



Northampton Friends Meeting

Welcome Handbook

(Draft January, 2025)

Introduction

The Welcome Handbook is intended for people who are relatively new to Northampton Friends Meeting and who have questions about Quaker process in general or about our Meeting in particular. It is not intended to replace the New England Yearly Meeting Faith & Practice, which gives more in-depth information.

The Handbook consists of 7 sections. Each section will eventually be brought to the Meeting for comment, feedback, and threshing. Because this takes time, Worship and Ministry is making the Handbook available to the Meeting community as a working draft.

The first section has been addressed in several threshing sessions, the outcome of which was the creation of some much condensed welcome materials that are available at the meetinghouse. Part 1 included here is the original longer version that was presented, with some modifications made in response to people's comments. Over time, Worship and Ministry will bring forward each section for the Meeting's review and threshing.

Please feel free to read through any and all of the sections and to ask questions, make comments, and suggest additions or edits to the text.

You can find a digital copy of the entire handbook at this link:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1D5oZhTKy-7yJINkh6PW0vXzDWEqXTj8pScnRc67nlyo/edit?usp=sharing>

If you want to speak to someone about any of your questions or feedback, be in touch with Becky Jones, Meeting Clerk (emacjones@gmail.com), or with April Merleaux, clerk of Worship and Ministry (april.merleaux@gmail.com).

(January, 2025)

OVERALL TABLE OF CONTENTS

of the Welcome Handbook

1. WHAT QUAKERS DO

- Quaker Worship
- Quaker Decision Making
- Quaker Values

2. WHAT NORTHAMPTON FRIENDS DO

- Our Worship
- Adult Education
- Small Group Opportunities
- Newsletter
- Web Site
- Annual Retreat
- Becoming a Member

3. BEHIND THE SCENES

- Committees
- Officers
- Finances

4. THE BARE BONES

- The Meetinghouse
- The Building
- The Burial Ground

5. NORTHAMPTON FRIENDS HISTORY

- Our formation
- Pivotal moments

6. QUAKER HISTORY AND ORGANIZATIONS

- Quaker History
- Quaker Organizations

7. APPENDICES

- Minute on Sexual Orientation
- Possible text for introducing a memorial service

1. WHAT QUAKERS DO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Quaker Worship

- Silent waiting
- Vocal ministry
- A gathered meeting
- Care of meeting / care of worship
- Eldering/Nurturing
- The language we use
- Memorial meetings
- Marriage and Quaker weddings

Quaker Decision Making

- What is a meeting for worship with attention to business/meeting for worshipful discernment?
- Who runs the business meeting?
- Am I welcome to attend the meeting for worshipful discernment?
- What is the “sense of the meeting”? How is it different from consensus?

Quaker Values

- Testimonies
- Pacifism and draft counseling
- Social justice work
- Leadings
- *Ad hoc* working groups
- Theological diversity

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Quaker Worship

- **Silent waiting:**

Quakers worship in different ways around the world. Many Friends attend “programmed” meetings for worship, where an appointed minister prepares a program or message for the gathered body of Friends. Some programmed meetings have singing and Bible readings; some incorporate periods of silence.

Northampton Friends Meeting is part of the tradition that uses silent, waiting, “unprogrammed” worship. We settle into silence where Friends expect to feel the presence of Spirit and expect that the community will be brought together in love and faithfulness. Out of the silence, Friends may be moved to speak and give a message, sometimes called vocal ministry.

Worship generally lasts for an hour, though a person assigned care of worship will monitor the energy of the room (even in silence) and discern the right moment to close the meeting. Traditionally this is done by shaking hands with a nearby Friend, at which time everyone shakes hands with those seated nearby. In our blended format of in-person and Zoom worship, and because of health restrictions and personal preference, some people now use non-contact greetings as an alternative to the traditional Quaker handshake to greet one another.

Early on in the COVID Pandemic, the Meeting shifted quickly to Zoom worship. Once we were able to return to the meetinghouse for in-person worship, we continued to incorporate those who come on Zoom into what we call a blended meeting for worship.

For more on silent worship, see the QuakerSpeak video Quaker Silence at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZG1bcWwDb34>

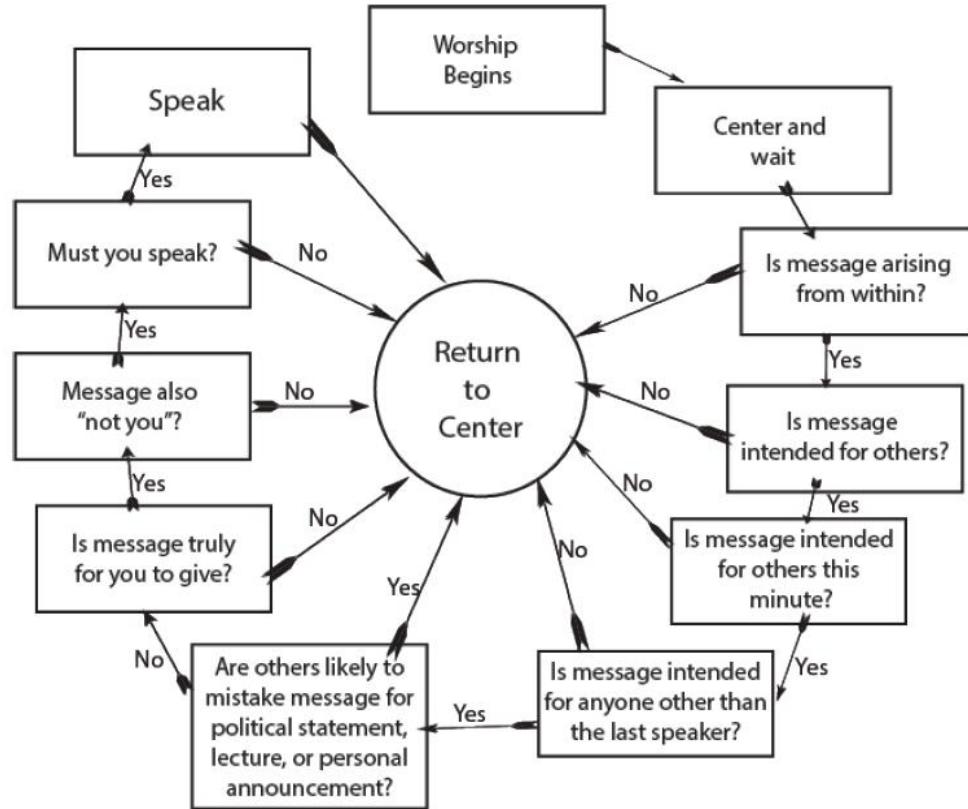
- **Speaking in Meeting / Vocal ministry:**

Quakers believe we can have direct connection to the divine, without need of a minister to serve as an intermediary, and it can also rightly be said that we all are ministers. In the vibrant silence of unprogrammed worship, Friends listen for the still, small voice of God that rises through the inward Light. The Spirit may move through anyone during silent worship, adult or child. When someone is moved by the Spirit, they may speak out of the silence, giving vocal ministry.

Vocal ministry should be given when it is nearly impossible for a person not to speak, and when given it should be without preamble, rhetorical flourishes, or apology. A good

message is one that is faithful, not necessarily articulate or convincing. Messages given in meeting for worship should only come from the prompting of Spirit, rather than from one's personal desire or agenda, which is what the chart below is addressing with the query, "Message also 'not you'?" If in doubt about whether or not to speak, don't.

The chart below shows a decision path to follow about whether or not to speak in meeting for worship.



After someone speaks their message, the silence resumes. It is best to leave time between messages so that the message can settle and take root. People generally speak only once during a meeting for worship, but ministry may be offered by several people during worship, or the whole period of worship may be silent.

- **A Gathered meeting:**

A meeting is called gathered when there is the sense that the spirit of God is very present in our midst. This may come after an especially deep silent meeting or after a message or series of messages that seem connected, related, and intense. Thomas Kelly, a mystical Quaker, describes it thus:

In the Quaker practice of group worship on the basis of silence come special times when an electric hush and solemnity and depth of power steals over the worshippers. A blanket of divine covering comes over the room, and a quickening Presence pervades us, breaking down some part of the special privacy and isolation of our individual lives and bonding our spirits within a super-individual Life and Power—an objective, dynamic Presence which enfolds us all, nourishes our souls, speaks glad, unutterable comfort within us, and quickens in us depths that had before been slumbering....

Brevity, earnestness, sincerity and frequently a lack of polish characterize the best Quaker speaking. The words should rise like a shaggy crag upthrust from the surface of silence, under the pressure of yearning contrition and wonder. But in another sense the words should not rise up like a shaggy crag. They should not break the silence, but continue it. For the Divine Life who was ministering through the medium of silence is the same Life as is now ministering through words.

- **Care of meeting / care of worship:**

Having care of meeting or care of worship means that you are “holding” the worship from the time before people start to arrive until closing and through to introductions and announcements. Ideally, the person who has care of meeting has prepared to be in the role by the mindful use of their time prior to worship. People think of it in different ways: holding the gathered group in prayer; praying for the individual worshippers in the room, visualizing oneself as the keel of a boat, stabilizing it with God’s help, or that the meeting is a pond to be stilled when ripples arise; or praying for a gathered meeting. The person who has care of meeting is also the one called upon to engage with worshippers whose behavior interferes with the ability of the group as a whole to center.

- **Eldering/Nurturing:**

Eldering is an important part of Quaker tradition. While our worship, our values, and our work in the world arise from our direct experience of Spirit, we also rely on one another for support and guidance as we test and carry out our leadings. Eldering refers to the whole process of nurturing the spiritual vitality of the meeting. It may involve recognizing and supporting Friends who have gifts in ministry, including serving on committees for clearness and for support of the ministry of individuals. It may involve caring for the sick and those in need among us. It may also mean setting the boundaries of good practice in the meeting, dealing with disruptive behavior, or helping with conflict resolution. Eldering always means being prayerfully present with one another and with the meeting as a whole.

