

Quaker Jargon Buster

Adapted and expanded from various sources for the use of Fairfield Friends Meeting, Camby, IN, USA

This guide is intended to help people who are new to Friends to navigate the minefield of Quaker language. Friends have a great sense of history. They continue to use words and phrases that are antiquated (the meaning has passed out of common usage, like *Book of Discipline*), obscure (special meanings for *visitor* and *notion*), and just plain quaint (like *right ordering*). Special thanks to Ealing Meeting in Britain for the inspiration, the title, and the most colorful definitions.

Please remember that Friends are human. These definitions represent the way things are supposed to work within the Society. As usual, life on the ground can get a bit muddier.

ACFIA (Associated Committee of Friends on Indian Affairs) – founded in 1869 by Friends with a *concern* for Native Americans who had been removed from their ancestral lands and driven west. No longer functioning.

Advices and queries – a set of suggestions to help Friends reflect on their spiritual lives and ethical responsibilities. It forms part of *Faith and Practice* for each *yearly meeting*, but additional sets of queries have been written separately for specific occasions (such as a conference on age discrimination) or to address a specific concern (such as care of the environment).

Affirm – a legal declaration made by Friends or others who conscientiously decline to take an oath. “I affirm such and such is so” rather than, “I swear ...” Swearing an oath implies having a double standard in regard to speaking the truth.

AFSC (American Friends Service Committee) – founded in 1917 as “a practical expression of the faith of the Religious Society of Friends” to provide an opportunity for service instead of fighting. Its world-wide programs now aid war refugees, promote peace, and work to remove injustice and inequality. It was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 jointly with the British Friends Service Council.

Approve – agree to unite in a decision during *meeting for business*. Disapproval is usually not asked for, but a Friend who does not wish to approve may *stand aside* from the decision.

Area Meeting – a periodic gathering of several Friends’ *meetings* for business and fellowship in a specific geographical area. Historically, it was held four times a year, and was known as quarterly *meeting*.

Attender – a person who worships regularly with *Friends* but has not formally joined the *Religious Society of Friends*.

Birthright – until the late 1940s, a person who was born to a Quaker family automatically became a member of the Society by right of birth, hence birthright! Nowadays an application must be made to become a member of the Society. Since then, the term has come to be used more loosely to describe any Friend born of Quaker parents. Compare with *convincement*.

Book of Discipline – alternate term for *Faith and Practice*. “Discipline” is used in the sense of “discipleship.”

Called Meeting – a *meeting for business* to consider an urgent and specific item that arises between regularly scheduled *meetings*.

Centering/centering down – focusing to remove distractions; preparing heart and mind to commune with the Spirit upon entering worship.

Christocentric – a Quaker whose inspiration is essentially Christian and who holds that the Religious Society of Friends is essentially a Christian denomination. Compare with *universalist*.

Clerk (Presiding Clerk) – a person *approved* by a *meeting for business* or committee to take a *meeting* through its business and write the minutes while providing spiritual leadership in the decision making. (The minutes may also be written by a second person called the *recording clerk*.) Among *unprogrammed* Friends, the clerk is also the *meeting’s* representative to the community. See also *convener*.

Clearness committee – a small, temporary committee appointed at the request of a Friend wanting to clarify thinking about a decision or *concern*. The committee’s function is to ask questions that help the person consider all aspects of the question; it does not give advice. It is often used by those contemplating marriage. Sometimes used incorrectly for a group whose purpose is *eldering* rather than clearness.

CM & E (Christian Ministries & Evangelism) – Also called “Ministry & Counsel” or “Ministry & Oversight” in many *meetings*, this committee is responsible for the spiritual health of the *meeting*.

Concern – an idea or prompting of the Spirit which leads a Friend to take on an issue as a personal responsibility. The Friend will probably bring their concern to their *meeting for business* to be *tested*, that is to see if it is a true concern or simply a *notion*. Concerns are task-related, not life-long, and when the task is completed the concern is *laid down*.

Conservative Friends – a group of three *yearly meetings* in the US which use the *unprogrammed* form of worship and hold a *Christocentric* theology. They practice the traditional *testimonies*.

