

## Worship Groups

A worship group is a gathering of people that meets regularly for worship after the manner of Friends and is led to unite with Quaker principles and practices. A worship group may organize independently, but usually comes under the care of a monthly meeting. The group may first need to contact and get information, advice, or other support from established Friends groups, including NPYM's Outreach & Visitation Committee. North Pacific Yearly Meeting has helpful information on how to form a worship group (see Bibliography); regional or quarterly meetings may also be good sources of information. The group is encouraged to ask one or two members of the Ministry & Oversight Committee of the quarterly meeting, or of a monthly meeting, to visit and help them with the discernment process.

Monthly meetings are encouraged to be alert to groups of remote individuals who are seeking to worship as Quakers and provide assistance according to the needs of the groups. If requested, a monthly meeting may establish a committee to help seekers develop a structure and practice for worship. The monthly meeting may provide helpful books and pamphlets, speakers, and the presence of Friends at the group's worship. The monthly meeting actively discerns the level of ongoing support it can provide.

When a worship group comes under its care, the monthly meeting informs the quarterly and yearly meetings and designates a committee or other form of support for it. The committee usually includes a member of the monthly meeting's Pastoral Care Committee.<sup>1</sup> The committee is available to give help and guidance to the worship group. The committee meets with the worship group as often as necessary to discern what the group's spiritual and practical needs are and how the monthly meeting can best help the group. In situations where the worship group is geographically remote, the committee and the worship group work to find creative ways of increasing connection and community – for example, by finding mutually agreed-upon

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1. "The Oversight Committee" is a traditional Quaker name for the committee that organizes memorials, handles requests for membership

meeting places, offering weekend gatherings, establishing travel funding, or seeking visitation and support from the yearly and quarterly meeting or other Quaker organizations.

A worship group may be led to change from one sponsoring monthly meeting to another. A monthly meeting may be unable to continue supporting a worship group. In consultation with the quarterly meeting, another monthly meeting may be found to assume support of the worship group.

A worship group usually names a person to serve as the convener and correspondent of the group. Monthly and regional meetings and other Friends groups or organizations address their communications to this correspondent, who is responsible for sharing these with the entire group. When the worship group chooses a new correspondent, that new person informs these other Quaker organizations.

There is no single path of development for worship groups. Worship groups may decide that meeting for worship is their only activity, and it is acceptable to continue in this fashion for an indefinite time. If there is a sponsoring monthly meeting, it does not encourage the worship group to develop committees and other meeting structures until the group is ready to do so. It may be sufficient initially to simply establish an official relationship with the Religious Society of Friends and provide an avenue for membership, which comes only through a monthly meeting. However, some worship groups are large and well-structured from the beginning and can undertake activities such as shared meals;

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or marriage under the care of the meeting, and coordinates help and comfort for Friends in need. In many meetings this function is combined with care for the community's spiritual life, hence the common name "Ministry & Oversight Committee" —the name used by NPYM and its quarterly meetings. However, "oversight" has connotations of slavery for many Friends, and they may use some other name in their meetings, such as Ministry & Counsel for a combined committee. Each Friends' group names its committees in its own way. Reflecting the concern about "oversight," this *Faith and Practice* uses "Pastoral Care Committee" for the committee in a local Friends group that has responsibility for memorials, memberships, etc.

reading, study, and discussion groups; service projects; religious education; public witness; or worship-sharing groups.

A worship group need organize only to the degree that is right for it at the current time. It is important to attend to whatever level of organization is needed to nurture the interests and concerns of its participants, including children. It also provides ways to connect with other Friends groups which can enrich the life of the worship group.

A worship group is limited in particular ways: it may not receive members, take marriages or committed relationships under its care, or otherwise act formally as an established meeting. Such actions must be carried out through the sponsoring monthly meeting. The sponsoring monthly meeting is responsible for the yearly and quarterly meeting assessments for its members participating in a worship group. (See “Yearly Meeting Finances” in Chapter 8.)

It is important that those who start a worship group be dedicated to the leadings of the Light and that the group be devoted to the growth of the Spirit among them. This goal will help the group through discouragements and setbacks, which are bound to occur. Groups suffer through periods when they are weakened by departures of participants or in other ways – when their very existence seems threatened and when it is hard to remember that a meeting’s life is grounded in the Spirit. There may be times when only one or two meet for worship at the appointed hour. It is worthwhile to persevere at these times, not only for those few in attendance but for those unable to attend, that they may be upheld in the Light and that all may come to know the comfort of an ongoing meeting. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20).

When a worship group feels it is ready to organize and conduct business in the manner of an established meeting, it may, but is not required to, ask its sponsoring monthly meeting to recognize it as a preparative meeting. Occasionally a worship group develops in its organization to the point where it is acting as a preparative meeting even though it has never asked to be so

recognized. In such a situation it may be appropriate to apply for monthly meeting status without first being recognized as a preparative meeting.

Occasionally a worship group does not change or grow over time and the group determines that it will remain a worship group. In this case it may be helpful for the worship group and the sponsoring monthly meeting to discuss their continuing relationship, taking care that neither group is overtaxed.

Occasionally a worship group loses its attenders or agrees that it is no longer a functioning group. The worship group's correspondent should notify its sponsoring meeting of the group's desire to lay itself down and work with the meeting to make sure the process unfolds in good order.

## **Preparative Meetings**

A preparative meeting is a meeting for worship and for business that is under the care of, and reports regularly to, a sponsoring monthly meeting, and that ordinarily looks forward to becoming a monthly meeting. If a worship group is ready to be recognized as a preparative meeting, it asks its sponsoring monthly meeting for this recognition. As a preparative meeting, it continues to receive care and counsel from its sponsoring monthly meeting. A preparative meeting may be led to change from one sponsoring monthly meeting to another, if the circumstances require.

After the manner of a monthly meeting, a preparative meeting has officers and committees as needed, holds a meeting for business once a month, and may receive and distribute funds on its own behalf. It regularly sends a copy of the minutes of its meeting for business to the sponsoring monthly meeting's standing committee. A preparative meeting may not receive members, take marriages or committed relationships under its care, or otherwise act formally as an established meeting; such actions are brought to and carried out through its sponsoring monthly meeting. Friends participating in a preparative meeting customarily hold their membership in the sponsoring monthly meeting, which