When an individual in the meeting is led to undertake a specific ministry, a committee may be formed (sometimes called an anchor committee or ministry oversight and support committee) to hold the Friend's faithfulness in prayer, offer care, ask hard questions, and hold the person accountable to the Spirit and responsible to the meeting.

- **The language we use:**

Friends use a multiplicity of terms to denote the divine: Spirit, God, Light, Inner Light, Inner Guide, Christ Within, Creator, the Divine Spark, the Inner Seed, the Light Within, Inward Light, Guide, Jesus, Teacher, Inward Teacher, Truth, Movement of the Spirit.

- **Memorial meetings**

A memorial meeting is a meeting for worship celebrating the movement of the Spirit and the grace of God in the life of a deceased Friend. It is usually arranged by members of Pastoral Care, in consultation with the family and in accord with any wishes recorded by the Friend. A designated Friend is appointed to hold care of the worship and to briefly explain how the meeting will be conducted and to invite participation of the worshippers. See Appendix B, part 7 of the Handbook, for a sample introduction.

- **Marriage and Quaker weddings**

Marriage in the manner of Friends is accomplished within a meeting for worship. The couple marries each other, and the gathered friends serve as their witnesses. Historically, the wedding certificate signed by those in attendance was the legal document. Today, signing the certificate is a symbolic indication of the support of those in attendance. The Clerk of the meeting signs the official marriage license.

At a Quaker wedding, a Friend will be appointed to hold care of the worship and to explain to those new to Quaker worship what to expect and to invite worshippers to participate. Out of the silence, the couple speaks their vows to one another. If they are using the traditional wedding certificate, the certificate will be read aloud by an appointed Friend, and the couple will sign the certificate. Then the body settles into worship and those in attendance may speak out of the silence. It is not uncommon for there to be much vocal ministry in a Quaker wedding. After the wedding, those in attendance are invited to sign the certificate.

When Friends wish to be married under a meeting's care, the couple requests a clearness committee from the Pastoral Care Committee. The clearness committee will meet with the couple not only to confirm the couple's clarity to be married but also to discern the

Meeting's clarity to take the couple under its care. Once confirmed, the couple is appointed an Oversight Committee to help them in their wedding preparations.

Quaker Decision Making

- **What is a meeting for worship with attention to business or, as our Meeting sometimes calls it, meeting for worshipful discernment?**

Often referred to simply as business meeting, this is where most decisions related to the life of the Meeting are made, such as approving budgets, choosing officers and committee members, hearing reports, and taking stands on social and political issues. Business meeting is a form of worship as we strive to conduct our business in a spirit of prayer, with decisions arising out of Spirit-led discernment rather than rational debate or political wrangling. We do not vote at business meetings, nor do we operate by traditional consensus procedures. Instead, as Friends speak to the issues at hand, the gathered body moves toward a sense of unity not just with each other but with Spirit.

- **Who conducts the business meeting?**

The meeting for worship for business is facilitated by the Clerk, who is chosen by the Nominating Committee and approved by the gathered body to serve for a two-year term. The Clerk is responsible for discerning the “sense of the meeting” in our decision-making. The Clerk is joined at the table by a Recording Clerk, responsible for taking minutes, and by a Clerk’s elder who holds the Clerk in prayer during meetings for worshipful discernment.

However, the Clerk does not make decisions on items of business. That is the responsibility of everyone in attendance. All of us are called to share the light and knowledge that has been given to us and to be faithful in asking questions or expressing concerns about an issue.

- **Am I welcome to come to meeting for worshipful discernment?**

Yes, anyone attending a Quaker meeting is welcome to come to business meeting. You may participate as much or as little as you are led.

- **What is the “sense of the Meeting”? How is it different from consensus?**

When Quakers speak of finding unity, that doesn’t necessarily mean complete agreement among ourselves; it means the gathered body finds itself united with how Spirit is moving among us.

In Quaker process, one person might express a concern that moves the entire group in a different direction. Or one person might have reservations about an action without impeding the sense of the meeting. Unanimity is not required. An individual may ask that the recording clerk note that the decision was made against their wishes, sometimes saying, “I stand aside.” But the person may very well be able to unite with the sense of the meeting, even if they don’t agree with the decision itself, especially if the articulated sense of the meeting includes reference to that Friend’s views.

In a consensus process, everyone is seeking agreement, which sometimes results in finding a compromised solution that lies somewhere in the middle of various presented options. And, in a consensus process, one person can have the power to obstruct an action. When seeking the sense of the meeting that includes Spirit’s guidance, often a solution is something no one had thought of beforehand, and there’s an accompanying sense of rightness to the decision.

Quaker Values

- **Testimonies:**

Quakers find that attending to the Light Within influences the ways we act in our personal lives, as well as the changes we work for in the wider world. We have noticed that certain values seem to arise more or less consistently when we try to stay close to the guidance of the Inward Teacher, and we call these principles our “testimonies.” They are not so much rules to obey as they are strived-for outcomes of our efforts to live in harmony with the Spirit. Some commonly recognized testimonies include: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship/care for the earth (often referred to as SPICES). In recent years, Dr. Harold Weaver, founder of the Black Quakers Project, added JaM to SPICES for Justice and Mercy. People are often led by their faith to work for social justice, either through their professional lives or through civic engagement. Many people have become acquainted with Quakers and Quakerism because of social justice issues.

- **Pacifism and Draft Counseling:**

The peace testimony has resulted in many Quakers doing alternative service or registering for conscientious objector status, rather than being drafted or doing military service. Frances Crowe, a local peace activist and longtime Quaker who died at age 100 in 2019, started an intensive program of draft counseling in the Northampton - Amherst region for draft-eligible young men in the 1960s.

- **Leadings**

Quakers describe persistent nudges from the Spirit as leadings. This is something unique about Quakers. A person or a gathered body may find themselves led by Spirit. Outside authority is not the final arbiter of right and wrong for Quakers, but neither is individual belief or opinion. Leadings are always tested by the community. Typically, this is done by working with a clearness committee, set up by the Pastoral Care Committee or the Worship & Ministry Committee. There is also a freestanding Peace & Justice Discernment Committee which can be approached directly to help Friends discern the nature of their leading. Clearness committees are described in more detail in Section 2, What Northampton Friends Do.

A leading may be a call to ministry, which for Quakers may mean speaking or writing and can be focused within the Meeting or in the wider Society of Friends or may involve activism in the world. A Friend with such a leading will often ask for ongoing guidance, usually by requesting a ministry oversight and support committee (also called an anchor committee).

- **Social justice work:**

Much of the social justice work carried by Friends has resulted from shared leadings. When a leading for work in the world is shared by several Friends, they may form an ad hoc working group. The Peace and Justice Discernment Committee exists to help Friends discern their individual leadings, and it can also recommend formation of working groups to address specific issues as part of the meeting's shared witness in the world.

- **Working groups**

As noted above, working groups form to address specific areas of concern: At the time of this writing, Northampton Meeting has working groups on Racial and Class, on Immigrant Solidarity, and on Nuclear Disarmament & Climate Action. Each of these is described in section 3, Behind the Scenes.

Since working groups represent Northampton Friends Meeting, it is important that actions taken by them are consistent with the values and testimonies of Friends. Actions of working groups where they represent the Meeting should be approved through prayerful discernment by the Meeting.

- **Theological and spiritual diversity**

Much has been written about theological diversity among Quakers, and we encourage you to talk to others and to explore the Meeting's library to learn more.

George Fox challenged early Friends by asking, “You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this; but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of Light and hast walked in the Light, and what thou speakest is it inwardly from God?” While modern unprogrammed Friends might not use Fox’s language, his emphasis on direct experience and access to the divine has made Quakerism accessible to people with ideas about the transcendent. The Society of Friends has a rich history as a Christian religion, and much of what we hold dear comes from that history. Most Quakers throughout the world today identify as Christian, especially in the Global South. Still, even the most theologically conservative branches of Quakers have resisted the temptation to formalize a doctrine. This has allowed the Society of Friends to find common ground with many other religions and spiritual paths, and many Friends’ paths have included other religions and spiritual practices. Many Quakers, especially in North America and in Europe, do not identify as Christian. Today, Christian Friends sit in Meetings alongside Buddhist Friends, Jewish Friends, Pagan Friends, and non-theist or atheist Friends.

We experience this diversity of Quaker practices, experiences, and theologies as a gift. Yet when we express our sense of the Truth in words, we sometimes find that the life-affirming words used by one person to convey their understanding and experience of spiritual mysteries may be distressing to another. Knowing that we each perceive Truth only in part, we endeavor to hear each other with openness and we strive not to ask each other to change our own authentic language to accommodate another member’s discomfort. Through honest and sensitive exploration of our differences, we continually seek to uncover our spiritual unity, leading us to greater love of each other and the world, and a gracious appreciation of our differences.

