

Responses on Questions about Membership

Disley Local Meeting – East Cheshire Area Meeting

Why do we have Membership and what is it for?

Generally, membership implies ‘commitment’, ‘responsibility’ and ‘belonging’. It has both a nurturing and challenging role in our spiritual journeys and can be a meaningful force for good in the world. Membership helps us to speak out to one another and to the wider world about what it means to be Quaker and is also about sharing our joys and our sorrows with one another.

As in Q F&P 11.01: “Membership is for those who feel at home and in the right place within the Quaker community.” ‘I feel those in worship and in service alongside those of us in formal membership are ‘members’ too, in my heart and mind for the time they are with us’.

We have a large group of active attenders at Disley meeting who are fully involved and committed both within the meeting and beyond it. Whilst membership is important to us we welcome our attenders taking on roles within and beyond the local meeting.

Is it still necessary?

Membership is still important, because of the challenge of upholding our faith in the world, because we are a charity and because of our legal obligations through the work of Trustees. Of more importance is the psychological value of membership, as in Q F&P 11.04: “It is the outward acknowledgement of an inward growth of commitment or a sense of belonging to the Religious Society of Friends.”

What form(s) could it take?

The Membership ‘process’ at present is quite simple with clear steps involving the applicant at each stage but perhaps there is room for more flexibility in the process. For some the letter of application and

visit can be quite stressful. Another idea might be a simple invitation from elders & pastoral friends to become a member because 'we value you'.

Alternatively, a mixture of the traditional visit by two appointed friends, informal approaches by pastoral friends and a suggestion, if wished, for a discussion about membership. Then encouragement to apply to Area meeting, including a question on the willingness, or not, to undertake responsible roles, etc. without expecting an immediate commitment.

Finally, there is a concern in The Society of Friends about falling numbers and a need to turn outwards through outreach, to remind people that we exist and that we are a meaningful force for good in the world, at both grass roots and national levels.

'It might be good to understand better why long-standing Attenders do not come into Membership. There's a bunch of folklore around it but it would be good to have some evidence. It's not necessarily a goal to "convert" Attenders to Members, but we may learn something useful.'

Disley Meeting 16.08.23