

## Does your meeting yearn to engage newcomers better?

Many sources have reported about people who visit Quaker meetings but do not stay. Although some of these people may find that they are not drawn to the Quaker path, there are many stories of newcomers being ignored, neglected and even offended during their initial visits to a Quaker meeting. Seekers and Friends of Color, along with newcomers from other groups not well represented in our meetings, face unique challenges as newcomers. This may be in the form of microaggressions or other obstacles to entry. Families with children also have unique needs that often make it hard to fully participate in the life of our meetings. How can our meetings better engage all who are seeking the Quaker way?

We believe meetings need people who:

- understand the needs of newcomers
- are focused on welcome
- are knowledgeable about Quaker faith and practice and able to share in a way that is accessible to newcomers
- are comfortable with and embracing of diversity in all its forms
- are willing and able to accompany the newcomer, helping them to find connection in the meeting community and
- support the entry of newcomers and help them to understand why and whether or not they should stay

Experience among Friends and in other faith communities suggests that being drawn into the life of the community promotes spiritual growth and increases the likelihood that newcomers will remain active within their faith.

## We are looking for Friends Meetings to help us practice and improve our welcoming.

To help our Meetings draw newcomers more fully into the life of the Meeting, FGC has initiated The Welcoming Friend Project. This fall, we will create a collection of resources, geared toward helping Friends in monthly and yearly meetings adopt welcoming practices. We are inviting meetings to create a community of practice of meetings that will test out these practices in the winter, introducing newcomers to the depth of the Quaker way while bringing them into the life of the meeting. In the spring and summer we'll glean the learnings from these meetings, and share out our findings through workshops and eRetreats. In fall 2019, after the initial project phases are over, a volunteer leadership team will continue the work by maintaining and updating the resource collection and offering online trainings and Gathering workshops on an on-going basis.

One key focus of the Welcoming Friend project is to improve the welcome and engagement of newcomers to Quakerism and particularly of Friends and Seekers of Color. We recognize a need to increase awareness of and sensitivity to how U.S. and Canadian Friends of European descent

currently respond to Friends and Seekers of Color and therefore the project will specifically emphasize awareness of micro-aggressions and other barriers to entry, the unique needs of newcomers from a variety of backgrounds, and behaviors and practices that invite the full participation and membership of Friends and Seekers of Color.

## **Would your meeting like to participate?**

We are looking for 20-25 Friends from about a dozen meetings representing a broad range of Quaker experience in FGC meetings-- urban, rural and in between; from a variety of regions of the U.S. and Canada; small, large and medium-sized.

### **To participate, your meeting should expect to:**

- Have strong support from your meeting. (Usually this will look like a minute of support from your Meeting for Worship for Business.)
- Two Friends who will participate as Welcoming Friends
- Track newcomer attendance and participation before and during the learning period
- Support the Welcoming Friends as they recommend new ideas and practices to try on during the experiment
  - Such ideas and practices might include:
    - Learning about needs of newcomers as a meeting
    - Learning about microaggressions and other ways that Friends might
    - Organizing programs or opportunities of interest to newcomers and/or regular attenders such as potlucks, Quakerism 101, worship sharing, or other discussion times.
- There is no fee to participate, although your meeting may be led to actions that may have costs associated: hiring child care to encourage family participation, buying books or videos for small group discussions, etc.

### **The Welcoming Friends should expect to:**

- Attend a video conference orientation in early November
- Participate in monthly video calls
- Take the lead in introducing new practices in your local meeting
- Report back quantitative and anecdotal results to the Welcoming Friend practice group
- Some Welcoming Friends will continue to support the project as Working Group members beginning in summer 2019

## **Questions? Ideas?**

We'd love to hear from you! Contact:

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# Welcoming Friend Working Group

## *Charge*

### **Background**

Many sources have reported about people who visit Quaker meetings but do not stay. Although some of these people may find that they are not drawn to the Quaker path, there are many stories of newcomers being ignored, neglected and even offended during their initial visits to a Quaker meeting.

We believe meetings need people who:

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- are knowledgeable about Quaker faith and practice and able to share in a way that is accessible to newcomers
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- are willing and able to accompany the newcomer, helping them to find connection in the meeting community and
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Experience among Friends and in other faith communities suggests that being drawn into the life of the community promotes spiritual growth and increases the likelihood that newcomers will remain active within their faith.

To help our Meetings draw newcomers more fully into the life of the Meeting, FGC has initiated The Welcoming Friend Project. This Project tests and evaluates tools for welcoming newcomers with the goal of sharing effective practices that will help introduce newcomers to the depth of the Quaker way while bringing them into the life of the meeting. To achieve this, the Welcoming Friend project will create a collection of resources, an online training, and a workshop at the Gathering all geared toward helping Friends in monthly and yearly meetings adopt welcoming practices. An additional goal of the project is to also create a community of practice and a volunteer leadership team that will continue the work after the initial project phases are over by maintaining and updating the resource collection and offering online trainings and Gathering workshops on an on-going basis.

One key focus of the Welcoming Friend project is to improve the welcome and engagement of newcomers to Quakerism and particularly of Friends and Seekers of Color. We recognize a need to increase awareness of and sensitivity to how U.S. and

Canadian Friends of European descent currently respond to Friends and Seekers of Color and therefore the project will specifically emphasize awareness of micro-aggressions and other barriers to entry, the unique needs of newcomers from a variety of backgrounds, and behaviors and practices that invite the full participation and membership of Friends and Seekers of Color.

### **Charge**

The Welcoming Friend Working Group (WFWG) is responsible for supporting, guiding and advising the program assistant in the collection and development of tools, practices and strategies for welcoming. The WFWG will also suggest names of meetings and individuals to be trained to test, refine, and share methods of welcoming visitors and newcomers. Finally, the working group members will contribute to the development of a plan for carrying forward this work after the initial project phase.

### **Timeframe**

We anticipate that WFWG members will participate in one meeting a month by zoom, and will spend one to five hours a month working on different aspects of the project. The working group will convene in late August-early September 2018. The first Welcoming Friend Project period will take place in the winter-spring 2019. The findings will be shared out in the spring-summer 2019. During summer 2019 the WFWG will plan for the continuation of the project after year one, at which point some WFWG members may step down, and new members may join.

### **Composition** (7-10 persons)

- Committee should be diverse racially, geographically and in terms of age and gender.
- One member from the Committee for Nurturing Ministries
- One member of meeting in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
- 5-6 members from yearly and monthly meetings in various locations in the US & Canada
- Members with significant study and/or experience of welcoming
- Members with experience in diversity work, especially racial diversity
- Members should be big picture thinkers, able to consider the broad range of needs within FGC meeting communities
- Some members should have experience facilitating workshops