2. WHAT NORTHAMPTON FRIENDS DO

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our Worship

- Blended worship
- Children coming to worship
- Microphones
- Latecomers
- Midweek worship
- Taizé worship

Adult Education (9:30 Hours)

Small Group Opportunities

- Fellowship lunches
- Elements of Quakerism
- Spiritual accountability groups
- Friendly 8's
- Coffee and Conversation
- Book discussions
- Book reading group
- Craft sale
- Crafts and games
- Yearly Meeting offerings
- Woolman Hill offerings

Newsletter

Web Site

Annual Retreat

Becoming a Member

Organization QR Codes

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Our Worship

- **Blended worship:**

With the Pandemic, Friends at Northampton Meeting switched over to worship via Zoom. When the meetinghouse re-opened for in-person worship in late June, 2021, many friends continued to prefer Zoom (or are able to attend only because of Zoom), so the Meeting has created as unobtrusive an experience as possible for a “blended worship,” i.e. a worship experience that works for as many as possible. Most people find that blended worship has enlarged and deepened our community. We use a standing Zoom link to join worship and other meeting events by Zoom. You can receive the link by contacting the Meeting Clerk at northampton@neym.org.

- **Children coming to worship:**

We welcome babies, children, teens, and families to Northampton Friends Meeting. The Meeting provides childcare and First Day School for the Meeting’s children. The children usually enter worship during the last ten minutes, but are welcome to be in worship for as much time as they would like. Occasionally we have intergenerational worship that incorporates children into our worship for the whole hour. We recognize that perfect silence is rarely possible for the youngest Friends and find that this enriches rather than diminishes the quality of our Meetings.

- **Microphones:**

The meeting uses microphones to make the space more accessible to those who are hard of hearing. The microphones are amplified into the entire room but, more importantly, people who attend via Zoom cannot hear Friends in the meetinghouse without the microphone. It is not enough for people simply to speak in a loud voice.

- **Latecomers:**

Northampton Friends Meeting has developed a practice of asking latecomers to wait outside the worship room for the first ten minutes of worship, with the hope that those already in worship might settle into deeper worship without interruptions. The thought is that one larger rush of latecomers might be more easily absorbed by a settled gathering than a trickle of arrivals into a less settled gathering. The greeter will sit outside with those who arrive late.

- **Midweek worship:**

Every Wednesday morning, Friends gather on Zoom to have one-half hour of worship together, then settle into the silence to worship-share on the query, “What was rising in you?” Midweek worship uses the Meeting’s usual Zoom link.

- **Taizé worship:**

On Thursday evenings, programmed Quaker worship with prayers, songs, and chants from Taizé and elsewhere is offered over Zoom. Taizé comes out of an ecumenical monastic order in central France with a strong devotion to peace and justice through prayer and meditation. Prayer and silence are at the heart of the Taizé experience. The music highlights simple phrases repeated or sung in canon, designed to help with meditation and prayer. Northampton Meeting's Taizé service includes a period of traditional Quaker silent waiting worship. To get the link to the Taizé worship, contact: quakertaize@fastmail.com.

Adult Education (9:30 Hours)

Most weeks, there is worship sharing (reflections offered in the spirit of worship), discussion, or a presentation on a topic of interest to the Meeting in the hour-and-a-half before meeting for worship. Topics vary widely. Some 9:30 Hour topics have included discernments about New England Yearly Meeting concerns, nuclear disarmament, early Quaker history, racial justice, bringing our Quaker values to our work, the sharing of favorite poetry, Taizé worship, and the spiritual journeys of individual members or attenders. Attending 9:30 Hours is a good way to start getting to know others in the meeting. You are welcome to come listen, even if you are not comfortable sharing as a newcomer.

Small Group Opportunities

- **Fellowship Lunches:**

Friends gather for a monthly potluck at the rise of worship in the meetinghouse on the fourth Sundays of the month. During the summer months we have been gathering at Look Park for monthly potlucks.

- **Elements of Quakerism**

We offer a multi-week series once or twice a year to new and seasoned Friends to explore the roots of Quakerism and how those roots interweave with our spiritual lives now.

Contact Phil Fitz if you are interested in learning more or in attending:

pfitz28@gmail.com.

- **Spiritual accountability/enrichment/nurture groups:**

Friends meet monthly to share worship and reflections on our spiritual conditions. They can meet for a set number of months or carry on indefinitely. They tend to be closed groups once they are formed, but if you are interested in being part of a spiritual

accountability group, you can let someone from Worship & Ministry know of your interest.

- **Friendly 8's:**

Fellowship Committee occasionally invites Friends to participate in a Friendly 8's group that often shares food and reflection on our spiritual lives. These can be one-time meetings of a group of up to 8-10 Friends, or they can meet monthly over a number of months. Sometimes a group chooses to continue beyond its initial time frame.

- **Monthly Coffee and Conversation**

Fellowship Committee hosts a monthly gathering at Tandem Bagels, 191 Russell Street, Hadley, generally on the first Monday of the month, from 10:30 - noon.

- **Book discussions:**

Periodically there is a call for Friends to participate in discussion of books on Quaker history and spiritually or on issues related to racial and social justice.

- **Book reading group:**

There is a group that meets about once a month on Zoom, on a weekday afternoon to read books aloud to each other, taking turns to read from a shared screen. The group decides which books to read, and they have ranged from novels to poetry to lectures to essays. If you are interested in joining, be in touch with Becky Jones, emacjones@gmail.com.

- **Craft sale/Holiday fair:**

Often we host a craft sale or holiday fair after worship on a Sunday in late November or early December as a fund-raiser (and fun-raiser) for the Meeting (or for a designated group), and Friends within the Meeting provide the crafts, baked goods, or small tag sale items to be sold. The Meeting has employed the models of selling goods at posted prices and allowing people to pay-as-led.

- **Crafts and games:**

We occasionally host opportunities to do crafts or games together. These are generally offered by individuals in the Meeting, rather than by a particular committee.

- **Your idea here:**

If you are interested in participating in a small group activity and don't see the opportunity you are looking for, you can contact the Fellowship Committee or Worship & Ministry (depending on the type of activity) to see if they can help make it happen. Or you can post a notice to the meeting's listserv to see if there are other Friends who might want to join you.

- **Yearly Meeting offerings:** <https://neym.org/> [QR code below]
 - Spiritual Nurture Program is a year-long program designed to deepen Friends' spiritual lives.
 - Periodic gatherings of friends to develop ministry.
 - Sessions, an annual gathering for the conduct of business and to build community through worship, learning, and play.
- **Woolman Hill offerings:** <http://woolmanhill.org/> [QR code below]
 - Personal retreats in one of their cabins
 - They offer many weekend workshops of a variety of topics
 - This is the location of our annual meeting retreat.

Newsletter

Our newsletter is published monthly, except in August. It comes out the week after our business meetings, which are held the second Sundays of the month. We have hard copies of the newsletter available at the meetinghouse, but you can also sign up to get a copy of the newsletter. Electronic copies are emailed to you toward the end of the week following the second Sunday.

Website

<https://nohofriends.org/> [QR code below]

There are levels of information on the website. For the general public, there is information for newcomers and for signing up to be put on the Meeting mailing list, as well as a link to "What Quakers believe." For access to more private information, such as the Meeting directory and committee minutes and documents, access needs to be granted by clicking on the "Request Access to Private Content."

Annual Retreat

In most years, Northampton Meeting has had a weekend retreat at Woolman Hill, a Quaker retreat center in Deerfield. It's a great way to get to know people in a relatively short period of time, and newcomers to the Meeting as well as long-standing members are welcome to come. You don't have to stay for the whole weekend, but you'll want to come for as much of it as you possibly can. You'll get more out of the retreat and out of connecting with people the longer you stay.

The cost of the retreat is covered by the Meeting's budget, so there is no registration fee, although contributions are always welcome.

Becoming a Member

Friends welcome fellow travelers to walk alongside them on their journeys, but not all attenders are called to seek membership. Membership is a mutual commitment. In accepting someone into membership, the Meeting's commitment is to offer opportunities for spiritual growth; to help individuals grow and to discover and use their gifts; and to offer pastoral care as needed. Members commit to live their daily life in accordance with the faith and practice of Friends, to encourage and cherish others in the Meeting, and to participate in the life of the Meeting as they are able. This means regularly attending meetings for worship and discernment ; contributing their time and energy; and contributing financially according to their means.

There is a separate handbook to help with the process of discernment for those considering membership in Northampton Friends Meeting.

Organization QR Codes:

New England Yearly Meeting website



Woolman Hill website



Northampton Friends Meeting website:



3. BEHIND THE SCENES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Committees

- Standing committees
 - Worship & Ministry
 - Pastoral Care
 - Nominating
 - Naming
 - Peace & Justice Discernment
 - Youth & Families
 - Retreat
 - Communication
 - Fellowship
 - Finance
 - Property
 - Library
 - Walls & Displays
- *Ad hoc* committees/Working Groups
 - Racial and Class
 - Refugee Immigrant Solidarity
 - Nuclear Disarmament & Climate Change
- Special committees appointed by Pastoral Care and/or Worship and Ministry
 - Support Committees
 - Clearness Committees
 - Anchor/ministry support committees

Officers

- Clerk
- Clerk's Elder
- Recording Clerk
- Treasurer
- Recorder
- Historian
- Condo Association Representative

Table of Contents (con't)

Finances

- Budget
- Our Expenses
- Our Income
- How to contribute

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Committees

Serving on a committee is a great way to become more involved in the Meeting and to get to know people. The Nominating Committee can help you connect with any of the standing committees. For the ad hoc working groups, you would want to get in touch with the committee chair. A list of committees and who serves on the committees is posted on the bulletin board in the hallway that leads to the library.

Nominating Committee nominates new people to serve as officers or on standing committees, with terms starting in September of each year. The nominated names are brought to a business meeting for approval. Their names are read that month, but they are not approved until the following month, to allow time for people to ask questions and/or to express any doubts or reservations about a specific nomination.

- **Standing Committees**

Except for Nominating Committee itself, membership nomination for standing committees comes through Nominating Committee. Membership terms are staggered so that there is continuity of membership when new members come onto the committee each fall.

