

## A QUAKER GLOSSARY -- With some notes on how things got that way.

When a word within a definition is itself defined elsewhere in this Glossary, it appears in **bold** the first time it is used in that definition.

**Advices and Queries** ---- Advices are recommendations, usually quotes from weighty **Friends** of past generations, about how to live according to the Friends' **testimonies**. Queries are questions designed to help one think about one's values and how to live according to the advices and testimonies.

**Clearness Committee** ---- A committee appointed to assist a person or the **Meeting** to seek clearness about a decision or **concern**.

**Clerk** ---- The person appointed to preside in **Meeting for Business** or a committee (a "chairman"). The Presiding Clerk is charged with setting up the agenda, keeping the discussion orderly and peaceful, determining the **sense of the meeting** (the decision that everyone agrees is the leading of the Spirit), and working with the Recording Clerk to develop minutes that accurately express the decisions of the **Meeting**.

**Concern** ---- When a person feels Spirit-led toward some issue or action, this may be expressed to the **Meeting** as a concern.

**Continuing revelation** ---- The belief that God (or the spiritual dimension) can speak directly to people today just as tradition says happened in earlier times. Also called "ongoing revelation"

**Convincement** ---- When people decide to become part of the **Quaker** community, they are said to have joined by convincement. (In prior centuries, children born to Quaker families were said to be "birthright" Friends, but membership in the Religious Society of **Friends** by birthright alone is not recognized today in most **yearly meetings**.)

**Corporate** ---- (As in "corporate worship" or "corporate **discernment**") Relating to or shared by all members of a group, such as a **monthly meeting**.

**Discernment** ---- The process of recognizing or finding something out, particularly (among **Friends**) with the help of our **inner light** and **corporate** seeking for the best solution for the group as a whole.

**Discipline** --- See "**Faith and Practice, Book of Discipline**".

**Eldering** ---- Encouraging diffident or timid **Friends** to share their gifts with a meeting, or discouraging and/or questioning an individual's inappropriate behavior or expression of concerns. In most **unprogrammed yearly meetings**, there are no longer formally-appointed Elders carrying these responsibilities, as had been the case previously. However, in modern usage elderying can also refer to the practice of accompanying a Friend who is traveling in the ministry, for the purpose of supporting that Friend spiritually and/or practically.

**Faith and Practice, Book of Discipline** ---- Each **Yearly Meeting** publishes a book which contains statements about what **Quakers** in that time and place believe and practice. **Advices and Queries** are usually included, along with description of the ways Quakers do business, how weddings and memorials are conducted, the requirements and arrangements for membership, and how finances are handled. Yearly Meetings usually revise these books every generation in order to keep them in accord with current practices and wisdom gained from guidance of the Spirit. These books used to be called "Discipline", but now most are titled "Faith and Practice".

**First Day, First Month**, etc. ---- Sunday, January, etc. The days of the week and months of the year were mostly named to honor pagan Nordic and Roman gods, and a couple of emperors. Our **Quaker** ancestors wanted to get away from all the old traditions that they thought empty and misleading (or even idolatrous) in both church and society. So they abandoned the usual names and just numbered the days and months. Most **Friends** today have dropped this custom, just as they have the 17th and 18th century Quaker clothing and "plain speech" (using "thee" instead of "you"), though some continue to keep the "First Day" tradition, at least part of the time, perhaps to identify their Quaker allegiance.

**Friend** --- Synonym for "**Quaker**". This word came into common usage because early Quakers called their collective body "The Religious Society of Friends of Truth".

**Friends General Conference** ---- An association of mostly **unprogrammed Yearly Meetings** in North America

**Friends United Meeting** ---- An association of mostly **programmed Yearly Meetings** in North America, Africa, and the Caribbean.

**Good order** ---- The procedures for **Friends'** business that have been found by experience to facilitate our corporate activities as we seek to discern and carry out God's will. Also called "good order of Friends".

**Inner light** ---- That part of each person which **Friends** believe is our connection to the Spirit or (for most Friends) to God. Sometimes also called "inward Christ", "the Seed", or "inward Teacher", it is believed accessible to all.

**Lay down** ---- To terminate a committee or activity when its work is completed, no longer felt necessary, or is not sustainable with the resources available.

**Leading** ---- An inner conviction that impels one to follow a certain course under a sense of divine guidance, seen by most **Friends** as a manifestation of one's **inner light**. A **Friend** may submit a leading to the **Meeting** for testing by corporate wisdom.

**Meeting** ---- What do you call a group of people who gather for a specific purpose? A meeting, of course. **Quakers** have used this common term in a variety of ways:

**Meeting for Worship** ---- A gathering in expectant silence to "listen" for divine guidance and to seek harmony with the spiritual dimension.

