

Chapter 11

Membership

THE MEANING OF MEMBERSHIP

- 11.01 'The Kingdom of Heaven did gather us and catch us all, as in a net,' wrote Francis Howgill in 1663, 'and his heavenly power at one time drew many hundreds to land. We came to know a place to stand in and what to wait in.'

Early Friends felt no need for formal membership; they were a community of seekers who recognised in each other a similar hunger, a similar quest. Seeking the 'hidden seed of God' they were prepared to recognise it wherever they found it.

The seventeenth century, however, was not an easy time to be a dissenter; and Friends, like many others, suffered ridicule, arrest, imprisonment, fines, distraint of their goods and death. In this harsh climate it required a degree of personal commitment openly to avow membership. This, combined with the recognition of a 'heavenly power' at work, was all that was required.

Today membership may not involve putting liberty, goods or life at risk but the spiritual understanding of membership is, in essentials, the same as that which guided the 'Children of the Light'. People still become Friends through 'convincement', and like early Friends they wrestle and rejoice with that experience. Membership is still seen as a discipleship, a discipline within a broadly Christian perspective and our Quaker tradition, where the way we live is as important as the beliefs we affirm.

Like all discipleships, membership has its elements of commitment and responsibility but it is also about joy and celebration. Membership is a way of saying to the meeting that you feel at home, and in the right place. Membership is also a way of saying to the meeting, and to the world, that you accept at least the fundamental

The meaning of membership

elements of being a Quaker: the understanding of divine guidance, the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the meeting's business, the practical expression of inward convictions and the equality of all before God. In asking to be admitted into the community of the meeting you are affirming what the meeting stands for and declaring your willingness to contribute to its life.

When early Friends affirmed the priesthood of all believers it was seen as an abolition of the clergy; in fact it is an abolition of the laity. All members are part of the clergy and have the clergy's responsibility for the maintenance of the meeting as a community. This means helping to contribute, in whatever ways are most suitable, to the maintenance of an atmosphere in which spiritual growth and exploration are possible for all. It means contributing to the meeting by giving time and energy to events and necessary tasks, and also being willing to serve on various regional or yearly meeting committees and other groups. There is a special expectation that Friends attending meetings for church affairs will benefit from working together under Quaker discipline on the decisions that need to be made. Membership also entails a financial commitment appropriate to a member's means, for without money neither the local meeting nor the wider structure can function.

Membership does not require great moral or spiritual achievement, but it does require a sincerity of purpose and a commitment to Quaker values and practices. Membership is a spiritual discipline, a commitment to the well-being of one's spiritual home and not simply appearance on a membership roll. The simple process of becoming a member is part of the spiritual journey: part of the seeking that is so integral to our religious heritage. The membership application process is not only about seeking but also about finding.

The process is an important part of the life of the area meeting, too; accepting a new member means not only welcoming the 'hidden seed of God' but also affirming what it is as a community that we value and cherish. Quakers once called themselves 'Friends in the Truth' and it is the finding of this truth that we affirm when we accept others who value it into membership.

11.02 Our membership ... is never based upon worthiness... We none of us are members because we have attained a certain standard of

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goodness, but rather because, in this matter, we still are all humble learners in the school of Christ. Our membership is of no importance whatever unless it signifies that we are committed to something of far greater and more lasting significance than can adequately be conveyed by the closest association with any movement or organisation.

Edgar G Dunstan, 1956

- 11.03 *Richard Claridge (1649-1723) of Peel Monthly Meeting had been rector of the parish of Peopleton in Worcestershire for nineteen years when in 1691 he resigned and joined the Baptists. In 1697 he became convinced of the truth as understood by Friends. He recalled his experiences in these words:*

This was the way that Friends used with me, when I was convinced of truth; they came oftentimes to visit me, and sat and waited upon the Lord in silence with me; and as the Lord opened our understanding and mouths, so we had very sweet and comfortable seasons together. They did not ask me questions about this or the other creed, or about this or the other controversy in religion; but they waited to feel that living Power to quicken me, which raised up Jesus from the dead. And it pleased God so in his wisdom to direct, that all the great truths of the Christian religion were occasionally spoken to. Now this was Friends' way with me, a way far beyond all rules or methods established by the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God: and this is their way with others that are convinced of the truth.

BECOMING A MEMBER

- 11.04 An individual becomes a member of their area meeting, and through it of Britain Yearly Meeting, by a simple process agreed and adopted by the area meeting. Variety and flexibility in procedures are needed to reflect individual and local circumstances. Each area meeting will develop one or more of such procedures.

Guidance on current procedures used by various area meetings can be obtained from the Recording Clerk.

Becoming a member

Principles

- 11.05 Coming into membership is a two-sided process involving the individual on their spiritual journey and a whole community of faith. It is a process of discernment that involves both the applicant and the wider Quaker community: local Friends, the area meeting and possible contacts with other Quakers in other contexts such as a listed informal group or a university chaplain. It is the outward acknowledgement of an inward growth of commitment or a sense of belonging to the Religious Society of Friends.
- 11.06 The area meeting will be mindful of the need for simple, open and inclusive processes, involving the potential member throughout. The applicant should be party to any written report prepared as part of the process, which must be compliant with legal requirements such as the Data Protection Act (see 4.45). The Quaker community should be sure that the individual has an appropriate understanding of the meaning and responsibilities of membership. Potential members should be supported and nurtured before, during and after the process.
- 11.07 Although aspects of the process may be devolved to smaller groups, area meeting has the responsibility to:
- a. establish and explain what local procedures are;
 - b. maintain records as appropriate;
 - c. take the decision on whether to admit the individual into membership and minute it.