- **Worship & Ministry**

Worship & Ministry promotes and supports the spiritual life of the Meeting. There are five members, each serving three-year terms, plus the Meeting Clerk as an ad hoc member. Worship & Ministry is the committee you approach for membership, for clearness committees for spiritual discernment, or to ask for an anchor committee to provide support for a specific ministry.

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- **Pastoral Care**

Pastoral Care provides care for the Meeting community, families, and individuals within the Meeting and gives voice, visibility, and implementation to our ministry of inclusion. There are five members who serve two-year terms. The Pastoral Care Committee has been established to help discover the unfolding gifts of receiving and giving nurture and care. The Committee is responsible for setting up clearness committees for personal discernment.

- **Nominating**

Nominating Committee discerns and recommends members and attenders for service to the Meeting. There are three members who each serve a three-year term. Unlike other committees, new members of Nominating Committee are nominated by the Naming Committee, and their “year” starts in February so that all their committee nominees can start their terms in September.

- **Naming**

The Naming Committee is constituted once a year for one month only. Their job is to find the person(s) to fill the outgoing position(s) on Nominating Committee. Nomination to the Naming Committee is done within a business meeting. Their names do not need to wait for approval at the next business meeting, although the person’s nomination to Nominating Committee does wait until the subsequent month for final approval. At least two people serve on the Naming Committee.

- **Peace & Justice Discernment**

Instead of a standing Peace and Social Concerns Committee, Northampton Friends has a Peace and Justice Discernment Committee, which meets when called on to provide discernment support to Meeting members or attenders regarding possible personal leadings related to issues of peace & social justice. The committee has three members, 1 nominated by Pastoral Care for a 1-year term, 1 nominated by Worship & Ministry for a 1-year term, and 1 at-large member nominated by Nominating for a 2-year term. They meet as needed, but at least once a year.

- **Youth & Families**

The committee develops and oversees programs of spiritual nurture and education for Meeting youth, including hiring any staff to support youth programming. There are four members, each serving two-year terms.

- **Retreat**

The Retreat Committee organizes and runs our annual retreat, usually held the first weekend of June at Woolman Hill Retreat Center in Deerfield, MA. All attenders and

members are invited and encouraged to attend, the cost being covered by the Meeting's budget. Three people serve on the retreat, with staggered two year terms.

- **Communication**

Communication sets guidelines for and oversees the use of the Meeting's listserv, website, and the Meeting directory. Three people serve on Communication for staggered two-year terms.

- **Fellowship**

Fellowship facilitates community-building activities, including monthly fellowship lunch, picnics, Friendly 8s (monthly gatherings of small groups), and other opportunities as inspired. Four people serve on Fellowship with staggered two-year terms.

- **Finance**

Finance has the overall care for Meeting finances and budget. There are three members serving staggered three-year terms, with the Treasurer serving in an ad hoc role.

- **Property**

The Property Committee facilitates the stewardship and proper functioning of the Meeting's physical plant. Property has four members with staggered two-year terms.

- **Library**

Organizes and maintains a lending library of books, videos, tapes, and CDs. It has two members with staggered two-year terms.

- **Walls & Displays**

Oversees what is placed on the walls of the social room and hallways. This committee has three members, one appointed by Worship & Ministry for one year, one appointed by Pastoral Care for one year, and one at-large member nominated by Nominating Committee for a two-year term.

- **Ad hoc Committees:**

These committees are open to new membership as people are led. If you're interested in joining one of these groups, you can be in touch with the Meeting Clerk, whose contact information is in the Meeting Newsletter. The Clerk can put you in touch with the members of the Working Group.

- **Race and Class Working Group**

The Race and Class Working Group formed in 2015 (originally called the Racial Justice Working Group) to address issues related to racism and class. They began by leading

after-meeting discussions over lunch. The group hosts periodic 9:30 Hours on topics related to racial justice; hosts book discussion groups; shows occasional films, and advocates for Meeting-wide stances relative to racial justice. The group meets monthly for sharing of resources and planning of educational opportunities for the Meeting.

- **Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament & Climate Action**

The Working Group on Nuclear Disarmament & Climate Action began after the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) was adopted in July 2017. Early efforts included raising awareness of the importance of the treaty among Quakers (monthly, quarterly, yearly meetings as well as national Quaker organizations), other faith communities, and local governments and businesses. The Working Group coordinated a review of our Meeting's finances and practices and the Meeting made changes to bring it in full alignment with the TPNW in June 2018. Members of the WG represent NFM at various actions related to nuclear disarmament. In terms of climate action, the WG has collaborated with other faith communities and activist organizations to address environmental threats, particularly the intersection of systemic racism and the climate crisis. The WG has stewardship of NFM's participation in the Voluntary Carbon Tax Witness program.

- **Working Group on Refugee & Immigrant Solidarity**

The Working Group on Refugee & Immigrant Solidarity formed in April 2017, when Northampton Friends Meeting declared itself an Immigrant-Welcoming Congregation. Our early activities focused on support for immigrants living in sanctuary in two churches in the Valley, and members were involved in advocacy for other immigrants and refugees, often through the Pioneer Valley Workers Center. The working group coordinates with a similar group at Mt. Toby and with an interfaith group. Since summer 2021, the WG has coordinated NFM's involvement with agencies resettling Afghan refugees in local communities.

- **Special Committees appointed by Pastoral Care and/or Worship and Ministry**

- **Support Committees**

Friends needing tangible, practical, and/or emotional support may ask Pastoral Care for a support committee. Such a committee usually meets for a specified time period (monthly for three or six months, for example).

- **Clearness Committees**

When an individual applies for membership in Northampton Friends Meeting, when a couple asks the Meeting to marry them under its care, or when someone wants help in making an important decision or discern a new direction in their life, they can ask Pastoral Care or Worship and Ministry for a clearness committee. Clearness committees

consist of three or four friends who are appointed by Pastoral Care or Worship and Ministry and who will meet with the individual(s) to help them find clarity. These committees usually meet one or two times. A sample guidelines for membership clearness committees appears in Appendix C, section 7.

- **Anchor/ministry support committees**

Anchor or ministry support committees are appointed by Worship and Ministry, either at the request of an individual who is following a leading in ministry or at Worship and Ministry's initiation. An anchor or ministry support committee's charge is to help the Friend be faithful in their ministry, and a committee usually meets over an extended period of time. Worship and Ministry checks in with the committees annually and asks for periodic reports back from the committee.

Officers

- **Clerk:**

The Clerk is the person who is the public representative of the Meeting and is responsible for conducting our monthly meetings for worshipful discernment (business), setting the agendas, and discerning the sense of the meeting for our decision-making. The position of the clerk rotates among the Meeting membership.

- **Clerk's elder**

The Clerk's elder helps to keep the Clerk grounded in the spirit through centered grounding worship during business sessions and offering a grounded presence during the planning of the month's agenda.

- **Recording Clerk**

The Recording Clerk helps set the monthly business agenda and takes minutes of the business that comes before the community.

- **Treasurer:**

The Treasurer serves as an ad hoc member of the Finance Committee and keeps the Meeting's books, handling donations and payment of expenses.

- **Recorder:**

The Recorder keeps records of births, deaths, and memberships to the Meeting.

- **Historian**

The Historian gathers news items and photos related to the Meeting community.

- **Condo Association Representative**

The Condo Rep serves as our representative to the building's Condo Association, serving as liaison between the Meeting and the Condo Association.

Finances

- **Budget:**

Each year the Meeting approves an annual budget based on anticipated needs of the Meeting. A copy of the budget is posted on the bulletin board in the hallway that leads to the library. The Meeting's annual budget is in the neighborhood of \$74,000.

- **Our Expenses:**

We spend money on our general operating expenses (13%), property expenses (70%), and contributions we make to outside organizations (17%).

- *Operating expenses* include:

- Committee budgets (which includes such things as supplies, gifts for graduating high school seniors, and gifts to new members)
 - Fellowship (such as kitchen supplies for our after-worship fellowship and potluck lunches)
 - Retreat (to provide access to all participants, regardless of financial ability, we fully fund our annual retreat, while also encouraging contributions to cover the expenses)
 - Youthcare/childcare
 - Library purchases
 - Newsletter
 - Outreach
 - Special Meeting projects (determined as need arises) such as providing financial assistance to the three community organizations sponsoring Afghan refugees; helping another meeting fund a roofing project.
 - Funding our cumulative accounts that support our assistance projects

- *Property expenses* include:

- Utilities (electricity; sewer and water; phone; our heating costs are covered in our condo fees)
 - Mortgage payments
 - Condo fees (our highest single expense)
 - Insurance
 - Wifi and internet fees

- Taxes (our unit is tax-free, but we are taxed property tax on our extra unit because its use is not related to the Meeting's purposes.)
- Payment to Mt. Toby for use of their burial grounds
- Payments to our cumulative building accounts (for maintenance and repairs and for furnishing and appliances)

- ***Contributions we make:***

We make modest annual donations to Quaker organizations or others that are aligned with our values. We make more substantial contributions to New England Yearly Meeting. We generally contribute to the following organizations:

- *Local:* Interfaith cot shelter; Gardening the Community, Interfaith Help Fund, Northampton Survival Center, Pioneer Valley Workers' Center, the Truth School, and Woolman Hill.
- *Regional:* New England Yearly Meeting (both broadly and to support an equalization fund); Puente de Amigos; and Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting.
- *National:* EarthCare Witness; Friends Committee on National Legislation; Friends General Conference; Nuclear Ban USA, Pendle Hill.
- *International:* Friends United Meeting, Friends World Committee for Consultation, and Health in Harmony

- ***Meeting designated funds:***

We set aside money each year to ensure that we have funds available for our building or condo expenses, for special projects, and to provide support to friends in financial need (through a scholarship fund, an assistance fund, and a fund for sufferings for friends whose financial situation is compromised through their public witness, such as engaging in war tax resistance).

