

Deepening Meeting Life (previous titles of this course were Gospel Order, Quakerism 301)

Purposes of course:

- To encourage meeting members to talk to each other about important issues in the spiritual life of the meeting.
- To enrich the fabric of key components of the spiritual life of the community.
- To provide a springboard for further ongoing work on key areas of concern to the Friends Mtg.

Leadership style: The leader is a facilitator. She or he is not primarily a teacher transferring information or a change agent creating change based on a preconceived agenda. She or he is seeking to provide an opportunity for the faith community to talk to each other about key areas in the life of the community.

How time is spent:

20-25% Presentation/communication of ideas/information

20-25% Work alone or in two's or three's (can be great prep for sharing in the group as a whole)

50-60% Various forms of sharing in the community as a whole - e.g. sharing response to a question around the circle, worship/sharing in response to a brief quotation or query, open discussion

Setting the agenda: The facilitator explores with the group requesting the retreat or course (e.g. Ministry and Counsel Committee, Adult Religious Education Committee).

- Find out some of the key reasons why the requesting group is interested in having this course
- Learn the "lay of the land" in the meeting (theological language, places of brokenness, etc.)
- Discern together which of the 7 possible topics listed below will be covered in this program

Format: This can be run as either a course taught over a number of weeks or months or as a one day or weekend retreat. Each module requires a minimum of 50 minutes (as a class session or section of a retreat - preferably 75 -90 minutes).

Possible modules: Although the sessions are numbered in the handout packet, a meeting is unlikely to want to do all of these sessions. The meeting can identify the issues of most interest to its own spiritual life. The first three are often the most helpful to meetings. I would not recommend trying to cover more than 3 or 4 topics in a single day (morning and afternoon) retreat.

Talking about our faith with each other - living relationship with Spirit, language, direct/unmediated ongoing revelation
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Deepening worship - "gathered" meeting, spirit-led ministry
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Open-hearted search for unity - "corporate discernment" in meeting for business, listening for the guidance of God/Spirit together

Nurturing gifts in one another - identifying each others' spiritual gifts, naming them, nurturing them, helping each other live them out faithfully as a community ("eldership")

Beloved community - vulnerability, trust, accountability, love

Outreach - hiding our light under a bushel, what holds us back?
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Radical witness - How Friends can bring a prophetic message to great issues facing our time, such as race, immigrant solidarity and climate
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Note: This module on worship is designed for meetings with unprogrammed (or "waiting") worship. There are two different versions of the handouts with more and less detail, quotations, and readings.

Sample class or retreat session (Suggested times can be altered greatly!)

Opening prayer / waiting worship (5 mins.)

Introduction of the subject by leader (5-20 mins.) - It is best if the leader knows the material well enough to talk extemporaneously. Using a flip chart or dry erase board to outline key points can help people absorb what's being talked about.

You may want to leave some time for answering questions. (Others in group may know the answer better than the leader!)

An opening round of sharing in response to a key query: In a not too big group it can be helpful to go around the whole circle and share briefly - e.g. how worship is working for that individual. In a larger group you can share in pairs or threes.

Hearing voice of early Friends. Choose several readings from handout to be read out loud (5 mins.) One possible approach is to invite Friends to look over a handout and choose a passage to read out loud that especially speaks to them.

Response to readings. Can be done individually via reflection/journaling on queries, sharing in pairs or threes, and/or reflective worship-sharing around the circle. (5-15 mins.)

Exploring what this means for the meeting. A period of worship sharing and/or open discussion diving in more depth on the subject at hand. Try to simply ask evoking questions and then just *listen!* How might the meeting follow up on this subject later? (15-30 mins.)

Closing prayer / worship (5-10 mins.)

Creating a “a safe container” for the course or retreat: Many Friends meetings today encompass a wide range of theological beliefs and approaches to Quaker practice. It is critical that participants in this retreat or course approach these sessions with a deeply respectful attitude towards other participants. The goal of this program is to encourage participants to share openly with each other in a vulnerable and heart-felt manner. This can only happen if there is a spirit of trust and curiosity.

The facilitator should take time during the first session to discuss how important this is and to work to establish an atmosphere of trust, vulnerability, and mutual respect going into this program. Some meetings refer to this as “listening in tongues” - as a reference to the way early Christians honored as a spiritual gift the ability of some members to discern the meaning of and translate when other members of the church spoke in tongues. Ask participants to speak for themselves and urge participants to avoid framing comments in terms of disagreement or agreement with previous speakers' sharings.

There are also individual handouts on specific topics that can be distributed as an alternative to or addition to the full packet of materials. (Most of these are already included in the longer curriculum.)

You are welcome to utilize or edit these materials freely but please include some indication in packets that these materials were originally developed by Peter Blood-Patterson.