

QUAKER PROCESS:

How Quakers Conduct Business

A Curriculum for High School/Upper School Students

by

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2018

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this curriculum is to introduce high school/upper school age Friends to the Quaker process of conducting business. By experiencing and reflecting on this process, young Friends will explore the principles, methods, and transforming power of the Quaker way. This curriculum prepares students to become full members of their monthly meetings.

The objectives of this curriculum:

- As a group, students and their teachers will visit one, two, or three different committee meetings. At the end of each visit, the students will ask questions of the members of the committee.
- As a group, students will visit one meeting for worship with a concern for business. Following that, students will meet separately with the presiding clerk and recording clerk to ask questions.
- During their own meeting for worship with a concern for business, students will make a decision concerning a project they will carry out.
- Students will write letters about why they would or would not want to apply for membership in their monthly meeting.

Notes to the Teachers

- *Each First Day Program session should include food such as bagels, donuts, pizzas, pretzels, fruit, vegetable sticks, etc.*
- *Sessions do not need to be held on Sunday mornings. Students will visit committees whenever committees meet. Students will attend one meeting for worship with a concern for business and have pizza and a discussion following that.*
- *This curriculum involves members of your meeting as guest presenters. In advance, emphasize to guests that their oral presentations may be no more than 5- to 10- minutes long. To allow time for questions and to maintain student interest, be prepared to cut off speakers' presentations, if they continue beyond their time limit. You might say something like "At this time, we need to take questions." Be prepared to start the discussion with one or two of your own questions.*

Outline of the Sessions:

Session I: What are Quaker committees, and why are they important?

Preparation by teachers:

- *Prepare a 5- to 10-minute presentation on what Quaker committees do and why they are important. (See Appendix I for background material.)*
- *Ask a member of the Nominating Committee to visit your class and describe, in 5 to 10 minutes, the work of the Nominating Committee.*
- *Describe briefly, in one or two sentences, the work of each committee of the Monthly Meeting. (The Meeting may already have this material available.)*

During the session:

- Describe the purpose and the objectives of this curriculum found on the previous page. (5 minutes)
- Describe for students what Quaker committees are and why they are important. Refer to Appendix I. (5 to 10 minutes)
- Invite a member of the nominating committee to attend class and describe the work of the nominating committee and of each committee of the monthly meeting. There need only be one or two sentences per committee description. Then he or she answers questions (10 to 15 minutes)
- Students choose which committees of the monthly meeting they would like to visit.

Session II: Preparation for the first committee visit

Preparation by teachers:

- *Arrange days and times for students to visit their chosen committee meetings.*
- *Inform students of the scheduled visits.*
- *Arrange transportation with each family. For students not being transported by their parents, have parents sign a Release Form, to be kept as a permanent record. (See Appendix II for a sample Release Form.)*
- *Request an agenda from the committee clerk for each meeting you will attend and disseminate it to the class.*

During the session:

- Handout the schedule for committee visits and discuss transportation.
- Discuss the work of the first committee you will visit, review their agenda, and prepare specific questions for that committee.
- Discuss behavioral guidelines for visits to committees. Point out that students will have time for comments and questions at the end of each visit. Their role is to be observers during the committee meeting and ask questions afterwards.

Session IV: First committee visit

Sample observation queries:

- What elements of Quaker process do you see?
- How do these elements create a sense of the meeting?
- How do these elements call Friends to seek Truth together?
- Does anything surprise you about the committee process?
- If there are different points of view, are they acknowledged and included? If so, how?
- Were any decisions made? Were they recorded?

Session V: Discuss and evaluate the last visit and plan for the next visit

During the session:

- Evaluate the first committee visit
- Plan the next visit, review the agenda for that visit, and write specific questions concerning the work of the second committee to be visited.

Sessions VI through IX: Alternate visits to committees with evaluations, agenda reviews, and the writing of new questions for the next visit.

Session X: As a group, visit the monthly meeting for worship with a concern for business. Depending upon the length of the meeting, your class may not want to stay for the entire time, but it would be informative to stay through the first reading and corrections of the minutes, if possible. On a separate occasion, have pizza and a discussion with the clerks of the meeting.

Preparation by teachers:

- *Prior to visiting meeting for worship with a concern for business, inform the meeting's clerks that the class may only stay for part of the meeting.*
- *With the class, plan where to sit and how to exit quietly.*

Session XI: Invite the clerk and recording clerk to attend your session to describe their roles and answer questions. Serve pizza.