- ***Restricted funds:***

We receive and disburse funds for designated projects that fall outside our general budget. For instance, we hold funds for Gifts of Ministry and for those who participate in a voluntary carbon tax witness.

Our Income:

The Meeting does not pass a collection plate, so we depend on:

- contributions from members, attenders, visitors, and occasional outside individuals or organizations,
- lease income from the tenant in our second unit, and
- income from renting out the meetinghouse for events or group meetings.

- **How to contribute**

There are several ways to make contributions to the Meeting.

- Put a check or cash into our small contribution box at the meetinghouse (in the Fellowship Room on the left hand wall, as you're heading toward the worship room).
- Send checks to the Treasurer, Northampton Friends Meeting, 43 Center Street, Suite 202, Northampton, MA 01060. You may mail a check, have checks generated (on demand or monthly) through your bank, or set up automatic transfers by talking to the Treasurer at northamptonfriendstreasurer@gmail.com.

4. THE BARE BONES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Meetinghouse

- Worship room
- Fellowship room
- kitchen
- cloakroom
- classrooms
- library
- bathrooms
- cleaning
- Keys / key cards
- Wifi access

The Building

- Plan of the meetinghouse
- land acknowledgement
- Previous use
- Ownership / mortgage
- Tenants
- Condo Association
- Use of the meetinghouse by outside groups
- The Northampton Interfaith Cot Shelter

The Burial Ground

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The Meetinghouse

- **The worship room**

The worship room, designed by architect Lynn Rice and built with some of our labor, was added on to the building when we purchased our unit in 2000. It sits above what used to be the Interfaith Cot Shelter, the proximity to which was part of the Meeting's motivation for moving to the 43 Center Street condominium. [See Chapter 5, Northampton Friends Meeting History for more details.].

It was designed with a nod to Quaker history, when men and women used separate entrances and where a dividing wall could be lowered between the two sides so that men and women could conduct their business separately.

The floors here, and elsewhere, are finished with a water-based floor finish, in deference to those with chemical sensitivities. That makes the floors more susceptible to showing use. For that reason, and to preserve the worship room as a place of worship, we ask that no food or drink be brought into the worship room.

We have a ventilation system that brings in fresh air into the meeting room. A number of friends have seasonal allergies, so we tend to keep the windows closed during the warm months of the year. During the pandemic, we added a ceiling fan and air purifier to increase the ventilation.

The condo association controls whether the building is heated or cooled. Twice annually, they switch from one to the other. Our temperature is set by a master thermostat; but it can be adjusted up or down using the thermostat in the worship room. It takes a while for the temperature to adjust.

We have an amplification system using hand-held microphones for those who are hard of hearing and so that those attending blended worship and programs from Zoom can hear what is said in the meetinghouse.

Cushions for the benches are kept in the cupboard on your left, just before the doors into worship. Help yourself. There are blankets in a basket by the left hand set of doors for use if you are chilly.

The doors to the worship room click into place when opened. To close the doors, you can either tug on the door to get it past its point of resistance, or you can reach overhead and

turn a knob to unlock the door. The first option is noisy. The second option requires a bit of height and dexterity. Either is fine.

- **Fellowship room (social room):**

The fellowship room used to house the bar of the old Elks Lodge (see building history below for more detail). You can see the stain marks on the floor from where the bar stood. We use this room for snacks and fellowship after worship, and on the fourth Sunday of the month we hold a pot-luck lunch, open to anyone, regardless of whether you've brought food to share or not.

- **Kitchen**

The kitchen was remodeled during the pandemic, primarily through the donated labor of Sally Stites-Robertson. We needed to accommodate an extra dishwasher for our fellowship lunches.

- **Cloakroom:**

Friends may hang up their coats here, and this is where you will find our lost and found.

- **Classrooms**

Classrooms #1 and #2 are used by the children. Classroom #3 is used by renters and for committee meetings.

- **Library**

In the fellowship room, there is a bookcase of books that our Library Committee puts out to highlight books from our collection. Additionally, the library is located down the hallway to the left as you exit our space (toward the bathrooms and the front door of the building). We have an electronic card catalog to help you browse our collection, but books are also shelved by categories labeled on the shelves. To check out a book, simply fill out the library card in the jacket of the book and place it in the box labeled for checked-out books. Please make sure to put your name and phone number. Please return the book within a month after you've checked it out. Returns go in the box on the table labeled for returns.

- **Bathrooms**

Our bathrooms are located on the 2nd floor landing across from the elevators. Northampton Friends Meeting is part of a condo association and we share our two bathrooms with other tenants in common areas of the building. To keep the bathrooms

clean and protected from outside drop-in users, the doors are set to open only with a key. We keep our keys on the wall opposite the coat room. You use the key in the handle lock only. Once inside the bathroom, for your privacy, turn the deadbolt in place.

On Sundays or during other public events, we provide a courtesy to incoming bathroom users: instead of letting the door close (and thereby locking out the next user), we “lock” the deadbolt when leaving the bathroom. That way the tongue of the deadbolt catches on the door trim to keep the door ajar for the next user.

- **Cleaning**

Cleaning of our space is done by teams of people every three weeks. If you would like to be on a cleaning team, please be in touch with someone from Property Committee.

- **Keys / key cards:**

Bathroom keys live across from the coat room, on rings hanging from hooks.

The building’s front door is set on a timer to be open at certain hours of the day and certain days of the week. At other times, when the front door is locked, access to the building and to our meetinghouse is through the use of a key card.

The meetinghouse door is also set on a timer, to be open on Sunday mornings. Otherwise, access to our unit’s front door is by keycard.

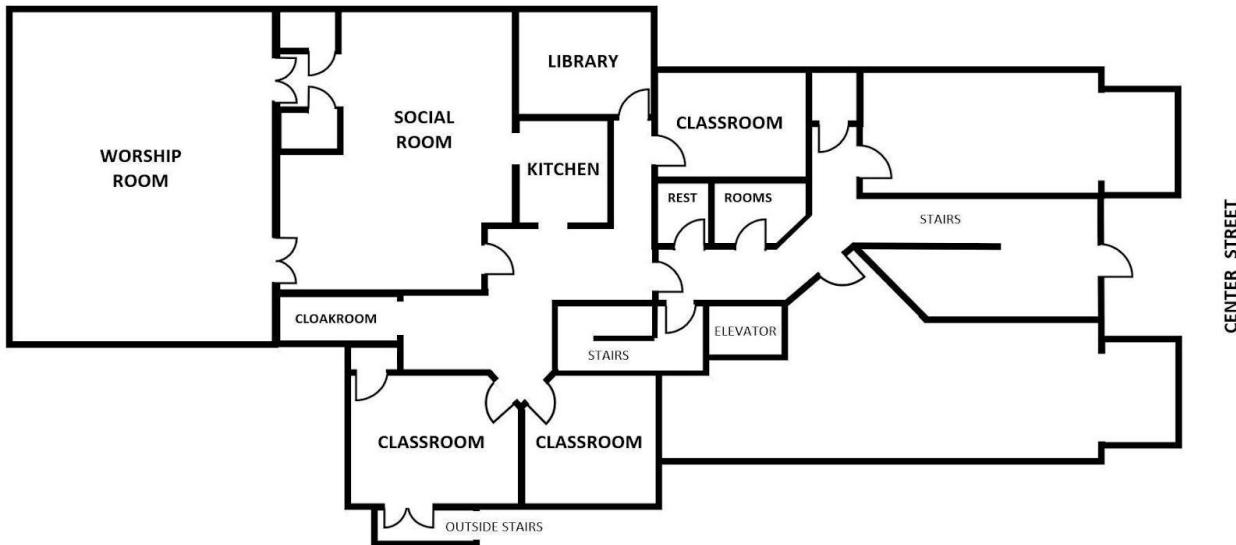
We have a side entrance that is operated by key, but it also has to be locked with the key. It is best to be unlocked and locked from the inside, by use of the allen wrench in the door’s push bar. This allen wrench “key” hangs from a chain on the right jamb.

- **Wifi access**

The meeting’s guest wifi is NFMGuest. The password is “bewelcome.” Renters are allowed to use our wifi, but we charge an access fee, so please do not share the password.

The Building

- **Plan of the meetinghouse:**



- **Land acknowledgement:**

We wish to acknowledge that the Meetinghouse is located in what is now known as Northampton, MA but was once the ancestral lands of the Nipmuc, Pocumtuc, and Nonotuck, who shared the land without ownership. (Note: this is an inadequate land acknowledgement based on our current knowledge.)

- **Previous Use**

43 Center Street used to be the home of the Northampton Elks. You can see the symbol of the Elks at the entrance to the building, as well as the clock in the upper windows. We added the worship room and remodeled the other spaces within our unit. The Fellowship room used to be where their bar was. You can still see the stains on the floor.

- **Ownership / Mortgage**

Northampton Friends Meeting owns two units, our meetinghouse and the unit to the left of the elevators on our floor. When we bought into this building, we bought the second unit as a potential space to grow into. We currently lease that space out.

We are part of a condo association and, as such, we share some expenses with other tenants in the building.

- **Tenants:**

Our second unit is leased by John Rollinson, a craniosacral practitioner. He sublets it to other providers. Other tenants in the building (but who are not connected with the Meeting) include offices of Clinical Support Options, lawyers, therapists, health practitioners, and, on the fourth floor, private residents.

- **Condo Association:**

The building is owned by the owners of the individual condo units within the building. Together we form the condo association. The managers of the Condo Association are Kendrick Property Management. We pay monthly condo fees to the Association to cover expenses such as: trash, heat, cleaning of the common areas, building insurance, snow removal, and building maintenance. Northampton Friends Meeting two units make up about 23% of the association, based on our footprint in the building.

