

# Organization and Structure of Meetings

## Communities of Friends

The Quaker way of life is one of community: Friends gather together for worship, for service, to support each other spiritually and in other ways, and to reach collective decisions on the issues which arise in community life. For Friends, religion is not just a matter of individual experience, but something we enter into together, acting as a body in our worship, our witness, and our business; holding each other in mutual care, love and attention.

This is not to discount the experience of those Friends who live at too great a distance from their meetings to participate regularly, nor to deny that each of us must come individually to a sense of what is right and true and essential in spiritual matters. But time and experience have proven the value of a close, responsive community in fostering individual spiritual growth, in testing and tempering individual leadings and individual understanding, and in supporting individuals as they are called to act or to suffer for religious principle. Worship in a gathered community is different in valuable ways from private devotion, and a coordinated group can accomplish far more in service and advocacy than individuals acting alone.

Effective functioning as a community requires some organizational structure, and Friends have developed a variety of modes of organization, at both the local and the regional levels.

The local (or “particular”) meeting may be organized as a *worship group*, *recognized meeting*, *preparative meeting*, or *monthly meeting*. (The differences among these are explained on pp. xx–xx.) Whatever its organizational pattern, the local meeting is where Friends typically find their primary spiritual home. The local meeting is where Friends gather most often for worship, where they have the most regular contact with one another, where they can most easily provide individual care and support for one another. Indeed, some Friends find that their entire involvement in the Religious Society of Friends is with their local meeting.

There is a strong tradition of local autonomy in Illinois Yearly Meeting, and local meetings order their own affairs as they feel led. But Friends community is not purely local, any more than spiritual life is purely individual. No local meeting is a denomination unto itself; we are gathered into larger, regional bodies and into the worldwide Religious Society of Friends just as we are gathered locally: for worship, mutual care, fellowship, and above all for service to God and to humankind. Larger gatherings provide support for local meetings, and make coordination possible across meetings; they allow the pursuit of larger-scale projects than local meetings could accomplish on their own; they broaden the spiritual perspectives both of meetings and of individuals; and they provide an important unifying influence among Friends.

Regional meetings may be organized in various ways and for regions of various sizes. In some cases a monthly meeting may function as a small regional body, with more than one local meeting in its care (see pp. xx–xx below). Several monthly meetings may be organized into a *quarterly meeting*, or may hold other kinds of regional gatherings. *Yearly meetings* encompass a still wider area; Illinois Yearly Meeting includes local meetings throughout Illinois and neighboring areas of several other states. Various “umbrella” organizations promote communication, services, and cooperation among yearly meetings, and represent the Religious Society of Friends at the national and international levels.

The purpose and organization of these various kinds of local meetings, regional meetings and organizations will be described in turn.

### **The Monthly Meeting**

The *monthly meeting* is our primary level of business meeting, conducting the business of a single local meeting, or in some cases, of a small number of meetings across a limited region. By extension, the body of Friends whose business is conducted in such a meeting is also known as a monthly meeting. Membership in the Religious Society of Friends is through and in a monthly meeting, which may admit new members and make other membership decisions.

#### *Functions of monthly meetings*

Each monthly meeting organizes, maintains and oversees one or more regular meetings for worship. This includes arranging the time and location of meetings, publicizing their existence, and seeing that those who come to meeting are warmly welcomed. Beyond these practical matters, the monthly meeting promotes the spiritual vitality of its meetings for worship, encouraging worship and ministry in which the presence of God is deeply felt, and which tenderly addresses the spiritual needs of meeting participants, individually and as a community.

The monthly meeting also develops the meeting community and cares for its members outside of meeting for worship. Often, the meeting has meals together after worship, or holds other events which cultivate a sense of intimacy and fellowship among meeting participants. It educates both children and adults in the principles of Friends, and supports them in their spiritual development. It is responsible for holding meetings for marriage, funerals and memorials. The meeting should see to it that Friends in difficult or trying circumstances receive the support they need, whether in the form of practical assistance, counsel, or simple companionship and acknowledgment.

Monthly meetings also witness publicly as led by God, and interpret the Quaker message to the wider community. Much of this witness may take the form of advocacy for peace, justice, environmental stewardship, and equality; or of direct service and relief to those in need.

All these functions require resources and organization, and the monthly meeting therefore also serves an administrative purpose. It receives, maintains and disburses funds. It may own and maintain a meetinghouse, burial ground, or other property. It must keep accurate records of its business proceedings, membership, and finances.

