

INTRODUCTION TO ALBANY FRIENDS MEETING



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Introduction to Albany Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

The basic unit in the Religious Society of Friends is the **Monthly Meeting**, so named because it is governed by “a meeting for worship with a concern for business” once a month. When one becomes a member of Albany Monthly Meeting, one also joins the Northeastern Regional Meeting, the New York Yearly Meeting, and two associations of yearly meetings: **Friends General Conference, and Friends United Meeting**. There is another such association, called **Evangelical Friends International**, to which New York Yearly Meeting does not belong.

Albany Meeting has no paid staff. Instead, the work of the Meeting is shared by members and attenders.

The Clerk is responsible for maintaining an overview of the life of the Meeting, and watching for problems and opportunities. She or he clerks (or presides at) the business meeting, and keeps track of the schedule of tasks for the business meeting to take care of during the year.

Signing correspondence, minutes and official papers and representing the Meeting at public gatherings are the formal duties of the Clerk. In addition, the Clerk is available to consult with clerks of the Meeting committees as needed, as well as to link the Meeting with Regional Meeting, Yearly Meeting and other Quaker and community groups.

The **Assistant Clerk** writes, organizes and keeps the minutes of the business meetings. Other responsibilities may be assigned by the Clerk.

The Clerk and Assistant Clerk must be members of the Meeting, and each is appointed for a two-year term, with no consecutive term.

The **Recorder** keeps records of vital statistics of the Meeting: births, deaths, marriages, and membership, and forwards the information to the Yearly Meeting office. The term is one year with no limit on re-appointment.

The **Treasurer** is named from and by the Trustees. She or he receives and records all contributions, prepares payment for bills, conducts the banking business of the Meeting, and presents regular reports of receipts and expenditures. The term of the Treasurer is co-terminous with service on Trustees; therefore limited to 6 years at a time.

Committees

Ministry and Counsel is responsible for the spiritual care of the Meeting. This committee plans for religious education for adults, and provides scholarships to Yearly Meeting and other Quaker events. First Day School and the Library Committee are under the care of Ministry and Counsel. The committee prepares annually a State of Society Report, which is forwarded to Yearly Meeting on Ministry and Counsel. Only members of the Meeting may serve on Ministry and Counsel, though a sojourning member could serve. Six is

the preferred size of this committee. The term is for three years, which may be renewed for a second three-year term, for a maximum service of six years.

Nurture and Oversight attends to the health and well-being of members and attenders of the Meeting. This committee oversees marriages, memorial services, and requests for membership, as well as nurturing the communal life of the Meeting. Committee meetings are not open to non-members of the committee (unless they arrange to bring a concern) because confidentiality is important on this committee.

Only members of the Meeting may serve on Nurture and Oversight, and six is the preferred size of this committee. The term is for three years, which may be renewed for a second three-year term, for a maximum service of six years.

Trustees are responsible for managing the Meeting finances and coordinating repairs and improvements to the Meetinghouse. They solicit funds to support the work of the Meeting, arrange for use of the Meetinghouse by outside groups, and appoint **caretaker(s)** who live on the third floor and provide basic care of the property, and manage the calendar. Six members of the Meeting serve as Trustees for three year terms, which may be renewed for a second three-year term, for a maximum service of 6 years.

The **Memorial Fund Committee** administers investment and disbursement of the Memorial Fund. The Fund was established from the estates of John Cooke, who died in 1998 and Bob Doran, who died in 2004 and the fund is available for other memorial bequests. At least one member of

this committee must be a Trustee. The committee appoints a Fund treasurer to maintain records of this Fund, which are reported annually to the Meeting. The term is for two years, and may be renewed for a second two-year term, for a maximum service of four years.

The **Fund for Suffering** provides assistance to people who are experiencing financial hardship on account of having taken a conscientious stand consistent with Quaker testimonies. Members may suggest possible recipients, but the decisions of the committee are confidential. Two to three members of the Meeting generally serve on this committee. The term is for one year, with no limit on re-appointment.

Peace & Service Committee implements concerns for peace and justice locally and globally. Peace and Service provides connections to the efforts of other groups and organizes Meeting activities around some issues. Both members and attenders serve on this committee, and there are no term limits.

First Day School Committee is responsible for planning and implementing an educational program for the Meeting's children and youth. This committee plans the curriculum and involves other adults as appropriate to work with the children. The committee also administers scholarships for youth to attend Powell House conferences. Both members and attenders serve on this committee, and there are no term limits.

The **Hospitality Committee** coordinates Rise of Meeting refreshments and potlucks, as well as food for special

occasions. Both members and attenders serve on this committee, and there are no term limits.

The **Library Committee** maintains order in the book and pamphlet collection, and arranges for the acquisition of new books, including those donated by the H.H. Mosher Fund of New York Yearly Meeting. Both members and attenders may serve on this committee, and there are no term limits.

The **Newsletter Committee** publishes a monthly newsletter which includes a calendar, minutes of the monthly meeting, news of members and committees and other relevant information. The newsletter can be done by one person or several. The term is for one year with no limit on re-appointment.