Convener – usually applied to a person who is appointed in advance to be responsible for a one-time *meeting for business* for a specific task. It may also designate the person who sets up an initial meeting of a longer-term committee. Compare with *clerk*.

Convincement – a discovery of truth by the working of the Spirit, as in “Quaker by convincement,” one who has become convinced of the truth of the Quaker way. It is used to describe anyone who joins the Religious Society of Friends by request. Compare with *birthright*. A person may thus be both a *birthright* and a convinced Friend.

Daffodil ministry – Every spring, a Friend notices how lovely the daffodils look as they come to *meeting for worship*, and they minister about how lovely the world is. Generally, a pejorative term to describe uncritical and predictable *ministry*.

Date forms – Because early *Friends* had *convincements* against naming pagan gods and aggrandizing particular individuals, they avoided use of traditional names of months and days of the week, substituting First Month for January and First Day for Sunday, etc. These forms may still be used in *meetings for business*. (see *plain speech*)

Discernment – an attempt at understanding of God’s will; the process of arriving at the right course of action through spiritual perception and clear rational thought.

ESR (Earlham School of Religion) – ESR was founded in 1960 as the first graduate theological school in the Quaker tradition of commitment to universal ministry. It is located on the campus of Earlham College, also a Friends’ institution, in Richmond, IN.

EFI (Evangelical Friends International) – a form of Christianity focused on scriptural authority with mainly *programmed* worship. One of the three main types of Friends in the US.

Elder – 1) (noun) a *meeting* member charged with responsibility for *right ordering* of the spiritual life of that *meeting*; a *weighty Friend*. 2) (verb) originally, the process of gentle redirection of a person by an elder back onto the path of *right ordering*; now, a pejorative term for the less-than-loving attempt to turn a “wayward” member back into conformity. (Like many other Quaker terms, distinctions in usage and intention can be quite subtle and hard to discern.)

Epistle – a public letter of greeting and ministry. Quaker gatherings often send a report of their deliberations to other Quakers. The best known example is the *yearly meeting* epistle. They often start “To Friends everywhere...”

Facing bench – one or more rows of benches located so that they face the majority of a congregation of Friends. Traditionally, those most likely to speak during worship (see *recording of ministers*) sat there so that the rest could hear the spoken ministry clearly.

Faith and Practice – a book which seeks to express in words the workings of the Spirit experienced by Quakers. It is both an anthology of Quaker thought and guidance on the *right ordering* of Quaker affairs. Distinctive to each *yearly meeting*, it is usually revised every generation to reflect the continuing revelation and understanding of the Spirit. It may also be called *Book of Discipline*.

Friend – a member of the *Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)*. We take our name from *John 15:14-15: Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.* For the first few years, the group had no fixed name but was often called “The Children of Light,” “Publishers of the Truth,” or “Friends in the Truth.” Quakers often refer to themselves collectively as Friends and will address an individual as “Friend” if they don’t know the person’s name; it is also used as a title demonstrating equality within the group, as in “Friend Johnson was our most recent *visitor* from *FWCC*.”

FCNL (Friends Committee on National Legislation) – a public interest lobby founded in 1943 to bring the concerns, experiences, and testimonies of Friends to bear on policy decisions in the nation’s capital.

FDS (Friends Disaster Service) – a *service* organization formed in 1974 to provide physical, emotional, and spiritual support to victims of natural and man-made disasters through voluntary cleanup and rebuilding projects.

FGC (Friends General Conference) – a loose association of several *yearly meetings* in the United States and Canada. These *meetings* are theologically diverse and usually *unprogrammed*. Some *meetings* maintain a dual affiliation with *FUM*. One of the three main types of Friends in the US.

FTC (Friends Theological College) – a school for pastoral preparation, located in Kaimosi, Kenya. *FUM* provides support for this school, including administrative staff, through its *ministries* program.

FUM (Friends United Meeting) – an association of several *yearly meetings* in the United States, Africa, Canada, and the Caribbean. These *meetings* are mostly *Christocentric* and *programmed*. It sponsors several *ministries* efforts in Africa, Palestine, and the Caribbean. Some *meetings* maintain a dual affiliation with *FGC*. One of the three main types of Friends in the US.