### *Positions and committees of the monthly meeting*

In fulfilling these functions, meetings usually find that certain responsibilities are best delegated to particular individuals or groups. The extent of this delegation will vary with the size, activity, and needs of the meeting. Normally, all monthly meetings will appoint someone to the position of *clerk*, and a different person as *treasurer*. A very small meeting might make no other appointments than these, working together as a committee of the whole in cases where other meetings might delegate, or might appoint individuals to handle responsibilities which in a larger meeting might be the work of committees. A very large meeting may have an elaborate system of committees and individual positions, into whose care the practical work of the meeting has been placed, and in which business is prepared before presentation to the monthly meeting itself.

The kinds of committees and individual positions which a meeting sets up are a matter for careful discernment. Just as organizational structure varies from meeting to meeting, it may vary across time within a single meeting. The size, energy, and concerns of a meeting community may change over the course of its history, and Friends sometimes find that a pattern of organization which formerly served them well becomes an impediment to effective work. Meetings do well to reconsider their structure from time to time. When major changes are made, community members may need to alter their habits and expectations: A meeting which has recently established a system of committees must guard against redoing committee work in its monthly meeting for business. A meeting which has recently laid down major committees must find new ways of making sure that vital work gets done.

Not all meetings will always use all the committees and positions listed here. But they have all proven to be useful in the right circumstances, and some of them have deep roots in Quaker tradition:

*Clerk.* The position of clerk is motivated by two unusual features of Friends business process: We do not vote, and decisions may be made which do not reflect proposals whose wording is prepared in advance of the meeting. These features present a challenge: How can we be sure when a decision has actually been made, and precisely what has been decided? To prevent confusion over such questions, meetings appoint an individual, the clerk, whose charge is to discern when the meeting has reached a decision in its business sessions, and articulate this decision back to the meeting for its approval.

In principle, our meetings are presided over by the Divine Spirit, by which we wait to be guided in our business meetings no less than in our meetings for worship. The clerk is not so much the pilot on whom Friends rely to steer the ship, as the mirror into which they

look to see what decisions they have reached; accurately reflecting the sense of the meeting is the first responsibility of good “clerking.” The position of clerk in a Friends meeting differs in important ways from that of president in some other organizations. In many institutions, the president has extensive executive decision-making power, and is expected to take the lead in developing new initiatives and new programs. The position of clerk is first and foremost one of discernment in business meeting, and requires a degree of impartiality which is easily undermined, in appearance or reality, if the clerk makes major meeting decisions or strenuously promotes specific choices on the issues which come before the meeting. Of course the clerk may make such administrative decisions as are necessary to carry out the instructions of the meeting, but the primary role of the clerk is discerning the sense of the meeting as guided by the Spirit.

The clerk prepares a tentative agenda before the meeting, recognizes speakers during the meeting, and is responsible for seeing that the decisions of the meeting are carried out afterwards. The clerk signs letters and other documents on behalf of the meeting as it directs. In many meetings the clerk is assigned additional responsibilities outside the meeting for business, such as dealing with incoming correspondence, or closing the meeting for worship and making announcements. In meetings which do not appoint a separate recorder or recording clerk, these functions also fall to the clerk.

Some meetings also appoint an *assistant clerk*, who aids the clerk in formulating a clear and accurate expression of meeting decisions, substitutes for the clerk when the clerk is absent, and assists in other ways as the meeting directs. In some meetings the assistant clerkship serves as training for future service as clerk.

For more on the functions of the clerk, see ‘On the role of the clerks in meeting for business’, Friends’ Manner of Decision Making pp. 3–4.

*Recording clerk.* Originally, it was the responsibility of the clerk to record the minutes of the monthly meeting, and especially in smaller meetings this may still be the case. Most meetings have found it useful to appoint a separate *recording clerk*, so that the clerk may devote full attention to discerning the sense of the meeting on the questions which come before it.

The recording clerk is responsible for writing out the minutes as they are approved, and in most meetings shares responsibility with the clerk for composing the actual wording of the minutes. After the meeting, the recording clerk prepares an official copy of the minutes to be stored in a permanent file or minute book, and typically also prepares copies for distribution to meeting participants. See Friends’ Manner of Decision Making p. xx.

*Treasurer.* The treasurer receives, invests, and disburses the funds of the meeting in accordance with its instructions, and regularly reports to the meeting on its receipts, expenditures, balance, and general financial state. Individual donors are not identified in such reports, and the treasurer should treat their identities as confidential. The treasurer provides donors with receipts for their donations as required for tax purposes.

*Recorder.* The recorder (not to be confused with the recording clerk) is responsible for maintaining the membership records of the meeting. These include an up-to-date list of members, their names and addresses, the dates when membership was initiated, whether it was initiated by birth/adoption, transfer from another meeting, or request. Records should be maintained for former members giving the date when membership was terminated, and whether it was terminated by death, transfer to another meeting, or release from membership. Many meetings keep additional information provided by members: dates and locations of births, marriages and deaths; names of parents, spouses and children, and other information which the meeting may find useful and which members are willing to share. The recorder should keep a record of marriages held under the care of the meeting, including dates, and a copy or transcript of the marriage certificate.

It is strongly advised that all records be kept in hard copy on acid free paper. A computer database of members may also be useful, but does not eliminate the need for hard-copy records because computer media and file formats become obsolete.

The recorder should bear in mind that the approval of the monthly business meeting is required for all membership transfers, all initiations of membership by request, and all releases from membership, including releases of Friends who have been inactive for many years and with whom the meeting has lost touch; it is not the prerogative of the recorder to purge the membership book of inactive Friends, or to decide who should no longer be considered a member.

The recorder should provide the care and counsel committee (or its equivalent) with an up-to-date membership list, at least annually.

In most meetings, the recorder or another Friend also periodically publishes a meeting directory, giving such contact information as active members and attenders of the meeting are willing to share. This directory should not be confused with the formal membership list of the meeting.

*[Sample membership record to go in an appendix at the end of the book]*

*Archivist.* Many meetings appoint an archivist, who is responsible for maintaining the meeting's records, including a complete set of minutes, older membership records and financial documents, deeds and other property-related documents, newsletters, and other materials felt to be of permanent interest. It is useful to keep copies of such documents on hand for meeting use, but it is strongly recommended that the original copies of legal documents be kept in a safe-deposit box, and that the original copies of most other kinds of materials be deposited on loan in an external, publicly accessible repository. The archivist is responsible for seeing that materials are deposited in a timely manner. Many meetings in Illinois Yearly Meeting archive their records at the Illinois Historical Survey, a department of the University of Illinois Library in Urbana-Champaign.

*Librarian or library committee.* Many meetings appoint an individual or committee to oversee the meeting library. It is helpful for the library to include material for new and experienced Friends, for children and adults, and to include both permanent holdings and materials to be given out to newcomers.

*Religious education committee.* This committee, sometimes known as the First Day School Committee or by other names, coordinates the meeting's efforts to educate the meeting's children in the principles and values of Friends. In small and growing meetings, this may be the first committee formed, because of the need to nurture the children of the meeting. This committee may also coordinate religious education for adults; but more commonly this is handled by a separate committee, or by a self-organizing study group.

The committee is responsible for finding appropriate teachers, and for supporting and overseeing their work. In most meetings, teachers are chosen from among the members and attenders of the meeting. Care should be taken not to leave the job of teaching exclusively to parents. In any case, teachers should be well known to the meeting, or carefully interviewed and investigated to ensure the safety of the children and the appropriateness of the teacher's instructional style.

The committee bears responsibility for the curriculum, subject to the guidance and approval of the monthly meeting. Some useful resources are the Illinois Yearly Meeting Religious Education Committee, the Friends General Conference Religious Education Committee, and QuakerBooks of FGC. The practical work of developing the curriculum and assembling instructional materials may be performed by the committee, the teachers, or both in consultation. Whatever the arrangement, parents should be carefully consulted. See [our yet to be written section on religious education], pp. xx–xx.

*Care and counsel committee.* This committee coordinates the meeting's care over its members and other active participants in the meeting community, working to make sure that they are adequately supported in times of trial or decision, and addressing cases of conflict or disaffection in the meeting. In many meetings it is also given specific responsibilities in the meeting's handling of membership, marriages, and funerals and memorial meetings. Such a committee is recommended even for relatively small meetings.

The committee continues, in some sense, the responsibilities formerly assigned to meeting "overseers," and may be known in some meetings as the Oversight Committee, the Pastoral Care Committee, or by other names. Continued use of the term *overseers* is not recommended, because of the potential for offensive connotations from historical uses of this term associated with slavery. Frequently, this committee is combined with the worship and ministry committee to form a single committee known as Ministry and Counsel, or something similar.

The care and counsel committee should make regular contact with all members of the meeting, whether local or distant, and inquire after their spiritual and practical needs, and

their relation with the meeting. It should keep alert to new situations as they arise, offering its help to meeting participants experiencing difficulty, and inquiring after those who have recently dropped their involvement in the meeting. When cases of conflict arise in the meeting, it works toward reconciliation. When appropriate, the committee may refer individuals to organizations in the wider community which provide practical or material assistance, counseling, or other services; it is strongly urged that the committee keep itself informed about the availability of such services, and keep an up-to-date directory with contact information. Strict confidentiality must be maintained both in the committee's own contacts and in its referrals to outside organizations. For more on care for the meeting community, see [our yet-to-be-written section on pastoral care], pp. xx–xx.