Session XII: With students as presiding clerk and recording clerk, conduct a meeting for worship with a concern for business.

- Students select their presiding clerk and recording clerk
- Students decide on their agenda. Sample agenda items:
 - Service projects for teens to do with monthly meeting members
 - Fund raising projects
 - Redecorating the teen room
 - Teen visit to another Quaker meeting on First Day
 - Holiday parties for the meeting
 - Other items...

Session XIII: Evaluate the students' meeting for business and their project.

Session XIV: Becoming a member of meeting

Preparation by the teachers:

- *Prepare a brief, one-page handout for your students, describing membership policies and procedures in your monthly meeting. (Your meeting may already have this information available.)*
- *Ask a member of your membership committee to attend your class, speak briefly about membership procedures, and answer questions.*

During the session:

- Give students the handout describing membership policies and procedures in your monthly meeting.
- A member of your membership committee discusses the membership process and answers questions.

Session XV: Individually and during a time of silent reflection, students write a letter describing why they would or would not want to apply for membership in their monthly meeting. When students have finished. They may voluntarily read their letters to and/or discuss them with the class. Students decide individually if they want to send their letters to the clerk of the meeting.

Session XVI: Students fill out the written evaluation in Appendix III. Ask if there are any comments about the curriculum that anyone would like to share with the group. Have a party.

Appendix I: What Quaker Committees are, How they Function, and Why they are Important

Quaker process stands on the principles of seeking Truth, looking to that of God in everyone, and waiting expectantly for the way to open. While seemingly simple, Quaker process can be challenging.

Conducting Business in Monthly and Yearly Meetings

Monthly meetings are local congregations of Friends that gather each month to conduct business. Yearly meetings are regional groups of monthly meetings, which gather annually to attend to business that is not possible or practical for local meetings to accomplish alone. Monthly and yearly meetings are a blend of worship, business, religious education, spiritual nurture, and social concerns. Meetings for worship with a concern for business attend to the administrative and practical work of the congregation.

Who makes decisions?

With no pastors or priests, all members of unprogrammed Friends meetings are collectively responsible for the work of their meetings. Decisions about the work of unprogrammed Friends are made at monthly meetings for worship with a concern for business. The work of the ministry is done between business meetings by committees and by committee members. Those committees then report back to the monthly meeting for business.

In Quaker meetings, there is no laity. Every member is a minister. In every decision in meeting for business, Friends labor in expectation that there is a direction toward the Truth and that, if they are patient, they can find that way. In making decisions, Friends, as a group, search for God's guidance. They seek unity in their decision-making because they have found that Truth with a capital "T" is not divided. It has one Source.

What about disagreements?

In Quaker business meetings, unity does not have to mean unanimity, or agreement without dissent. Unity is often agreement *with* dissent or staying together *through* differences. It requires moving forward with God's leadings based on the values that Friends hold in common. Unity occurs when collectively the members of the meeting feel they have been truthful in their discernment of God's will. This sometimes means that, out of respect for the unity of the whole, a Friend will "stand aside" and allow a decision to go forward with which he or she is not entirely comfortable but for which he or she has no moral misgivings. On the other hand, the community

knows that it must listen carefully to heartfelt dissent, as God's leadings may come through anyone at any time, and that the more differing perspectives they consider, the more closely they may come to discerning the Truth.

Who facilitates the business meeting?

The meeting selects a presiding clerk who oversees business meeting and a recording clerk who minutes decisions that have been agreed upon by the meeting. The responsibility of the presiding clerk and recording clerk is to help identify "a sense of the meeting."

What is "sense of the meeting"?

Sense of the meeting is a spiritual process in which Friends seek God's guidance in each particular situation. Sense of the meeting is different from consensus, which is a valuable secular process. Friends feel that, by working together, they can discover God's leadings for their words and actions, and that, when the right course becomes evident, it will unite them in a common effort. Friends have found that after a direction is discerned, specific steps forward often become apparent and possible. Friends refer to this phenomenon as "way opening." Because Friends do not vote, they avoid the fractures associated with losing to a majority.

How is a sense of the meeting achieved?