FWCC (Friends World Committee for Consultation) – This group is a world-wide association that seeks to “facilitate loving understanding of diversities among Friends while we discover together, with God’s help, our common spiritual ground.” They facilitate *visitation* and programs that cross *yearly meeting* lines.

Gathered meeting – a *meeting for worship* or *business* in which those present feel deeply united in the stillness of divine presence; sometimes called a “covered *meeting*.”

Gospel order – See *right ordering*. Sometimes used incorrectly for conflict resolution based on Mt. 18:15-17.

Laid down – completed, closed. A *monthly meeting* is laid down when it no longer functions and a *concern* is laid down when the requirement of the *leading* has been completed.

Leading – a prompting thought to be received from the Spirit by movements of love and truth in our heart. It can turn into a *concern*.

Meeting – used in different contexts, and so confusing. It can be shorthand for *meeting for worship*, or it can refer to a meeting of Quakers that has gathered for business and administrative matters (*meeting for business*), for example: *monthly meeting*, *yearly meeting*. Among Friends, the word “meeting” has the same function [referring to a congregation of worshipers] as “church” in most other denominations; the more evangelical the Friend, the more likely to use “church.”

Meeting for Business – (also *meeting for worship* with a *concern* for business) See also *Monthly Meeting*. Decisions are made together through worshipful attention to the Spirit and deep listening to one another in a shared search to discern the truth. Quakers do not reach decisions by voting; the *clerk*, the servant of the *meeting*, helps the *meeting* find a common voice. For an excellent (and practical) document on Quaker business procedures, see **Quaker Business Meetings: how Friends make decisions** at <http://www.qjs.net/~daruma/business.html> which was produced by Glasgow Meeting in Scotland (using British variations of terminology, of course).

Meeting for Worship – the great mystery of Quakerism: what happens in meeting for worship? We don’t actually worship using a liturgy, agreed words, or ritual the way that other traditions do. Quakers believe that when we gather together in silence (whether in *programmed* or *unprogrammed* worship), we can engage in a direct and personal relationship with God. (But we disagree on the nature of God!)

Meetinghouse – a place where Quakers regularly gather for worship, though not the only place they may do so. When early Quakers referred to church buildings as “steeplehouses,” it wasn’t meant as a compliment. Worship usually takes place in the “meetingroom.”

Membership – what you apply for when you decide you want to join *Friends*. *Visitors* will then come around to see you! Contrast with *attenders*.

Ministry – This is our term for what a person gives when they stand up and speak during *meeting for worship*. Ministry is (or should be) inspired by the Spirit. Also used for any *service* to others, now including mundane but necessary chores or casual fellowship: e.g., dishwashing ministry, coffee ministry.

Minute – the record of a corporate decision of a *meeting for business* as written by the *clerk*, *recording clerk*, or *convener* of that *meeting*. Quaker minutes are drafted and agreed on as the meeting progresses and represent the official decision once the wording has been *approved* by the group. In especially sensitive situations, a special committee may draft a minute before consideration by the *meeting*. Also, a minute is a statement of belief that an individual or group would like to record for others to see, both now and in the future, about a certain topic or person. This is recorded in the minutes of our *meeting for business* and is held as a permanent record of our *meeting’s* convictions. It will become part of the history of this *meeting*. It can be used to stimulate thought and discussion among other *meetings* and/or to inform various decision-makers beyond our *meeting* of our deeply held beliefs.

MM – abbreviation of *monthly meeting*.

Monthly Meeting – the basic unit of organization for Friends. Usually representing a single congregation, the name stems from the *meeting for business* held once a month. “Local meeting” may sometimes be used as a synonym. All members and attenders are welcome to attend and participate in the business session. It is commonly abbreviated MM (Fairfield Monthly Meeting may often be abbreviated FMM).

Notion – 1) any approach to religious understanding not based on first-hand experience. 2) a *leading* that didn’t become a *concern*, someone else’s *concern* that isn’t important to you, or any religious and spiritual practice that you don’t feel is relevant. Quakers rarely exert judgment, but deciding when something is a notion is one time they do. A derisive term; Friends try to avoid “running into notions.”