In many meetings, requests for membership or marriage under the care of the meeting are referred to this committee, as are requests for a funeral or memorial meetings. See “Applying for Membership,” pp. xx–xx; “Marriage Procedure,” pp. xx–xx; [and our yet-to-be written section on funerals and memorial meetings], pp. xx–xx.

Proposals to drop a Friend from membership, or to alter the membership policy of the meeting, are also normally considered in this committee before presentation to the monthly meeting.

*Worship and ministry committee.* This committee fosters the spiritual life of the meeting, especially the meeting for worship; promoting its vitality, depth, and fidelity to the life of the Spirit. This function is a continuation, to some extent, of responsibilities which in an earlier era belonged to the “preparative meeting of ministers and elders,” and the committee may still in some meetings be known as the Elders Committee, or by other names. In many meetings, it is combined with the care and counsel committee to form a single committee known as Ministry and Counsel, or something similar.

The worship and ministry committee may include Friends of any age or experience with a concern for the spiritual life of the community and its meetings for worship; but ideally will include several experienced and knowledgeable Friends, some Friends who speak frequently in meeting, and some Friends who speak less frequently.

The committee meets regularly to consider the spiritual state of the meeting, and the quality and conduct of its meetings for worship, including those for business. The queries on pp. 11–12 may help guide the committee in its consideration of these matters.

Members of the worship and ministry committee pay special attention to those Friends who have recently begun to speak more frequently in meeting, offering them counsel and guidance, and encouraging whatever in their ministry appears a free and faithful expression of the Light Within. In many meetings, this committee also provides support and advice to the clerk.

The worship and ministry committee is also responsible for dealing with disruptions in meeting for worship, and with participants who make a habit of inappropriate ministry.

A light touch is strongly urged in approaching such cases. It should be carefully considered whether the meeting might be damaged more by the bitterness and ill feeling which may result if a participant feels silenced than it would by forbearance. Nor should ministry be considered inappropriate simply because it is disturbing or upsetting to the meeting. But when inappropriate speech or other behavior interferes with the meeting's ability to hold meaningful meetings for worship, it is appropriate to take steps to correct the situation. On rare occasions, members of the committee must act individually to deal with disruptions as they arise; but it is strongly recommended that responses be developed by the committee as a whole whenever possible.

The worship and ministry committee may also work to promote the spiritual life of the meeting outside its regular meeting for worship, for example by arranging for retreats, workshops, or other events, by formulating queries for the meeting's consideration, or by making spiritually beneficial literature or other materials available to the meeting.

*Nominating committee.* On an annual basis, this committee proposes Friends to fill the positions and committees of the meeting, checking to make sure they are willing and available for service and aware of the terms and responsibilities before submitting their names to the monthly meeting for final approval.

Selecting Friends for service is a matter for careful discernment. While it is useful to ask meeting members and attenders which positions they feel most drawn to, care should be taken to consider who is best suited to a position, and not base decisions on the mere fact that someone has volunteered. Young people and those new to the meeting should be considered, not only "old hands." The committee is cautioned against rotating Friends through important positions of the meeting out of a sense that everyone deserves a "turn." At the same time, it should recognize opportunities for nurturing the growth of individuals in their ability to serve the meeting through participation in committee work. In many meetings certain positions, such as clerk, treasurer, members of worship and ministry and care and counsel committees may be limited to members of the Religious Society of Friends.

The nominating committee normally does not name its own members. This may be done by an *ad hoc* naming committee or through some other process developed by the monthly meeting. Members of the nominating committee should be knowledgeable about the responsibilities of the positions and committees of the meeting, and familiar with a wide range of participants in the meeting community.

*Finance committee.* This committee exercises a special care over the financial state of the meeting, working with the treasurer to ensure that the meeting remains in good financial condition and to clearly explain meeting finances. The finance committee proposes the meeting's annual budget (which must then be approved by the monthly meeting before adoption). The finance committee addresses any applicable tax considerations. In some meetings, the committee also considers requests for unbudgeted expenses. It is recommended that the committee audit the treasurer's books at least

annually. The finance committee may also issue fundraising appeals; or this may be handled by a separate fundraising committee.

*Peace and social concerns committee.* This committee, which may also be known as the Peace and Service Committee or by other names, coordinates the meeting's efforts to promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts, to establish justice and compassion in the wider society, and to provide service or relief to those in need. This witness may include petitioning the state; organizing events to educate and inform the public or the meeting on relevant issues; direct provision of food, shelter, or other necessities; or other work as the committee feels led and circumstances suggest.