**Friends Meeting** ---- Common reference to the local organized unit (or congregation) of The Religious Society of **Friends (Quakers)**.

**Monthly Meeting** ---- Since the local **Friends Meeting** generally meets to transact business once a month it is also designated as a Monthly Meeting, and the business session itself is also called a Monthly Meeting.

**Meeting for Worship for Business** ---- From the **Quaker** point of view business is not dealt with in a majority rule manner, but as a unified seeking for divine guidance. In the late 20th century it was felt by many that this focus on unified seeking was being lost, and this term combining worship and business has become popular to remind **Friends** to keep them together.

**Quarterly Meeting** ---- Local **Monthly Meetings** have traditionally joined in regional groups, which met four times a year and were of course called Quarterly Meetings. Today many such groups gather less often than quarterly, but the traditional name persists.

**Yearly Meeting** ---- Most local **Meetings** are joined in a larger regional group which meets once a year. Yearly Meetings usually include **Monthly Meetings** with similar thought and practice. Yearly Meetings are the most important, and most independent, bodies within the institution of the Religious Society of **Friends** beyond the Monthly Meeting.

**Programmed** ---- In the mid-19th century many **Friends** were led by the influential English evangelist, Joseph John Gurney, to adopt preplanned worship, using music, Bible readings, and a sermon, along with some silent worship.

**Quaker** ---- Originally a derogatory term for members of The Religious Society of **Friends**, referring to the fact that some Friends quaked or trembled during **Meeting for Worship**, especially when about to deliver **vocal ministry**. It is not owned or copyrighted by The Religious Society of Friends, and Friends today have no control over it. However, they are happy now to be called Quaker, and are more widely known by this designation than by their official name.

**Queries** --- See "**Advices and Queries**".

**Seasoning** ---- The practice of letting business decisions rest a month in thought and prayer before final approval.

**Sense of the Meeting** ---- The decision arrived at by a meeting for business through seeking the will of God, or the guidance of the Spirit, regarding the issue at hand.

**Testimony** ---- **Quakers** do not have a creed and are focused on character and behavior rather than on belief. Over the years suggestions about the nature and achievement of the good life outlined by Jesus and the writers of the New Testament, many other religious leaders throughout history, and the guidance of **Friends** as they have sought contact and harmony with the spiritual dimension, have coalesced into **advices** in such areas as integrity, equality, peace, simplicity, stewardship, and others. These have been called "testimonies". They are ideals and goals, not rules, and they may change or be added to as Friends receive new spiritual guidance. Only within the past few decades have Friends come to recognize that we need a testimony on care of the environment. Earlier, it took Friends a century to recognize that slavery was wrong, What will the Spirit guide us to recognize in the coming century?

**Threshing session** ---- A gathering of **Friends**, usually from a single **monthly meeting**, to express and hear one another's thoughts and feelings on a contentious or complex issue without the intention of reaching a decision during that gathering. Sometimes a threshing session may be **clerked** and/or recorded by one or more Friends from a different Meeting in order to facilitate full participation by all from the Meeting facing the issue.

**Unprogrammed** ---- **Meeting for worship** is based on silent waiting, with **vocal ministry** only when individuals are guided by the Spirit to share a message.

**Vocal ministry** ---- When **Friends** gather in the expectant silence of **Meeting for Worship**, occasionally one of them will be Spirit-led to speak aloud of an experience, insight, or feeling arising from his or her **inner light**. Many Friends have tried to describe the process of discerning whether a thought should be shared as vocal ministry, but perhaps the most succinct test is to ask oneself whether that ministry will be an improvement on the silence.

**Weighty Friends** ---- Those who, because of the general assumption of their wisdom, have much influence in **Meeting** decisions.

**Worship-discussion** and **worship-sharing** ---- These methods of personal sharing have evolved, primarily among **unprogrammed Friends**, over the last 60 years or so. In both of them, Friends are asked to respond, within a small group, to one or more topical **queries**, based on personal experience and reflection. A short period of silence is expected following each contribution, to facilitate deeper listening. What is said within the group is

regarded as confidential, and group members are asked to speak just once before everyone else has had an opportunity to speak. The difference between the two methods is that in worship-sharing Friends speak from personal experience and do not respond to or question one another's contributions, while such dialog is permitted in worship-discussion. In addition, worship-discussion allows greater leeway for speaking of ideas and theories as well as personal experience, while sharing of intellectual theories is discouraged in worship-sharing.

--This document was originally drafted by Howard Harris (1917-2014). Subsequent edits and additions have been made by Don Goldstein with input from the Outreach & Welcoming Committee of Bellingham Friends Meeting and other Friends. Don welcomes your feedback and suggestions (dnx6309@gmail.com). Revised 4/15/17