- **Use of meetinghouse by outside groups:**

The meetinghouse is available for use by Meeting committees (for no charge) and by outside groups (who are charged on a sliding scale on the basis of their kinship to Quaker values and group finances). We have a brochure in a rack just outside our front door with more information, and there is information on the Meeting's website.

The Burial Ground

Northampton Friends Meeting shares the burial ground at Mt. Toby Friends Meeting in Leverett. It is open to our members as well as immediate families within one generation (i.e., spouse, parents, and children). Northampton Friends Meeting's Pastoral Care Committee should facilitate an initial conversation between the family and one of Mt. Toby's Burial Ground Caretakers.

There is no charge for a burial plot, though families may wish to make a donation to Mt. Toby. The family is responsible for the costs of burial and other funeral arrangements. The Mt. Toby Burial Ground Caretakers can explain and help to estimate these costs for the family.

Grave markers are optional, but there are no standing markers or headstones. In keeping with Quaker simplicity, grave markers are flat, no larger than about 1' by 2' and set dry, without a foundation. Burial vaults, grave liners, and caskets made of metal or other nonbiodegradable materials (required for many cemeteries) are not permitted at Mt.

Toby. Shrouds or coffins made of readily biodegradable materials are preferred, and “green burials” have been done there.

Mt. Toby’s Burial Ground Caretakers assign and record grave plots. They are legally responsible for making sure the burial permit (officially, the “Disposition, Removal and Transportation Permit”) is in hand before interment. They also handle filing the permit with the town.

5. NORTHAMPTON FRIENDS HISTORY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Our Formation

Pivotal Moments in our history

- Retreats
- Challenges
- Same-Sex relationships
- Relationships with Cuba
- Support of Bosnian refugees
- Meeting quilts
- Peace & Social Concerns experiment
- Midweek worship
- Working groups
- Taize worship
- Elements of Quakerism
- Finding a permanent home
- Pandemic
- Accessibility
 - Physical access
 - Chemical sensitivities
 - Hearing

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Our Formation

Northampton Friends Meeting is an offspring of Mt. Toby Friends Meeting in Leverett, MA. In 1991, twenty-five friends from the Northampton area (many of them Mt. Toby members) met in the living room of Bruce and Ruth Hawkins to discern whether there was enough interest among the group to start a Northampton worship group. This was not the first attempt to start a Northampton worship group, but this time the efforts took. Friends in the group longed to have other Quakers living close enough to have connections beyond Sunday worship.

We began worshiping in each other's homes at first but quickly moved our gatherings to Smith College, which we had access to because some of the earliest members were faculty or staff at the college. We had adult education and children's programming from the outset. We worshiped at Smith until our move to the current location at the end of 2002.

Soon after we began meeting, we requested that we become a "preparative meeting" of Mt. Toby. This meant we had business meetings of our own, but Friends were still members of Mt. Toby, and Friends continued to serve on Mt. Toby committees.

Over the years, we periodically tested whether we should become our own freestanding monthly meeting. The first two times we approached the topic, we did not find ourselves clear. The third time, we found clarity quite quickly because we realized we were already functioning as if we were a monthly meeting (see below for more explanation of the differences between monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings; but briefly it describes the frequency with which friends gather to conduct business). We asked the Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting (of which Mt. Toby was a member) to grant us status as a monthly meeting. That was granted in February, 1994, and our first official business meeting was the following week. Soon after, the Meeting received 25 membership transfers from Mt. Toby and one transfer from Cambridge Friends Meeting.

As we moved to become a monthly meeting, we had a Transition Team who, in 1993 and 1994, worked out many of the details of how committees would function, who could serve in various roles in the Meeting, and what our legal name would be (Northampton Friends Meeting). Many monthly meetings say that only members may serve in certain roles. We, however, affirmed that "While we recognize the importance of having members of the Society of Friends serve as Meeting Clerk and as members of Ministry and Counsel [what we call Worship and Ministry], as Faith and Practice suggests, we also do not want to foreclose the process of discernment by which Nominating Committee

might call upon an experienced non-member with appropriate gifts to serve in these capacities.” (Minuted October 10, 1993)

We began having annual retreats at Woolman Hill early on, although no one remembers the exact year. In May of 1994, we signed what we called the “Launching Document” which was signed by forty adults and children who attended the retreat. This Launching Document hangs on the wall of the meetinghouse, just outside the hallway door to the kitchen. The text said:

Fifty years after Quakers established the first monthly meeting in this city, and three years after we began gathering as a Northampton worship group, we founded a new Northampton Friends Meeting in February of 1994. Obedient to the spirit that moves among us, seeking the continuing revelation of the will of God, we celebrate and nurture that of God in all human beings. On this fifteen day of May 1994 we hereto set our hands.

Pivotal Moments in Our History

- **Retreats**

Within the first several years, the Meeting made the decision to include our annual Woolman Hill retreat expenses into our annual budget, as opposed to having participants pay a registration fee to cover the expenses. We did this after realizing that some people excluded themselves from participation out of embarrassment for having to ask for financial support to attend.

- **Challenges**

There have been some hard incidents/situations that we as a meeting community have had to grapple with over the years, some of which caused people to leave the Meeting and some of which have ultimately brought us closer together as a community and made us more mindful of better ways to handle conflict and the unexpected.

- **Same-sex relationships**

One of our first actions as a monthly meeting was to affirm same-sex relationships (See Appendix A in the Appendices). Years later, two of our members became part of the lawsuit that legalized same-sex marriage in Massachusetts. Many friends supported Heidi and Gina Nortonsmith and their children during the years of the lawsuit and joined in celebrating their successful bid to legalize same-sex marriages in 2004. Our meeting has taken on the care of more same-sex couples than it has heterosexual couples.

- **Relationship with Cuba Friends**

New England Yearly Meeting has had ongoing relationships with Friends in Cuba for many years. For a time, Northampton considered having a sister relationship with Friends from Holguín meeting, an evangelical Christian meeting. We were upfront about our affirmation of same-sex relationships. They wrote to us saying that they wanted to come preach to us about our condition. We had many long meetings to discuss how and whether to enter into a sister relationship with Holguín, and although we ultimately turned down their conditions for being in relationship with each other, those conversations again deepened our sense of community. Since then several Cuban Friends, including the pastor of Holguín Monthly Meeting, have visited our Meeting and stayed at local Friends' houses. A number of Friends from our meeting have traveled to Cuba and have served on the Yearly Meeting's Puente de Amigos Committee.

- **Support of Bosnian Refugees**

In the late 1990s, members of our Meeting, in collaboration with members of the Congregation B'nai Israel in Northampton, helped sponsor three Bosnian refugee men, two of whom were joined by their wives and children. We helped them find apartments and employment, and supported them in many ways for a few years. The collaboration between the Meeting and the synagogue was a rich one, particularly when members of the synagogue agreed to try the Quaker discernment process of sitting in silence and allowing the spirit to guide us.

- **Meeting quilts**

Member Ann Emerson introduced the Meeting to the idea of comfort quilts. Members created individual squares that were assembled into three quilts, two for adults and one for children, that have been loaned to those experiencing challenging or pivotal times in their lives. Many of those who benefited from the quilts wrote their names on the back of the quilts. For some years, all of the quilts disappeared, but we now have two back in circulation again.

- **Peace & Social Concerns experiment**

When members of the Peace & Social Concerns Committee were experiencing fatigue from being the ones to carry social justice issues on behalf of the Meeting, we began an experiment: to have a Peace & Justice Discernment Committee whose job it would be to help individuals discern their own leadings and to help them figure out how that concern might be brought to the attention of the Meeting. They are a committee to help discern and season discernments, rather than to carry the projects forward themselves.

Membership on this committee consists of one person from Worship & Ministry, one from Pastoral Care, and one person who is nominated by the Nominating Committee.

- **Midweek worship**

Since October, 2018 a Wednesday morning midweek worship has been under the care of Worship & Ministry, after several unsuccessful attempts to start an evening midweek group. The worship used to be in person at the meetinghouse, but during the Pandemic, like Sunday worship, it pivoted to Zoom. A number of Friends from outside our region regularly attend, and the size of that worshiping group has grown. It continues only on Zoom. The first half hour is worship; during the second half, Friends settle into a period of worship-sharing to reflect on the query, “What was rising for you/us during worship?”

- **Taizé worship**

In 2018, Peter Bishop started hosting programmed Quaker worship with songs, chants, and prayers from Taizé and elsewhere. This began as an in-person service, once a month at Mt. Toby Monthly Meeting. Early in the Pandemic in 2020, the service moved to Zoom, became weekly, and was taken under the care of Northampton Friends. Readings are sent out in advance, and participants can volunteer to read one or more of them aloud if they choose. The readings include poetry, excerpts from Quaker writers, and selections from sacred texts of a wide variety of faith traditions. It is not a Christian service but is designed to be welcoming to people of all religious orientations. A dozen or so people attend regularly, and many others will drop in once or attend only occasionally. Even people who never come to the service have said they appreciate getting the weekly readings and find them very meaningful. If you are interested in being part of this rich programmed worship, you can reach Peter Bishop at quakertaize@fastmail.com.