Friends expect to work on issues, concerns, problems, and disagreements until unity is found. When Friends are unable to reach unity, they have several choices. Friends first look to their elders for advice. Elders are those Friends whose experience and insights give them perspective and authority in the business of the meeting. Friends may create a small group or a subcommittee to continue the discussion, discern key points, investigate alternatives, and report back to business meeting. Friends persevere. They urge dissenting individuals "to labor with us on this." If a decision seems possible, but not immanent, Friends "lay over" those decisions for consideration at a later time.

What if the meeting still isn't unified?

When there is no agreement, no obvious direction in which to proceed, Friends have the opportunity and responsibility to accept and cherish those with whom they disagree. Then Friends look for another way forward.

Doesn't this take forever?

Quaker process may sound hopelessly slow and cumbersome, but because the voice of one dissenter is honored, way opens for new ideas. John Woolman's mission to end slave ownership among Friends is such an example.

In the Eighteenth Century, John Woolman asked his meeting to endorse his concern to travel among Friends urging them to abolish Quaker slave ownership. Initially his meeting rejected his proposal. He persisted, and his meeting eventually supported him. It took most of John Woolman's adult life to accomplish, but before he died and *a hundred years* before slaves were freed by the "Proclamation of Emancipation" in the United States of America, no Quaker in the American colonies owned slaves.

Why learn about the Quaker process of decision making?

Sita Diehl (Nashville Friends Meeting) wrote: "Quaker process is a valuable contribution to society; often emulated, yet less often understood. The way Friends conduct the Meeting's business rests on the expectation of divine guidance, seeking higher Truth and recognizing each voice as a potential source."

Leonard Kenworthy, a Quaker theologian and writer, wrote: "The meeting for business is another of the unique contributions of Quakerism to the world. In fact, it may even be more unprecedented than the meeting for worship ... Nothing like it exists anywhere in Christendom or in any of the other world religions. It is uncommon, unusual, unparalleled, unique." (*Quakerism: A Study Guide on the Religious Society of Friends*, Quaker Publications, Box 726, Kennett Square, PA 19348, c1981 reprinted by Print Press, Dublin, IN 1982 and 1983, p. 81.)

In Quaker process, Friends collectively and intentionally look for God's surprises in their lives.

Appendix II: Sample Release Form from Friends Meeting of Washington

Individual Consent, Emergency Contact, Hold Harmless and Photo Release Form

Name of Activity: _____

Location: _____

FMW Event Coordinator Name: _____

FMW Event Coordinator telephone during activity: (____) _____

Dates of Activity ___/___/___ to ___/___/___ (mm/dd/yyyy)

(if this is for First Day School please put 09/01/yyyy to 08/31/yyyy and list activity as First Day School with the clerk of REC as the FMW Event Coordinator)

Child's name _____

Last

First

Middle

Date of birth ___/___/___ Age _____ Sex _____ Grade _____
mm/dd /yy

Address _____

Emergency Contact (2 must be listed)

1) Name: _____ Relationship _____

Home _____ Cell (____) _____ Work (____) _____

2) Name: _____ Relationship _____

Home _____ Cell (____) _____ Work (____) _____

I, _____ (Print First and Last Name), being the

parent/guardian /custodian of _____ (Print First and Last name) hereby give my consent for my child to participate in this activity sponsored by Friends Meeting of Washington, DC. I understand that the leader(s) of this activity will take all reasonable safety precautions, and that the possibility of an unforeseen hazard does exist. I further agree not to hold the Friends Meeting of Washington, DC its leaders, employees and volunteer staff liable for damages, losses, diseases, or injuries incurred by the child listed on this form or myself. I have recorded the telephone number for the Event Coordinator.

Signature of parent/guardian/custodian Date ___/___/___
mm/dd/yyyy

Assign Custodial Responsibility of Child

If the parent/guardian/custodian will not be present at the activity AND this activity is occurring off campus AND/OR the activity involves an overnight stay. I assign custodial responsibilities for my child, _____, to

(Print First and Last Name): _____

(This person cannot be responsible for more than four (4) children, if they have one or more of their own children).

Signature of Parent/guardian/custodian Date ____/____/____
mm/dd/yyyy

Appendix III: Observation Queries

Use the following questions to guide your observation of a committee or the meeting for worship with a concern for business.

Committee/Meeting: _____ Date: __/__/__

Your name: _____

What elements of Quaker process do you see?

How do these elements call Friends to seek a sense of the meeting?

What is interesting or surprising about the committee process?

If there are different points of view, are they acknowledged and included? If so, how?

What decisions or recommendations are made? Are they noted in the written record? If so, how?

Other comments: