

Quarterly Meetings

Proposed for an indefinite period. Revisions are indicated by underlining new material and ~~striking through~~ material to be deleted

The Quarterly Meeting is designed to bring together for inspiration and counsel a larger group and to consider more varied interests than any single meeting embraces. Its most helpful function should be to aid and encourage the Monthly Meetings composing it to greater interest and service, and to give its members an increasing vision of the truth. It should be diligent in seeking opportunities to gather together groups which may be organized into meetings and should always be ready to help Monthly Meetings whenever they ask for advice or assistance.

1927 Uniform Discipline of Friends General Conference, p. 111

A *quarterly meeting* is a regional body of Friends, comprising more than one monthly meeting and forming part of a larger yearly meeting. By tradition, quarterly meetings hold their business sessions four times each year, but it has been found useful in some cases to maintain a less frequent schedule, particularly if the quarterly meeting covers a wide geographic area or includes few meetings of sufficient size ~~regularly~~ to host its sessions regularly.

Quarterly meetings serve several purposes. First, it is in the quarterly meeting that monthly meetings report in detail the recent condition of their meeting communities, with an opportunity for the gathered Friends to respond, offer advice or assistance if needed, and take inspiration or new ideas when presented. At least once each year, representatives of each monthly meeting in the quarterly read aloud their monthly meeting's State of Society report in the quarterly meeting's business session. Time should be left after each meeting's report for Friends to speak as they feel led in response. For information on the composition of these reports, see 'State of Society reports', pp. xx-xx.

Because the quarterly meeting is the venue in which monthly meetings present these reports, and the body which regularly considers them with members of the monthly meeting present and participating, the quarterly meeting serves as an important source of support, guidance, and assistance to local meetings, including those experiencing difficulty. Meetings which find themselves in need of assistance are urged to bring such matters to their quarterly meetings. Help is also available from the Illinois Yearly Meeting Ministry and Advancement Committee, and from the Illinois Yearly Meeting Field Secretary.

Quarterly meetings serve as the appropriate bodies to decide issues which affect Friends on a region-wide basis, and to coordinate the efforts of local meetings when such coordination is called for. Projects which are too large or too general for a single monthly meeting to take on may more naturally be assumed by the quarterly meeting. In petitioning the state or addressing issues of public concern, the voice of the quarterly meeting will usually bear more weight than that of a monthly meeting.

Quarterly meetings serve to bring together Friends from different local meetings and promote a broader sense of community among Friends. Quarterly meetings may hold retreats, workshops, or social events, either in conjunction with their business sessions or separately, to build up connections among their local meetings. Meetings with few children may especially find that quarterly meetings and other regional gatherings provide a valuable opportunity for young Friends to find companionship and a sense of Quaker community.

Quarterly meetings serve as a valuable forum for the preliminary consideration of business to be brought before the yearly meeting. Monthly meetings with proposals to put before the yearly meeting are urged to bring such matters first to their quarterly meeting (if there is one), unless the next session of the yearly meeting falls before the next session of the quarterly meeting, and the matter is too urgent to delay. The quarterly meeting may also bring ~~business~~ business to the yearly meeting business which originated in the quarterly meeting itself, rather than any of its monthly meetings.

Finally, quarterly meetings have specific responsibilities in the setting up and laying down of meetings. In particular, a quarterly meeting may set up or lay down a preparative meeting on the advice of ~~the its~~ monthly meeting of which the preparative meeting is to be a part; see 'Preparative Meetings', pp. xx-xx. In addition, proposals to set up or lay down a monthly meeting are normally approved by ~~the its~~ quarterly meeting (if any) of which the monthly meeting is a part, before ~~forwarding~~ being forwarded to the yearly meeting for final approval; see 'Setting up, laying down, and reaffiliation of monthly meetings', pp. xx-xx. A quarterly meeting may add an existing monthly meeting which is part of Illinois Yearly Meeting at the request of the monthly meeting.

Each quarterly meeting appoints a clerk, who also serves as representative to the Continuing Committee of Illinois Yearly Meeting. Quarterly meetings may appoint a treasurer, recording clerk, and such other committees and offices as seem useful. Quarterly meetings must keep accurate records of their business and finances, and archive them properly; see 'Archivist', pp. xx-xx.

Decisions of the quarterly meeting are made by the Friends gathered in the quarterly meeting business sessions, and do not require the approval or ratification of the monthly meetings which compose the quarterly meeting, though such approval may be sought in cases where the quarterly meeting deems it helpful to do so. Quarterly meetings must respect the local autonomy of their constituent meetings, and may not override their decisions or direct their affairs in purely internal matters.

Setting up and laying down quarterly meetings

To set up a new quarterly meeting, approval must first be secured from each of the monthly meetings which are to become a part of it. Any monthly meetings which already form part of a quarterly meeting should present the plan for establishing the new quarterly meeting to the existing quarterly meeting and seek its views on the matter. Monthly meetings are advised against belonging to more than one quarterly meeting simultaneously, so joining a new quarterly meeting will normally mean leaving the old one. After the approval of all monthly meetings has been obtained and the issue considered in any existing quarterly meetings, the proposal is forwarded either to Illinois Yearly Meeting, or to the Continuing Committee. Whichever group receives the request appoints a clearness committee, or may request the Ministry and Advancement Committee to appoint a clearness committee. The clearness committee visits with the local meetings which are to be part of the proposed quarterly meeting to explore their readiness for this step. The following queries may be helpful in this process:

- What do you see as the spiritual and practical benefits of establishing a new quarterly meeting?
- What kinds of support can you provide as a quarterly meeting to the yearly meeting and to your monthly meetings? What kinds of support do you expect to receive from the yearly and monthly meetings?
- How strong is the commitment of each of the monthly meetings involved?
- Will you have a treasury? How will funds be raised? What will they be used for? How will the treasury be administered?

- How often will you meet and where? Have you considered potential scheduling conflicts?
- How will your gatherings be planned?
- Will your sessions include worship;? business;? workshops;? retreats;? fellowship, ~~and~~? community building? How will you decide on the relative balance?
- Do you have any qualms, fears, or reservations about establishing a quarterly meeting?

The committee may also meet with Friends outside the proposed quarterly meeting, to gauge the impact the establishment of the new meeting might have on existing quarterly meetings, and on the yearly meeting as a whole. The committee reports to Illinois Yearly Meeting; the new quarterly meeting is established when the yearly meeting minutes its approval in its annual business sessions. After minuting establishment, the yearly meeting (typically through its Ministry and Advancement Committee) appoints a committee of welcome to attend the opening session of the new quarterly and provide assistance or advice as it begins to conduct business.

If a quarterly meeting is unable, over an extended period, to fulfill the functions and meet the responsibilities normally expected of a quarterly meeting, it is appropriate to lay it down. Normally, this is accomplished by minute of the yearly meeting, though in principle a quarterly meeting may also lay itself down. In either case, it is strongly urged that the approval of all functioning monthly meetings which form part of the quarterly meeting be obtained before the quarterly meeting is officially laid down. If the quarterly meeting lays itself down, it should inform the yearly meeting promptly of this decision.

Whichever body lays down the quarterly meeting appoints a committee to assist with the arrangements, or may ask the yearly meeting's Ministry and Advancement Committee to appoint such a committee. This committee should see to it that provision is made for the archiving of the meeting's records in a manner and location which keeps them accessible to Illinois Yearly Meeting. Deposit in the University of Illinois Library is recommended for this purpose. If the quarterly meeting has a treasury or other property, the committee should see that these are disposed of in an appropriate fashion, such as transferring them to the yearly meeting, dividing them among the monthly meetings, or donating them to some other Friends or charitable organization. The advice of Friends who were involved in the quarterly meeting should be a major consideration in deciding how to dispose of property.

Monthly meetings which do not belong to a quarterly meeting

Originally, Illinois Yearly Meeting was organized so that all monthly meetings belonged to a quarterly meeting. The quarterly meetings formed a systematic intervening level between the monthly meetings and the yearly meeting: business, communications and finances passed between the monthly meetings and the yearly meeting through the quarterly meetings, which also played an important role in such matters as nominating the clerk of the yearly meeting and appointing the equivalent of the Continuing Committee.

For historical reasons, Illinois Yearly Meeting now includes a number of monthly meetings which are not part of a quarterly meeting. Such meetings may find that some of the functions of a quarterly meeting are well-served by other regional gatherings. However, business which is strictly internal to Illinois Yearly Meeting is not generally considered at such gatherings. If a monthly meeting is not part of a quarterly meeting which can provide preliminary consideration of proposals before they are brought to the yearly meeting, the monthly meeting should submit such proposals first to the Continuing Committee, unless the next session of the yearly meeting falls before the next session of the Continuing Committee, and the matter is too urgent to delay.

~~Specifically,~~ Regional gatherings which are not quarterly meetings of Illinois Yearly Meeting may not set up or lay down a preparative meeting as part of Illinois Yearly Meeting. Nor does Illinois Yearly Meeting require that the approval of such gatherings be secured before a monthly meeting or quarterly meeting is set up or laid down as part of Illinois Yearly Meeting. Proposals for setting up or laying down meetings which are part of Illinois Yearly Meeting but not part of a quarterly meeting are directed to the Continuing Committee or to the yearly meeting; see ‘Setting up, laying down and reaffiliation of monthly meetings’, pp. xx–xx; ‘Preparative meetings’, pp. xx–xx; and ‘Setting up and laying down quarterly meetings’, pp. xx–xx.