Occur – as in: “This Friend’s name would not have occurred to me.” A Friendly (i.e., devious) way of damning a suggestion.

Open worship – style of worship characterized by quiet contemplation out of which attenders may offer *ministry*.

Opening – the divinely-inspired recognition of some truth or spiritual opportunity; Friends proceed “as way opens.”

Outreach – 1) helpful actions beyond the *monthly meeting*, such as a food bank. 2) the process of making information available to inquirers for their own decision, not to be confused with proselytizing or converting, practices foreign to Friends.

Plain speech – Originally, the Quaker refusal to use the polite form of “you” to social superiors while reserving the familiar form of “thee” for social inferiors, it is now used to refer to “telling it like it is.” This is how Quakers aspire to speak (“Let your Yea be Yea”), but too often they will couch their meaning in obscure and devious phrases; see *occur*. See also *date forms*. Also used to denote precision in word usage (see *preparative* vs. preparatory).

Popcorn meeting – There are days when everybody seems to have something to say in *meeting for worship*. There is little or no silence. People keep bursting into *ministry* like a pan full of popcorn on the stove. A pejorative term for an unsettled *meeting*.

Preparative Meeting – a small worship group under the care and supervision of a *monthly meeting*. It does not hold independent *meetings for business*, but combines its business with that of the *monthly meeting* to which it is connected. The term does not imply a group that is preparing to be a “real” *meeting* (which would be “preparatory”); rather, it is a fully-functional group that prepares, or *seasons*, business to bring before *monthly meeting*.

Programmed – describes a *meeting for worship* that usually has an order of worship and is led by a pastor; it will still have a period of *open worship* where others may *minister*. Programmed Friends are also called pastoral Friends. Two-thirds of Friends world-wide belong to programmed *meetings*. Compare *unprogrammed* and *semi-programmed*.

Quaker – originally a pejorative name for a member of the *Religious Society of Friends* who “trembled [quaked] at the word of God,” but now a title worn with pride and probably more widely known by the public than the more formal term of *Friend*.

Quaker Men – a Christian organization of Friends men which supports *service* work and local needs.

Queries – See *advices and queries*.

Recording (of ministers) – *approval* of a *minute* by a *meeting for business* of its recognition of an individual’s exceptional gift of *ministry*. This is usually applied to vocal ministry, but many other forms are recognized, such as writing, music, etc.; it is only given after the gift has been recognized for some time. Often confused with “ordination,” which Friends eschew.

Recording clerk – acts as a secretary to the *clerk* during a *meeting for business* and also serves as a reference person on points of procedure.

Released Friend – a *Friend* whose *leading* to carry out a particular course of action has met with *approval* from a *meeting*, which then promises to provide such support as would enable the *Friend* to follow that *leading*. Among *programmed* Friends, pastors are considered to be *released* for their pastoral duties.

Right ordering – done in the correct manner by following the leading of the Spirit, in keeping with Quaker tradition and practice. A body of wisdom and insights that has evolved over three hundred plus years of seeking the guidance of the Spirit, it is captured in part by *Faith and Practice*, but only in part. It has also been called *gospel order*.

Rise of meeting – the end of a *meeting for worship* or *business*.

RSWR (Right Sharing of World Resources) – a program of Friends that supports small grants to grassroots projects for economic development around the world.

Run ahead of [one’s] guide – said of Friends who tend to act on *leadings* without *seasoning* them.

Season – to avoid haste and defer action on a *leading* while awaiting further guidance by the Spirit, perhaps to sense whether it is a *concern* or a *notion*; thus, a seasoned or *weighty Friend*.

Seeker – Early Friends were a community seeking “the hidden seed of God,” and there are many seekers still.

Semi-programmed – a *meeting for worship* where a part of the allotted time follows a set order of worship, like *programmed* worship, with a designated leader, and the remainder is *open worship* in the *unprogrammed* style. Common time divisions are half-and-half or one-third *programmed* and two-thirds *unprogrammed*.