*Advancement and outreach committee.* This committee (or, in some meetings, an advancement committee and a separate outreach committee) serves to advance the life of the meeting and the principles of Friends. It works to build the meeting community, both by fostering a sense of connection among meeting participants, and by promoting awareness of the meeting and of Friends in general among the wider public. The committee may arrange workshops, retreats, lectures, and social events, promoting these inside and outside the meeting as appropriate. Most meetings prefer a low-key approach to outreach, believing that the example of meeting service to the community will be more convincing to seekers than direct proselytization. But it is doubtful whether the Quaker movement would have survived if it had not been energetically promoted by early Friends; and even the example of community service will not be convincing to seekers who have no opportunity to hear of it. At the very least, the meeting must make sure it can be easily found by those who may already be looking for a Friends meeting.

*Property committee.* This committee, which may also be known as the House and Grounds Committee, Maintenance and Planning Committee or by other names, coordinates the maintenance of the meetinghouse and land, if any. In many meetings it also develops plans for future construction. If the meetinghouse is made available to outside groups, or if part of it is rented as an apartment, guesthouse, or for other purposes, this committee may also serve as the meeting contact with the guests or tenants, and administer any rental agreements; or this may be handled by a separate meetinghouse use committee or rental committee.

*Trustees and Incorporation officers.* Meetings which are organized as legal trusts or corporations may also have officers as required by state law, articles of incorporation, or corporation bylaws. Care should be taken to make full use of regular Quaker structure and decision making in fulfilling these roles. Monthly meetings are not covered by the yearly meeting incorporation.

*Other positions and committees.* A monthly meeting may establish such other positions and committees as seem useful and appropriate.

*Responsibilities of monthly meetings to other meetings*

Every monthly meeting is responsible to conduct its affairs in the manner of Friends, seek the Spirit's guidance in its worship and business, uphold Friends testimonies, and exercise loving care over its members. Beyond this, monthly meetings fulfill a particular role in the organizational structure of the Religious Society of Friends, and therefore bear specific responsibilities both to the larger meetings of which they form a part, such as the yearly and quarterly meetings, and to any smaller meetings under their care.

*Responsibilities to the yearly meeting, and to the quarterly or general meeting.* Monthly meetings in Illinois Yearly Meeting are responsible to participate in the life and work of the yearly meeting. To the extent possible, Friends from each monthly meeting are encouraged to attend the yearly meeting's business sessions, and serve as called on yearly meeting committees. Each monthly meeting appoints a representative to the yearly meeting Continuing Committee. Monthly meetings are also expected to help in the planning of yearly meeting gatherings, and in the practical work of putting on such gatherings. Monthly meetings may also expect from time to time to host meetings of the Continuing Committee. See [the yet to be written section on the yearly meeting].

Monthly meetings are also responsible to contribute to the financial support of the yearly meeting. The amount to be contributed is determined by the monthly meeting; however, Illinois Yearly Meeting does recommend specific amounts, proportional to the number of "resident adult members" in the monthly meeting. "Resident" members are those who live close enough to the meeting to attend on a regular basis; the monthly meeting must judge how close this is. Some meetings contribute based only on the number of resident adult members who are active participants in the meeting.

Each monthly meeting sends two annual reports to the yearly meeting. The first is a statistical report, giving information such as a list of those individuals who have initiated, terminated or transferred membership during the preceding year; the total number of members, divided into adult members and Young Friends, resident and non-resident; average attendance during the year; names of the meeting clerk, treasurer, recorder, and representative to the Continuing Committee; or other information as the yearly meeting requests. The second report is a "State of Society" report, describing the spiritual state of the meeting. This may be similar or identical to the State of Society report read at the quarterly or general meeting; for more information on this report, see the next section.

A monthly meeting which forms part of a quarterly meeting bears similar responsibilities to the quarterly as it does to the yearly meeting. Friends from each monthly meeting in the quarterly are encouraged to attend its business sessions, and serve as called on its committees. Monthly meetings plan and host the quarterly gatherings. Monthly meetings are also responsible to support the quarterly, according to practices established by the quarterly, and to send a State of Society report and such other reports as the quarterly meeting requests.

Some monthly meetings may belong to Metropolitan Chicago General Meeting. Monthly meetings are responsible to the general meeting according to practices worked out among the general meeting and its constituent monthly meetings.

*State of Society reports.* At least annually, each monthly meeting prepares a report on the spiritual state of Friends society in the meeting community. In essence this is to answer the question “How is the life of the Spirit faring in your meeting?” If the meeting is part of a quarterly or general meeting this report is read there, with an opportunity for the gathered Friends to respond to it from silence. In addition, the report is sent to the yearly meeting for publication in the annual minute book.

