



# Action Points

## Membership Process

The Process of applying for membership is described in full in Chapter 11 of *Quaker faith & practice* on Membership. This chapter was revised by Yearly Meeting in 2011 and all current printed editions of *Quaker faith & practice* are out of date. You can find the correct version online at <http://www.quaker.org.uk/files/Quaker-faith-and-practice-Chapter-11-as-amended-by-YMG-2011.pdf>

There are four parts to the basic process of applying for membership:

- Nurture and support
- Initiating the process
- Discerning rightness
- Recognition

### Nurture and support

Meetings (especially elders and overseers) have a responsibility to nurture and support individuals so that they can develop a sense of belonging and an understanding of Quaker shared beliefs, testimonies and spiritual discipline.

Obviously this is an on-going process and applies to all who are part of a meeting, whether or not they become a member or not.

Area meetings may provide attenders' packs with information about membership (including any local processes), there may be special nurturing or supporting Friends or there may be formal or informal discussion groups – using study materials like 'Becoming Friends' or making suggestions about relevant reading (or sending them to Woodbrooke on a course about Quakerism).

It is important for the applicant to become familiar with Quaker discipline: for example, meetings for church affairs are a part of the life of the meeting and applicants should be alive to the reasons Quakers conduct affairs the way they do and the importance of playing an active role in them.

A potential new member should feel able to approach elders and overseers to ask for support if needed. Before having a meeting about membership a potential new member should first think about:

- What so far has helped your journey to membership?
  - What you've done?
  - What your meeting has done to nurture and support you (might be the meeting as a whole or an individual within the meeting)?
  - What support do you think you need?

### Initiating the process

The process can be started by the applicant or someone else. For example, others may approach an attender to encourage her or him to consider membership and may begin the process on their behalf. Attenders themselves may take the first step.

The decision to apply may, perhaps, emerge from being part of a discussion group. The traditional way of starting the process is a letter to the AM clerk, but you might choose to talk about it to an elder or overseer in your meeting and write together, or ask the local meeting to send a minute (or the meeting might send a minute to the AM if it has considered the issue and wants to start the process).

The decision should not be delayed by the question “am I good enough? We are all human and fallible. However before you are in a position to make an informed decision you need to know something about the Society and there are some basic expectations that potential new members should fulfil:

- To have been attending Meeting for Worship at least for several months and to have attended, if possible, at least one other meeting other than your local meeting.
- To have “attended a meeting for church affairs” such as your local Meeting’s “local meeting” and to have read at least parts of Quaker Faith and Practice.
- To understand the Quaker corporate testimonies, not because you have to subscribe to them (they are not creeds), but so that you can appreciate the importance for other Friends of these principles of living.

### **Discerning rightness**

One of the key elements of membership is the idea of mutuality. The application process is at best one of mutual exploration. In applying the prospective member opens themselves up to both giving and receiving from the group. The group in turn should expect to receive from and give to the individual member. There is commitment on both sides. There is a mutual undertaking to listen to one another, to listen to God, to seek, to share doubts and to share findings – and then to live out the consequences. Because the membership relationship is a mutual one, the discernment process also needs to be mutual.

There are three main requirements for membership:

- You have found help and strength in the Meeting for Worship.
- You are genuinely seeking a spiritual dimension in your life – an openness to God.
- You have experience of Quaker worship, testimonies and decision making to be aware of the commitment you are making and the group to which you are committing yourself.

The discernment process may involve a meeting for clearness, consideration by the local meeting or, what often happens, is a visit from two existing members appointed by the Area Meeting.

This isn’t a test or an examination, but is a conversation that is an important part of the process – both in helping the individual to decide that it is still right for them to become a member and so the community, or meeting, can be sure that the individual has an appropriate understanding of the meaning and responsibilities of membership. These visitors may prepare a report to go to Area Meeting and the individual should see this as part of the process, and usually they’re allowed to comment on what the visitors have written before it goes to AM.

Often people will have found a wider Quaker community beyond the local or area meeting and individuals from this wider Quaker community can also be involved in the discernment process.

Those involved in this process might include members of a listed informal group, a young person's link group, or a university chaplain. If someone is heavily involved in a Quaker group for example that explores environmental concerns and that is relevant to their understanding of Quaker testimony, it would be right for someone from this group to be involved in the discernment process.

The final part of the process of discernment is consideration by the area meeting. As area meetings are responsible for holding membership they are responsible for the final decision about an application. The decision may be informed, for example, by a minute from the local meeting, a report written by visitors with the applicant, or by the outcome of a meeting for clearness. All of these are the product of discernment.

### **Recognition**

It can be important for people for there to be an outward recognition of the journey to membership. It usually includes being 'welcomed' either personally or publicly after meeting (or both), a meeting may make a gift of a book (*Quaker faith & practice* or some other suitable book if they already have *Quaker faith & practice*). It can be a significant event, for some it may be more significant than others.

### **For discussion and reflection:**

- What are your feelings about the process?
- Do you have any questions?
- What is clear/unclear?
- What might stop you from embarking on this?