Sense of the meeting – a collective understanding of God’s will that emerges from a *meeting for business*, as expressed by the *clerk* and *approved* by the *meeting* in a *minute*. It is not necessary for every member to agree with a decision, but for Friends to discern that they are called to a particular decision as a body. (See *stand aside*)

Service – activity or *ministry* undertaken in response to a *leading*, especially to provide aid to others, as in *AFSC*; never used as an alternate term for *meeting for worship*.

Stand aside – If an individual does not agree with the *sense of the meeting*, he or she may continue to oppose the action or may “stand aside” and let the decision proceed; if the person wishes, he or she may be noted in the minutes as “opposing but standing aside.” (A person with a deep, spirit-led objection may prevent further action on a topic by “standing in the way” but this rarely happens in healthy *meetings*.)

Testimonies – 1) the cumulative lived witness of generations of Friends. Aspects of our witness on which most Friends can agree! They are often remembered by the acronym SPICE and are Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, and Equality. 2) any act that a Friend feels impelled to do to testify to the Truth and the Way; for example, some Friends are vegetarians as a testimony for environmental support.

Testing (a concern) – a process of deliberation by a *monthly meeting* to examine whether a Friend’s *concern* has validity and should be promoted and supported by the *meeting* as a body. Compare with *clearness committee*.

Threshing meeting – a *meeting* at which a variety of opinions may be forcefully expressed, but without the need to reach a decision, in order to defuse a situation before a later decision-making *meeting* takes place.

Traveling minute – a *minute* provided by a *monthly, area, or yearly meeting* and carried by a Friend traveling in order to carry out a specific task (often a *concern*). This minute will provide introduction to other Friends bodies (who often add their greetings and a report of how the *concern* was received) and will be returned to the issuing body at the end of the task.

Universalist – Friends who consider that spiritual awareness is accessible to everyone, of any religion or none, and that no one faith can have a monopoly of truth. A Quaker who believes that there is a universal truth that may be found in all faiths, as opposed to *Christocentric*.

Unprogrammed – describes a *meeting for worship* where all *ministry* and prayer is inspired by the Spirit rather than by a predetermined order of worship. The worship is ended (“meeting is broken”) when a *seasoned* Friend shakes hands with his or her neighbor and the rest of the *meeting* then does likewise. Compare with *programmed* and *semi-programmed*.

USFWI (United Society of Friends Women International) – a Christian organization of Friends women in 26 *yearly meetings* which supports mission work and local needs.

Visitor/Visitation – 1) If you apply for *membership*, a few people will be appointed by the *monthly meeting* to visit and welcome you into the *meeting* and to answer questions you may have. They will return your official membership statistics to the *monthly meeting*. 2) a Friend visiting from another official Friend’s organization. 3) somebody new to *meeting*.

Weighty Friend – one who is influential (i.e., their opinion carries weight) within the Society because of the depth of their spiritual experience, insight, and long service to the Society (while remaining consistent with the *testimony* on equality, of course). Also called a *seasoned* Friend.

Worship – See *meeting for worship*

Worship Group – a small group that meets regularly or irregularly and with or without formal status in order to worship together (usually *unprogrammed*).

Worship-sharing group – sharing personal and spiritual experience, thoughts, and feelings, in a worshipful setting, often in response to a query or theme and in a manner that acknowledges the presence of God.

Yearly meeting – the highest level of decision-making among Friends. It meets annually as a body, though there may be intervening smaller *meetings* of representatives and committees. Most *monthly meetings* are affiliated with a yearly meeting in their region and there are many yearly *meetings* throughout the world.

YM – abbreviation of *yearly meeting*. *Western Yearly Meeting* is often abbreviated WYM.

Sources

Baltimore Yearly Meeting <http://www.bym-rsf.org/quakers/pubs/FaithNPractice/glossary.shtml>

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Short Glossary of Quaker Terms and Phrases <http://quakerjane.com/spirit.friends/spirituality-glossary.html>

Swarthmore Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends: A Small Glossary of Quaker Terms
<http://swarthmore.quaker.org/Glossary.htm>