Historically, quarterly and yearly meetings expected each constituent monthly meeting to report by minuting responses to a series of queries about its spiritual and practical condition. The traditional queries covered a variety of areas, including factual information about the regularity with which meetings were held, and the establishment or discontinuance of meetings; the lives and conduct of meeting members and the degree to which they upheld Friends testimonies; and the meeting’s conformity to accepted Friends practice in its meetings for business and worship. Over time, the queries came to be regarded not as definite questions to which specific answers were expected, but as guides to the kinds of topics to be discussed in a free-form report. The following queries are offered for those meetings which may wish to return to the practice of composing reports in whole or in part as a series of query responses, or as a guide to the kinds of topics to be discussed in a free-form report, as the meeting feels led. If a free-form report is given, it is usually formulated by a committee or individual appointed by the meeting, with the final text being approved by the monthly meeting as a whole. If the report is given as a series of query responses, it is recommended that these not be formulated by a committee, but that the entire meeting be given an opportunity to respond to each query out of the silence, with the clerk discerning the sense of the meeting from the responses and distilling it into a minute. Queries 5, 11, and 12 are adapted from queries in the 1879 and 1892 disciplines of Illinois Yearly Meeting.

1. What is the quality of worship in recent meetings? Do Friends feel drawn into living silence? Do they meet in the hope and expectation of a transformative encounter with the Divine Spirit?
2. Does the meeting feel “gathered” in its worship, seeking and responding to God as a community? Are meetings more than simultaneous individual meditation?
3. Is the right balance between silence and speaking maintained? Do Friends speak when moved to do so? When spoken ministry is offered, is it under a clear sense of Divine leading?
4. Do Friends feel the opportunity to grow spiritually? Does the meeting community provide both the challenge and the sense of security needed for real spiritual progress? How does your meeting develop and nurture ministry and service?
5. Do Friends maintain love and fellowship towards one another and care for each other in times of need? Are conflicts handled in a timely and respectful manner?

6. How are you teaching your children? How are you teaching adults? How are you encouraging Friends, including teenagers, to participate in your programs?
7. How is your membership changing? Why has it changed? How do you help make the transitions from visitor to attender and from attender to member?
8. How visible is your meeting to the public, how welcoming is it? How do you reach out to invite newcomers?
9. How does your meeting connect with the wider Quaker world? Do you make use of the resources of Friends from outside the meeting? Do you encourage participation in quarterly or general meeting, yearly meeting, and other Quaker activities?
10. What is the witness of the meeting? Is this witness apparent to the general public?
11. Are the circumstances of those in our neighborhoods who appear to need aid considered and addressed?
12. Do Friends bear testimony against oppression, oaths, war, and gambling, and in favor of simplicity, integrity, and stewardship of the earth?
13. What is the general level of vitality in the meeting? Are Friends encouraged or discouraged about the state of the meeting? If you are discouraged, have you sought help from within your own meeting, from the quarterly or yearly meeting, and/or from Friends General Conference?
14. What major events have occurred in the meeting since its last report, particularly as these affect the spiritual life of the meeting community?
15. How do you exercise stewardship of your physical, financial, and spiritual resources?
16. If the monthly meeting has any preparative meetings, recognized meetings or worship groups under its care, how do they fare?

*Responsibilities of the monthly meeting to meetings under its care.* In some cases, a monthly meeting may function as a regional body of Friends, with more than one local meeting under its care. This was, in fact, the original conception: a monthly meeting consisted of several local meetings, each normally organized as a preparative meeting (so-called because it prepared business for presentation at the monthly meeting). Friends from the various preparative meetings composing a monthly meeting gathered once a month to finalize business for all of them.

This mode of organization is still used in some parts of the world, and is available in principle in Illinois Yearly Meeting. However, it has become more common for monthly meetings to consist of a single local meeting; or sometimes, of one local meeting which,

by reasons of size or history, is often informally identified with the monthly meeting itself, together with one or more smaller meetings organized as worship groups, recognized meetings, or preparative meetings, and held “under the care” of the monthly meeting. It should be emphasized that in the latter case, the monthly meeting is still in some sense a regional body, consisting of all of these local meetings.

A monthly meeting has the responsibility to nurture and support all the meetings in its care, to promote their spiritual life and practical growth, and to care for their participants in times of need or trial. The monthly meeting must also deal promptly with any business brought to it by a meeting under its care. It must keep itself informed as to the time and location of all the meetings in its care, and as to their general condition and level of vitality.

To help fulfill these responsibilities, it is recommended that the monthly meeting appoint one or more Friends to visit regularly with each worship group, recognized meeting or preparative meeting under its care, according to a schedule to be worked out with the meeting being visited.