- **Elements of Quakerism**

In the early 2000s, Phil Fitz led what is traditionally known as Quakerism 101, a class which focuses on the history of Quakerism. In 2019, Phil created a different kind of course, giving people the opportunity over seven weeks to engage with the spiritual underpinnings of basic Quaker faith and practice through group discussion of selected readings. These Elements of Quakerism courses have greatly helped increase the spiritual groundedness of the Meeting and have become an important part of the Meeting’s outreach, drawing newcomers, along with long-term members and attenders, to reflect on how these spiritual cornerstones relate to our individual and collective spiritual lives. Many of those who have attended the course have become active attenders and even members of the Meeting community. As of spring, 2025, about 85 people have attended the Northampton Elements of Quakerism courses. Phil has also taken this ministry to the

wider Yearly Meeting. To express interest in an Elements of Quakerism course, contact Phil Fitz at pfitz@gmail.com.

- **Working groups**

A number of groups have formed spontaneously, outside of the normal committee nomination process, to work on specific concerns. For a time, we had an Ad Hoc Leadings Coordination Group to support those working groups. The committee met with working group clerks to ground their work in a spiritual framework. [For more information on current working groups, see Section 5, Behind the Scenes.]

- **Finding a permanent home**

In 1994, we began discussion about finding our own home. We tried to purchase a house on Riverside Drive in 1994, but that fell through. In 1995, we bought a small house with a surprisingly large lot on Barrett Street. We renovated the small house, with the thought that a caretaker could live in the house in exchange for service to the Meeting. We intended to build a meetinghouse on the wide patch of land behind the house, and we hired an architect to help us design a meetinghouse. The process of discerning who the architect would be was a wonderful example of listening to the Spirit for guidance. From discussion, it seemed that there was no agreement on which of several architects would be the Meeting's first choice. But as Friends settled into the silence, every person named the architect we ultimately engaged, Lynn Posner Rice. We had many gatherings in which Friends brainstormed how we wanted a meetinghouse to reflect who we were as a community and to serve our needs.

In early 2000, we were presented with the possibility of being part of a new condo association at 43 Center Street, the former home of the Northampton Elks Lodge. The location in downtown Northampton, the proximity to other communities of faith, and the opportunity to work with the Emergency Cot Shelter all appealed to us. [At that time, and until the tail end of the pandemic, the Interfaith Cot Shelter was located in the space beneath our worship room.] While we loved the property at Barrett Street and many of us mourned the decision to let go of that property, it was clear that we were being guided to shift our efforts over to 43 Center Street. We had hoped that we might involve the children of the meeting in service to the Cot Shelter but later learned that youth under the age of 18 are not allowed.

Our presence in the building helped others make the decision to join in the project and for the project to get financing. When the project got into financial difficulties, our former member Claire Bateman came to the rescue. She stepped in both financially and in a

project oversight capacity to correct previous errors and deficiencies and bring the project to completion. She eventually moved into a unit on the 4th floor of the building. Claire subsequently moved to a home she built in Williamsburg and has since died, leaving the Meeting with a parting financial gift that filled a deficit during the lean months of the pandemic.

Lynn Posner Rice designed our worship room, an addition at the back of the building that sits above what was the Interfaith Emergency Cot Shelter, now housing an office of Clinical Support Options. Many Friends had a hand in finishing the space with their labors of painting and woodworking.

The design for the benches came via Karen and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, from a year they spent worshiping with Friends in Monte Verde, Costa Rica. The benches in each section of the room are three different lengths, with the shortest in the front, the longest in the back. The benches are stackable, which is why there is a foot rest only on the shortest bench. We have occasionally stacked the benches when we have had community dances in the worship room. The benches were built by a formerly incarcerated man known to one of our members.

Our first day of worship in this current space occurred the same day as our last worship at Smith College. On that day we began worship at Bass Hall on Smith College's Campus and walked mid-worship over to 43 Center Street and continued worship in the new space.

- **Pandemic**

When the COVID Pandemic caused the Meeting (and the rest of the world) to shut its doors in March, 2020, the Meeting was able, with the help of a few technologically adept Friends, to pivot immediately to having worship, 9:30 Hours, meeting for worshipful discernment (aka meeting for worship for business), and mid-week worship on Zoom. What we discovered was that friends who had been restricted in their ability to attend worship and committee meetings in person because of distance or physical ability or household needs were able to feel much more intimately interwoven into the life of the Meeting.

We resumed in-person worship in the summer of 2021, but we never stopped offering Zoom as an option for Friends to attend. In fact, the screen has become part of the circle of worshipers in the meetinghouse. As a community, we have embraced what we call "blended worship" because of the increased accessibility and powerful connection that exists among and across the two groups of our worshiping community. In fact, those

communities are not static. Some people move back and forth between the two formats. While some Friends may opt not to worship in a room with a computer and screen, we keep reaffirming the decision to opt for more inclusivity rather than less. The blended format continues as a living experiment for First Day Worship.

Midweek worship, as well as Taizé worship, has remained a Zoom-only, which allows people who regularly attend to attend not only from the Northampton region but from as far away as England, Oregon, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Vermont, and the eastern part of Massachusetts. In fact, we have two new members whom most of us have never met in person but who, nevertheless, have become integral to the life of the Meeting.

Our meetings for worshipful discernment moved to Zoom, and the clerks have not yet moved back to the meetinghouse. This lets everyone more easily see the clerk and recording clerk on the Zoom screen and ensures that everyone can hear and see the clerks.

Accessibility

- **Physical access**

The Meeting is located on the second floor of the building. The building's front door has handicap access when the building is open. If locked, one still needs a key but can use the access button. Elevators are available down a short ramp from the front door. The interior meetinghouse front door, the interior doors within the meetinghouse, and our bathroom doors are not (yet) handicapped accessible. On Sundays, our interior front door will be unlocked, and the doors to the worship room are left open until 11:00. A greeter waits outside the worship room for the first ten minutes of worship and is available to open a door.

For Friends who are physically not able to attend worship and events at the meetinghouse, Zoom itself makes the Meeting accessible to those individuals.

- **Chemical sensitivities**

When we moved into the meetinghouse at 43 Center Street, we encountered some environmental liabilities that made the building inaccessible to some Friends with chemical and environmental sensitivities. While we could not ensure that people would come scent-free to the meetinghouse, we have recommendations for unscented and environmentally friendly products that Friends can use. We use water-based floor finishes to protect our floors. Although they require frequent re-coating, there are significantly fewer issues with problematic fumes. As much as possible, we aspire to use scent-free

products and for years labeled the Meeting as “Aspiring to be scent-free.” We designate the two right-side wedges of benches in the meetinghouse for those friends who need scent-free space.

- **Hearing**

While the worship room has lovely acoustics, it can be difficult for hard-of-hearing friends to hear well. We have a hearing-assistive system that includes the use of hand-held microphones and headsets. When Friends use a microphone, their voices are amplified into the meeting room. They used to be amplified into headsets, thus enabling hard-of-hearing Friends easier access to the words and messages of others. Since tying into Zoom, the microphones no longer work with the headsets, but the transcript and closed captioning on Zoom help make messages and announcements more accessible to hard of hearing people. Friends on Zoom cannot hear anything in the meetinghouse without the microphones being used, which is why it is critical to hold the microphone close to one’s mouth when speaking.

In order to be more inclusive of those who would otherwise be excluded, some people have had to modify personal habits (such as modifying the products they use for personal care and laundry to make the Meeting accessible for chemically sensitive individuals) and/or personal comfort or preference (for example, around ease in using a microphone or worshiping with a computer screen in the worship room).

6. QUAKER HISTORY AND ORGANIZATIONS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Quaker History

- Early Quakers in England
- Quakers come to America
- Quakers worldwide
- Branches of Quakerism
- Resources for learning more

Quaker Organizations

- New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM)
- Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting (CVQM)
- Friends General Conference (FGC)
- Friends United Meeting (FUM)
- Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)
- Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)
- American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)

Organization QR Codes

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Quaker History

This brief history of Quakers overlooks many complexities. We recognize ways that Quakers have participated in settler colonialism and slaveholding, even as many of us celebrate examples of Quakers leading the movement to abolish slavery and foster peaceful relations with Indigenous people.

- **Early Quakers in England**

George Fox began preaching in the 1600's in the aftermath of the English civil war. Quakerism was one of several radical religious movements that arose in that chaotic time, rejecting the authority of both the Church of England and the Puritans. With no priests or bishops, no set places to congregate, and no fixed doctrine, most of these new movements disintegrated. The Religious Society of Friends of the Truth (Quakers) survived by experimenting with structures that could give form and continuity to the community while still maintaining radical beliefs about equality and the Light of God within everyone.

Quakers' beliefs have often put them at odds with the surrounding culture. Thousands of early Quakers were jailed and hundreds died in prison for refusing to swear oaths of loyalty or to attend church and pay tithes, and many Quakers today continue to be arrested for acts of civil disobedience against involvement in wars or the destruction of the environment.

- **Quakers come to America**

Quakers came to America in the 1650's, very soon after the Society of Friends began. They were not met with tolerance. Puritan authorities in Massachusetts hanged Quakers alongside accused witches. In spite of this, Quakerism took root in Massachusetts and in several other colonies. Many Friends fled to Rhode Island to escape persecution and soon they became the majority of the population there. New England Yearly Meeting, of which Northampton Friends is a part, was first organized as the Rhode Island Yearly Meeting in 1661, making it the oldest yearly meeting in the world.

In 1681, the colony of Pennsylvania was founded by the Quaker William Penn as a "holy experiment" testing how well a government could be run in keeping with the Quaker principles of religious toleration and pacifism. It succeeded for many years, though Quaker influence in the colony waned under the pressures of the French and Indian War.

Early Quakers held enslaved people and had even been prominent slave traders, but in the 1700's John Woolman and other reformers began visiting Friends around the country to urge them to free their slaves. Progress was frustratingly slow, but in 1776 the Society of Friends finally prohibited its members from buying, selling, or owning enslaved people.