Queries

Taken from Western Yearly Meeting Faith & Practice, 2005



General Queries

1. **Spiritual Growth**—Do you strive for the constant realization of God’s presence in your life? Are you sensitive and obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit? Do you endeavor to advance your spiritual growth by the prayerful study of the Bible and other devotional literature?
2. **Meeting for Worship and Business**—Are all meetings for worship and for business duly held and are you regular and punctual in attending them? Do you come with heart and mind prepared for communion with God and fellowship with one another? Do you individually assume your rightful share in the responsibility of the work and worship of the meeting? Are your meetings for business times of spiritual concern and prayerful search for the way of truth?
3. **Christian Fellowship**—Do you love one another as becomes the followers of Christ? Are you careful of the reputation of others? When differences arise, do you make earnest effort to end them speedily?
4. **Home and Family**—Do you practice the daily reading of the Scriptures in your families, giving time for reverent meditation? Do you make your home a place of hospitality, friendliness, peace, and Christian fellowship? Do you promote the moral and spiritual life of your children through careful supervision of their education, recreation, and friendships?
5. **Youth and the Church**—Do you seek the conversion and spiritual development of your young people? Do you endeavor to instruct them in the principles and practices of Friends? Do you strive to create a community life that will promote their mental and physical well being?
6. **Standards of Life**—Do you observe simplicity and moderation in your manner of living? Do you give proper attention to the rules of health? Are you careful to avoid all places of amusement that are inconsistent with Christian character? Do you practice total abstinence from tobacco, narcotics, and alcoholic beverages?
7. **Business Responsibilities**—Do you avoid such undue expansion of your business responsibilities as to endanger your personal integrity? Are you truthful and honest in your business transactions, punctual in fulfilling your promises, and prompt in the payment of your debts?
8. **Missionary Enterprise**—Do you make diligent effort to acquaint yourselves and those under your care with the spiritual needs of the world? Do you support by prayer and systematic giving those who are laboring to extend Christ’s kingdom? Do you use your spiritual gifts in serving humanity as God grants you light to see such service?
9. **Peace**—Do you consistently practice the Christian principles of love and good will toward all men? Do you work actively for peace and for the removal of the causes of war? Do you observe the testimony of Friends against military training and service? Do you endeavor to make clear to all whom you can influence, that war is inconsistent with the spirit and teaching of Jesus?
10. **Attitudes in Race Relations**—Does your attitude toward people of other races indicate your belief in their right to equal opportunity? Do you believe in the spiritual capacity of people of all races and do you recognize their equality in the sight of God? Are you aware of your responsibility as a Christian to help in the elimination of racial discrimination and prejudice?
11. **Social Conscience**—Are you concerned that our economic system shall so function as to sustain and enrich the life of all? Are you giving positive service to society in the promotion of peaceful methods of adjustment in all cases of social and industrial conflict? Do you support efforts which promote a humane criminal justice system and oppose the death penalty? Do you as workers, employers, producers, consumers, and investors endeavor to cultivate good will and mutual understanding in your economic relationship? Do you intelligently exercise all of your constitutional privileges and thus seek to promote Christian influence locally, nationally, and internationally?

Queries for Boards on Christian Ministries and Evangelism (Committees on Ministry and Counsel)

1. **Responsibilities of Membership**—Do you as elders and ministers recognize your responsibility in setting an example of faithfulness and loyalty to the meetings for worship and business? Do you accept appointment of this group as a definite response to the “high calling of God in Christ Jesus”? Are you concerned that the needs of all are ministered to in your meetings, whether by silent worship, inspirational speaking, or reverent music?
2. **Relations with Other Members**—Are you aware of the necessity of harmonious relations with your fellow members as a basis for the most effective service to the Church? Do you as leaders in the meeting strive earnestly to win men to Christ and to strengthen the faith and loyalty of fellow Christians?
3. **Spiritual Gifts**—Do you endeavor to recognize and develop your special talents and abilities for service in the meeting

and do you pray for divine guidance in their use? Do you cultivate the spiritual gifts of the members of your meeting? Are you always ready to encourage and advise those who engage in the vocal ministry or in other Christian work?

4. **Personal Life and Conduct**—Do you provide in your schedule of activities an opportunity for daily devotions? Do you prayerfully seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of scriptural truth? Does your personal conduct reflect the true dignity of Christian character as set forth in the Scriptures? Do you always strive so to live that you will have a “conscience void of offense toward God and man”?