The **Nominating Committee** prepares annually a slate of officers and committees for first reading in May, and approval at the June meeting for business. The Committee consults with members and attenders to discern their interests and gifts and seeks opportunities to deepen their involvement in the life of the Meeting. The committee fills vacancies during the year as needed. The three members are appointed by the Clerk of the Meeting, one each year in the fall. The term is three years, and the third year member serves as clerk.

A **Music Ministry group** was established in 1998 to enhance worship through music. Members of this group lead the monthly hymn-singing, and provide music by request for other events.

The **Earthcare Witness Committee** is concerned with our stewardship of the environment and sustainability of the world's resources, as individuals, as a Meeting, and in the local and world communities. Both members and attenders serve on this committee, and there are no term limits.

The Advancement and Outreach Committee identifies and implements projects and activities that nurture and further the growth of the Meeting and develop public awareness of the Society of Friends and Albany Friends Meeting. Both members and attenders may serve on this committee, and there are no term limits.

The **Racism Concerns Committee** works to help Albany Friends Meeting and New York Yearly Meeting overcome racism and involves Friends in supporting community efforts against racism. The committee includes members, attenders, and persons from the wider community, and there are no term limits.

The **Children's Peace Week Committee** oversees the implementation of Children's Peace Week, held annually in the summer at the Meetinghouse. The committee hires the Peace Week Director and the interns who work with the children, and coordinates the volunteers who help with the activities of Peace Week. The committee includes members and attenders, and there are no term limits.

Representatives are appointed to the following groups, usually for one-year terms:
Capital Area Council of Churches

Church Women United
Uptown Churches
NY Yearly Meeting Sessions
NYYM Committee on Discernment
NY Yearly Meeting Sharing Fund
Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)
American Friends Service Committee (AFSC),
Upstate NY

A liaison may be appointed, with one-year term, to the Quaker Earthcare Witness Committee

Albany Monthly Meeting is one of nine Meetings in **the Northeastern Regional Meeting (NERM)**, which is, in turn, one of nine components of the **New York Yearly Meeting**. Yearly Meeting gathers at Silver Bay on Lake George for Summer Sessions, usually the last week in July, and holds two interim sessions, **called Fall Sessions and Spring Sessions**, at various locations within New York Yearly Meeting. Anyone may attend these sessions where decisions are made about the ministry, administration, and witness of Friends in New York State and the metropolitan parts of Connecticut and New Jersey.

Yearly Meeting staff publish five issues of the Yearly Meeting newsletter, **SPARK**, and prepare a Yearbook with minutes of meetings and lists of committee appointments.

Meeting for Worship is held every Sunday (or First Day) at 11 am in the Meetinghouse. From mid-September

through mid-June there is a First Day School class for school-age children, and paid child care for younger children during worship. Children join the adults the first 15 minutes of worship. During worship we sit in silence--praying, meditating, listening for inspiration (and for a sense of whether a message is meant just for one's self or for the whole group). Sometimes several messages are spoken, sometimes none. At the end of the hour a member of Ministry & Counsel "breaks meeting" and everyone shakes hands. People are invited to share joys and concerns, a report from First Day School is heard, and announcements are made. Visitors are invited to introduce themselves and to sign the Guest Book. Conversation over juice and crackers provides an opportunity to socialize. Sometimes a group goes out for lunch together. On the third Sunday of every month we have a pot-luck luncheon, to which everyone is invited, whether or not they brought food.

Our **Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business** is held on the second Sunday of the month after worship (with the exception of August). Committees bring their concerns and proposals for consideration by the group. Decisions are made by seeking a "sense of the meeting." No votes are taken. If there is not general agreement on a particular issue, the matter is held over until there is a resolution that is acceptable to the entire group. In certain circumstances, a member who strongly disagrees with a decision of the meeting may ask to "stand aside" because they recognize the "sense of the meeting" and do not wish to oppose it, or, ask to be recorded by name in the minutes as opposing the decision.

The Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, as we are commonly known, began in England about 1650, and was widespread in the eastern colonies of the North American continent in the early days of settlement. Many changes over the years have resulted in a variety of Quaker Meetings in this country and around the world.

Albany Friends Meeting invites and welcomes all seekers of the Light to participate in the life of our Meeting. We are blessed that Meeting members and attenders come from many religious traditions. We honor both Christian and Universalist Friends. We value both liberal and orthodox religious practitioners. We treasure both reasoned and intuitive religious insight. We respect both intellectual and mystical approaches to truth.

Minute approved 2/14/93

"Our faith unites the historic beliefs of its Christian foundation with the corporate and individual search for the experience of God for today. This faith draws us into a com-

munity that emphasizes the integration of worship and work, faith and practice, in which we strengthen and challenge each other. Through this fellowship God's love and power can work towards the healing of the world."

Some of the distinctive qualities of our Friends Meeting are:

- emphasis on the individual and corporate connection to the Spirit
- unprogrammed worship
- communal decisions by seeking a sense of the meeting rather than voting
- volunteer service to the Meeting by members and attenders rather than a paid pastor
- commitment to the testimonies of honesty, simplicity, equality, justice, and peacemaking

rev. 12/09