In the 1800's, Quakers went through a period of "quietism," turning inward both as individuals and as a people. Plain dress, which had started as a witness for simplicity, became instead a kind of distinctive garb that helped maintain a "hedge against the world," though it was the very kind of "outward form" that the earliest Quakers had preached against. The abolitionist movement helped to bring the Society of Friends out of their isolationism as Quakers' spiritual beliefs and experience prompted them to act in the world. As they formed alliances with abolitionists in other churches, many Quaker meetings adopted a more Protestant style of worship. The Quakerism that spread westward across the United States and then worldwide to Africa and the Middle East had a very evangelical flavor.

- **Quakers worldwide**

Quaker missionaries from America first arrived in Kenya in 1903. Quaker missions established schools (including girls' schools) and helped subsistence farmers to develop trades and businesses so they could pay the onerous cash taxes demanded by the British colonial authorities. This focus on economic development and education rather than evangelism led to the dramatic success of the Quaker missions in Africa, and today about 45% of the roughly 400,000 Quakers worldwide live in Kenya.

- **Branches of Quakerism**

Some branches of Quakerism today (including the one that includes Northampton Friends Meeting) continue the early Friends' practice of silent waiting worship, where spoken ministry may be given by anyone as they are led by Spirit. Others have "programmed worship" with paid clergy, sermons, and hymn singing. Experimentation and change led to schisms, but in the 20th century many of the divergent branches of Quakers began to come together again. While you will still see tensions between Christ-centered, universalist, and nontheist Quakers, differences in theology and liturgy are less important today than our shared peace testimony and the work of organizations like the American Friends Service Committee and Friends Committee on National Legislation. Friends worshiping together may use different names for Spirit and different language to describe our shared experience, but that doesn't stop us being gathered together in the Light.

- **Resources for Learning More**

For more information about Quaker history, there are some very good books available. Here are just a few:

- *Friends for 300 Years* by Howard Brinton does a good job of conveying not just events but also the spiritual heart of the Society of Friends.
- *The Journal of George Fox* and *The Journal of John Woolman* both let us see into the lives of some of the most important early Quakers.
- *The Quakers in America* by Thomas Hamm gives lively vignettes of the many flavors of Quakerism, showing both our diversity in the wake of schisms and also the fundamental unity within the Society of Friends.
- *QuakerSpeak* is a video project of Friends Publishing Corporation, the publisher of *Friends Journal* magazine, as well as a [YouTube channel](#), with over 2 million views. Go to YouTube.com and search for quakerspeak.
- *Faith and Practice of New England Yearly Meeting* includes a wealth of information and is well worth reading.

Quaker Organizations

In Quakerism, you will hear about monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings. This refers to the frequency of their business sessions. A monthly meeting will have worship every first day (i.e., every Sunday) but will meet once a month outside of worship time for discernment about the practical matters of running the meeting.

- **New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM)** <https://neym.org> [see below for QR code]

NEYM is an association of more than 60 monthly meetings throughout New England, including Northampton Friends Meeting. Their annual sessions are held usually in the first week of August. The event brings several hundred Friends together for worship, workshops and interest groups, and meetings for business. The full range of Quaker diversity is present, keeping Friends with different backgrounds, outlooks, and beliefs in touch with one another. Business meetings can be contentious, but the goal is always to conduct business in a spirit of worship, listening to that of God in one another.

- **Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting (CVQM)** <https://neym.org/quarterly-meetings/connecticut-valley-quarter> [see below for QR code]

The quarters are regional associations that meet several times a year. Connecticut Valley Quarterly oversees seven monthly meetings in Connecticut and Massachusetts including

Northampton, Mt. Toby (Leverett), and South Berkshire in Massachusetts and Hartford,, New Haven, New London, and Storrs in Connecticut.

Besides being a place for fellowship between nearby meetings, the quarter is a place where items of business originating at the monthly meeting level can be seasoned before being brought to NEYM sessions.

- **Friends General Conference (FGC)** <https://www.fgcquaker.org> [see below for QR code]

FGC is an umbrella organization to which 15 yearly and 12 monthly meetings in the United States and Canada belong. FGC-affiliated meetings are typically in the unprogrammed tradition, worshiping without a designated pastor or a prepared liturgy, sitting in silence unless moved by the Spirit of God to stand and offer vocal ministry.

FGC's programs include traveling ministries, religious outreach, interfaith relations, book publishing and sales, religious education, and an annual conference that attracts 1,200 to 1,500 attenders from around the world, but mostly from the United States and Canada. The event features 40–60 workshops and a slate of plenary speakers. The gathering hosts both Quaker and non-Quaker speakers focusing on messages of interest to Friends. Topics covered include Quaker faith and practice, arts and crafts, multigenerational programming, and opportunities for political dialogue and action.

- **Friends United Meeting (FUM)** <https://www.friendsunitedmeeting.org> [see below for QR code]

FUM is another umbrella organization, this one comprising 37 yearly meetings in North America, Central and South America, Africa, the middle east, and the Caribbean. FUM's headquarters are in Richmond, Indiana and has offices in Kisumu, Kenya. Friends United Meeting is responsible for much of the growth of Quakerism in Africa and Latin America.

While FUM is more Christ-centered than FGC, it contains a wide range of Christian Quaker theological outlooks from very progressive and inclusive to very conservative. This has historically led to some friction within the larger organization. FUM also serves a wide range of Quaker worship styles in their Meetings for worship from unprogrammed to semi-programmed (pastor-led and including elements of a traditional church service in addition to a period of open worship) to completely programmed.

Friends United Meeting considers itself to be non-creedal which allows it to embrace a wide range of Christian Quaker theological viewpoints.

- **Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)** <https://fwcc.world> [see below for QR code].

FWCC is a Quaker organization that works to communicate between all parts of Quakerism, sponsoring events, gatherings, and publications. It has General Consultative NGO status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, and it shares responsibility for the Quaker UN Office in Geneva and New York City with the American Friends Service Committee and Britain Yearly Meeting. FWCC's world headquarters are in London.

- **Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)** <https://www.fcnl.org> [see below for QR code]

FCNL is a national, nonpartisan Quaker organization that lobbies Congress and the White House to advance peace, justice, and environmental stewardship. Combining a pragmatic strategy with a grounding in faith and morality, they cultivate relationships with elected officials and community leaders, relying on expert lobbyists and grass roots efforts around the country.

- **American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)** <https://www.afsc.org> [see below for QR code]

AFSC is a Quaker organization working hands-on with people around the world from all faiths and backgrounds to meet community needs, fight injustice, and build peace.

QR Codes for organizations:

New England Yearly Meeting



Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting



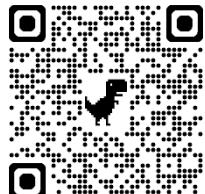
Friends General Conference:



Friends United Meeting:



Friends World Committee for Consultation:



Friends Committee on National Legislation:



American Friends Service Committee:



7. APPENDICES

Minute on Sexual Orientation

Possible Text for Introducing a Memorial Service

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Appendix A: Minute on Sexual Orientation

Northampton Friends Meeting wishes to affirm that we extend to all members of our community, whatever their sexual orientation, the same quality of love and support. We are one community of faith; we experience the varieties of love in our community as gifts of God and that we all have the same potential to reflect the Divine Light in our lives.

Our faith underlies these affirmations:

First, concerning the spiritual basis of our beliefs, as a group our hearts resonate deeply with the biblical injunctions to “love your neighbor as yourself.” We experience all forms of loving relationships as manifestations of God's love on earth.

Second, we believe that Friends' testimony on equality is central to our Quaker faith. Just as Friends have historically witnessed for equality among all races and both sexes, so do we now witness for equality among people of all sexual orientations. We understand equality not as sameness but as equality of respect.

Third, we affirm that our sexuality and sexual identity are integral components of who we are, not separate from who we are as spiritual beings. For lesbian, gay and bisexual members of the community, this allows for a wholeness of being, a feeling of personal unity within the context of the community. We bring our whole selves to our relationship with the Divine and find that sexuality within a loving relationship, whether homosexual or heterosexual, has the potential to bring us closer to God.

We as a Meeting feel that we have been blessed by the presence and participation of lesbians, gays and bisexuals as individuals and, for some, as partners in same sex couples. We are committed to providing spiritual care and acceptance to all these individuals, believing that the spiritual growth of each person best ripens in the context of a community of faith and with the support and loving regard of that community. Furthermore, we are committed to seeking out ways to actively provide that love and support, being mindful of the oppression lesbians, gays and bisexuals face in our society.

Appendix B: Possible text for introducing a Memorial Service

A Memorial Service in the Manner of Friends

Welcome family and Friends of _____ to Northampton Friends Meeting. A Friends memorial service is a special meeting for worship in the traditional manner of Friends. It is a meeting of thanksgiving for the life of the one we have known and loved and by whose presence we have felt blessed. As Quakers we gather for worship in listening and expectation: it is our understanding that in the silence all people can experience God directly. The ministry that occurs comes from those in attendance, as they listen inwardly to God. Anyone present may speak, or remain silent, as the Spirit directs. Tears and laughter are both appropriate. It is not in silence nor in words, but in sincerity of heart that we testify best to the goodness of God as we have seen it manifest in the life of our friend. We seek, in prayer and worship, to give thanks to God, the creator of our friend, and of us all.

If you wish to speak, please stand if you are able (and wait for the microphone) so that all can hear you clearly. We encourage you to leave a few moments of silent reflection of the previous message before you stand to speak. The responsibility for the spiritual depth of the meeting rests with each attender. Those who keep silence, as well as those who give a vocal message, do their part when they yield their minds and hearts to the Guidance of the Spirit.

The close of the service will be signaled with a handshake and greetings passed among those present.