienced clerk. We can look at the potential of that 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. Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre runs courses for roles within meetings. Help from those who have just retired from jobs can be very useful, and we need to seek it and organise it.

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. If we can't find anyone for whom the job is right and seen to be right, then we need to ask not 'who can we get for this job?', but 'why do we have this job when there's nobody to do it?'. If we can't find a clerk, how about a team of two or three co-clerks? If no treasurer is forthcoming, how about employing a professional book-keeper to lessen the task? We need to be creative with our community and the way we run it.

It is better to think of being led out of worshipful silence rather than of racking your brains and scouring the membership list: this is the way we do all Quaker tasks, and nominations should be no exception.

The diagram below shows how a nominations committee interacts with the appointing body (e.g. local business meeting) and highlights both the practical tasks to be done at each stage and the necessary points of discernment. Notice the importance of the whole meeting within which the nominations process sits. The basic principles that arise from this, and the main practical points, are given as 'Top Tips' overleaf.



## **Top Tips for Nominations**

1. Nominations is the quiet heart of building the framework of your Quaker community – enjoy being involved.
2. It is about practising prayerful discernment: of people's names for a particular role and of the ongoing needs of the community.
3. It is about encouraging people to grow, by giving them opportunities to offer service in new ways that will nourish them and enrich the community. It is not about finding people to do the jobs!
4. It is about putting our testimonies into practice, e.g. practising equality... how can we include everyone... young people, newer Friends, people with disabilities?
5. It is about avoiding making assumptions – they can't possibly be asked – they're too busy/old/sick/etc. Ask, don't assume!
6. It is about remembering not to overburden Friends – we want them to flourish, not flounder.
7. It is about listening and sensitivity – to others on your committee, your meeting and individuals you approach.
8. It is about explaining your work to others and asking for prayerful upholding by your meeting; of you and the people appointed to roles.
9. It is about keeping necessary records.
10. It is about taking a role back to your appointing body if you cannot find anyone who is prepared to be nominated for it.
11. It is about putting love into action and finding the divine in a well-founded Quaker process.

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