Originally, final decisions on all business concerning the local meetings composing a monthly meeting were made by the monthly meeting. Such a system may still occasionally be appropriate, for example in the case of a recognized meeting organized directly by the monthly meeting and held nearby. But bringing all business to the monthly meeting for finalization is impractical if the meetings are geographically distant from one another, as is often the case in Illinois Yearly Meeting; and experience has proven the value of local autonomy in meeting decision-making. In general, therefore, local meetings conduct their own affairs as they feel led.

However, decisions regarding the initiation, termination, or transfer of membership are the special province of the monthly meeting, as is the decision to hold a marriage under the care of the meeting, and the conduct of the wedding itself. Preparative meetings, recognized meetings and worship groups bring such business to their monthly meeting, and may also bring other business as seems appropriate. Major events such as funerals or memorial services may be difficult for a small meeting to conduct on its own; the monthly meeting should stand ready to assist the meetings under its care with these or other large projects.

#### *Setting up, laying down, and reaffiliation of monthly meetings*

*Setting up a monthly meeting.* When a group has met regularly for Divine worship in the manner of Friends and is in agreement with Friends principles, the desire for a monthly meeting, with its additional responsibilities, expectations, and joys, may arise. To begin the process of establishing a monthly meeting, the group makes a request to the appropriate monthly or quarterly meeting or to the Continuing Committee of Illinois Yearly Meeting. The following guidelines may be used to determine which of these is the most appropriate body to receive the request:

1. If the group requesting the establishment of a monthly meeting is a part of (or held under the care of) an existing monthly meeting, it normally makes its initial request to this monthly meeting.
2. If the group is not part of an existing monthly meeting, the request is normally made to the surrounding quarterly meeting, if there is one.
3. If the group is not part of an existing monthly meeting and there is no appropriate quarterly meeting, the request is normally made to the Continuing Committee of Illinois Yearly Meeting.

If the request is directed to a monthly or quarterly meeting, that meeting appoints a clearness committee to visit with the group making the request. If the request was made to the Continuing Committee, it may appoint a clearness committee directly, or may ask the yearly meeting Ministry and Advancement Committee to appoint a committee.

The clearness committee and the group making the request together review the functions and responsibilities of a monthly meeting, and explore the group's readiness to undertake this step. The following queries may be helpful in this process:

- Is your meeting of sufficient strength that it is likely to survive for the foreseeable future?
- Are you prepared to exercise appropriate pastoral care for your members, to nurture their spiritual growth and to support them in times of trial?
- How familiar are the participants in your meeting with Friends business practices, and with the principles and testimonies of Friends more generally?
- Do you have enough business to require a regular business meeting?
- Are you of sufficient size and organization to hold major events such as weddings, funerals, and memorial meetings?
- Are your participants willing to contribute financially to your meeting?
- Do you have members prepared to take on the responsibility of serving as meeting clerk, and as meeting treasurer?
- Are you prepared to maintain and preserve records of your business proceedings, membership, and finances? Where will the records be kept?
- Will members of your meeting participate in sessions of the yearly meeting and quarterly or general meeting (if any), and be willing to serve on their committees, as they are able? Are you able to send these meetings regular reports on the state of

your meeting, and to provide them with appropriate financial support?

The clearness committee reports to the body which appointed it, which in turn minutes its recommendation whether to establish the monthly meeting. If the recommendation is positive, and made by a monthly meeting, and the proposed new monthly meeting is to be part of a quarterly meeting, the recommendation is then forwarded to the quarterly meeting, and if the quarterly meeting concurs, to the yearly meeting. Otherwise, a positive recommendation is forwarded directly to the yearly meeting. The monthly meeting is established when the yearly meeting minutes its concurrence with the recommendation.

On establishing a new monthly meeting, the yearly meeting (typically through its Ministry and Advancement Committee) appoints a committee of welcome to visit the new meeting and provide assistance or advice as needed at its opening business session.

Establishing a new monthly meeting does not confer membership on its participants. After establishment, the meeting may receive new members and transfers of membership in the usual way; see “Membership,” pp. xx–xx.

*Laying down a monthly meeting.* “Laying down” a monthly meeting means formally discontinuing its meeting for business as a monthly meeting. Depending on the circumstances, the meeting for worship may be discontinued at the same time and the meeting community effectively disbanded; or the meeting may continue in some other form, such as a worship group, recognized meeting or preparative meeting under the care of another monthly meeting.

It is appropriate to lay down a monthly meeting when it is unable, over an extended period, to fulfill the functions and meet the responsibilities normally expected of a monthly meeting. Typically, this happens because the meeting has grown too weak in numbers, but may occasionally happen for other reasons as well.

The decision to lay down a meeting may be difficult: Friends may feel a strong attachment for the meeting, and wish for its revival, even when the prospects are very dim. But if a plain and honest assessment of the meeting’s condition makes clear that it cannot function as a monthly meeting, it should not be continued simply for sentimental reasons. Particularly if the meeting is completely inactive, neglecting to properly lay it down may result in obscurity as to the ownership of its property, difficulties for Friends desiring to transfer their memberships or record their children as members, and other problems.

Normally, a monthly meeting is laid down by minute of the yearly meeting on recommendation by the quarterly meeting, if any. A monthly meeting may also lay itself down. However, the involvement of the quarterly and yearly meeting is helpful in arranging for transfers of membership after the monthly meeting has been laid down; in working out what form, if any, the meeting will take afterwards; in assisting the meeting in the disposal of its property and archiving of its records; and in the various other details

which come with the discontinuation of a meeting. In most cases, therefore, it is advisable for a monthly meeting which desires to be laid down to make a request to the quarterly meeting, or yearly meeting if there is no quarterly, rather than laying itself down directly and in isolation. The quarterly or general meeting (if any) and yearly meeting should in any case be promptly notified whenever a monthly meeting is laid down.

The minute laying down a monthly meeting should make clear whether its meeting for worship, and any preparative meetings, recognized meetings or worship groups under its care are also laid down; and if not, note any arrangements that have been made for their continuation.

The quarterly meeting (or yearly if there is no quarterly) normally appoints a committee to assist with the necessary arrangements. This committee meets with the participants of the meeting to be laid down and renders whatever assistance seems called for. The committee arranges for transfer for the meeting's members, usually to the nearest appropriate meeting, but possibly to other meetings if individual members express a preference. Finalization of the transfers should not take place until the yearly meeting minutes that the meeting is laid down. Members who cannot be contacted may also be transferred, or the committee may recommend their release from membership to the quarterly or yearly meeting. In no case should membership be left in a discontinued meeting. The committee should arrange for the meeting's records to be archived in a manner and location which keeps them accessible to the yearly meeting.

If the meeting desires to continue under the care of another meeting as a worship group, recognized meeting or preparative meeting after it has been laid down, the committee should assist it in identifying a suitable meeting, approaching it with the request, and working out the practical details of the new relationship between the two meetings. Similar arrangements should be made for the continuation of any worship groups, recognized meetings or preparative meetings which had been under the care of the meeting to be laid down.

If the laid down meeting will continue in some form, it may continue to maintain a treasury, though it should carefully consider whether it is advisable to do so. If the meeting is being taken under the care of another monthly meeting, it may be appropriate to merge treasuries. If the meeting owns a meeting house or other real property it is strongly recommended that the property be transferred and the deed recorded.

If the laid down meeting will not continue in any form, arrangements must be made to dispose of its treasury and other property and to discharge any debt or liabilities. These may be transferred to the quarterly or yearly meeting; or to some other Friends or charitable organization. In no case should meeting property be divided among its members. Burial grounds are generally best placed into the care of a cemetery association.

*Reaffiliation of a monthly meeting.* An existing monthly meeting not currently affiliated

with Illinois Yearly Meeting may request affiliation. If the meeting is in the area of a quarterly meeting forming part of Illinois Yearly Meeting, the initial request is normally directed to the quarterly meeting; otherwise, it is directed to the Continuing Committee of Illinois Yearly Meeting. Whichever body receives the request normally appoints a committee to visit the meeting making the request and explore with them their reasons for desiring reaffiliation; or if the Continuing Committee receives the request, it may ask the Ministry and Advancement Committee to appoint a committee. The committee reports to the body which appointed it, which then makes a recommendation to the yearly meeting. Affiliation is established by minute of the yearly meeting.

A monthly meeting may affiliate both with Illinois Yearly Meeting and another yearly meeting. However, Friends should consider carefully the problems which may arise from dual affiliation. Dual affiliation requires substantial time and effort beyond what is involved in single affiliation, and many dually affiliated meetings find that they are unable to fully participate in either yearly meeting. In addition, yearly meetings may have conflicting expectations for how monthly meetings operate and how they relate to other levels of organization. Still, some meetings have found that dual affiliation is useful and rewarding.

A monthly meeting which withdraws from Illinois Yearly Meeting to affiliate with another yearly meeting or comparable Friends organization is not considered to be laid down; it retains its members and records as its affiliation changes.

An existing monthly meeting in Illinois Yearly Meeting may join a quarterly or general meeting with that meeting's approval. A monthly meeting which withdraws from a quarterly or general meeting need not withdraw from Illinois Yearly Meeting.