Stages of the process

Nurture and support

- 11.08 Meetings have a responsibility to nurture and support individuals so that they can develop a sense of belonging and an understanding of our shared beliefs, testimonies and spiritual discipline.

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Nurture is a continuing process for all who come to our meetings whether or not they decide to consider membership. Each area meeting will have its own ways of approaching this. For example they may provide attenders' packs for information and literature about membership, there may be special nurturing or supporting Friends or there may be an attenders' group.

Some area meetings have adopted alternative arrangements and procedures by which they carry out the responsibilities of overseers. In such cases, the following paragraphs should, where applicable, be interpreted according to whatever procedures the area or local meeting has in place: 11.09, 11.22, 11.23, 11.26, 11.30, 11.32, 11.39, 11.41.

- 11.09 Overseers should be sensitive to the needs of attenders and, when the time is right, encourage a consideration of membership (see 12.13.h). Part of this encouragement, which need not necessarily result in an application, could include the provision of formal or informal discussion groups and suggestions about relevant reading. Many meetings have found it helpful to present applicants with a copy of our book of discipline or other relevant book, either during the application process or when the application has been accepted by the area meeting. Whatever the method or moment selected, it is important for the applicant to become familiar with our discipline: for example, meetings for church affairs are a part of the life of the meeting and applicants should be alive to the reasons we conduct our affairs the way we do and the importance of playing an active role in them.

Initiating the process

- 11.10 If and when the time seems right, the process of discernment which can lead to membership may be initiated by the applicant or someone else. For example, others may approach an attender to encourage her or him to consider membership and may begin the process on their behalf. Attenders themselves may take the first step. The decision to apply may, perhaps, emerge from being part of a discussion or pastoral care or nurture group.

Becoming a member

For the individual this process is likely to reflect a wish to make a public statement to show their commitment to the discipline of Friends and their recognition that this is their spiritual home.

Discerning the rightness of the application

- 11.11 The process of discernment that membership is right for both the applicant and the meeting is at the heart of the acquisition of membership. Once it has been discerned that it is right for the application process to be taken forward, area meetings may offer a number of options. For example, it may be that the traditional process is followed, with a letter from the applicant to the area meeting clerk and the appointment of two Friends, one from the applicant's meeting and the other from a different local meeting within the area meeting, to visit the applicant and report back to the area meeting. In other cases supporting Friends may hold discussions with the attender and together they may write an application letter or a minute which is taken to area meeting. For some a meeting for clearness (12.23) may be right.

Some applicants will have found a wider Quaker community beyond the local geographical area, and those involved in the discernment process may find it helpful to contact individuals from this wider Quaker community (such as members of a listed informal group, a young person's link group, or a university chaplain).

The final part of the process of discernment is consideration by the area meeting. As area meetings are responsible for holding membership they are responsible for the final decision about an application. The decision may be informed, for example, by a minute from the local meeting, a report written by visitors with the applicant, or by the outcome of a meeting for clearness. All of these are the product of discernment.

Recognition and continuing nurture

- 11.12 Membership can be seen as an outward expression of what is already there. The acceptance of a new member should be a joyful occasion and may be marked by some kind of celebration. For all meetings

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the responsibility to nurture and guide the new member is a continuing one. Area meetings will find their own ways of providing this, for example by supporting Friends (11.08) or pastoral groups. Pastoral care, which in many other churches is given in part by a separated ministry, is in our yearly meeting a responsibility shared by all members.

MEMBERSHIP OF CHILDREN

Application on behalf of a child

- 11.13 There are three main ways of looking at children's membership, each with solid historical roots in Quaker tradition.
- a. You are not a Friend until you make a profession of faith, which you can do only at a mature age and after careful consideration; you must consciously and deliberately decide, declare and commit yourself: something you are unable to do as a child.
 - b. A child who is brought up within the community of a Friends' meeting is a full member in every sense; children were used by Jesus as patterns of the Kingdom and a child as well as an adult may have deep insights; your religious pilgrimage begins at, or before, birth and at any moment you are at a particular point on the journey.
 - c. A child may be a full member, but growing up demands confirmation; every one, at a given point of their physical and spiritual growth, should take up their membership for themselves and express it in some of the many forms of service.
- 11.14 These three approaches have usually been seen as mutually contradictory – if one is right the other two must be wrong. But in reality all three can be right: they express different aspects of membership. Each emphasises something of what it means to be persons shaped by the family and community we are born into, but having to choose our own position in relation to our family and community. Parents should try to recognise that their child may

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quite properly choose, in the light of the child's own temperament and experience, a way different from the one chosen on her or his behalf, even if that way lies outside the Society. Children, for their part, may recognise that any choice made for them will reflect the temperament and experience of their parents. (See 11.17.)

- 11.15 Parents or those with parental responsibility or guardians who intend to bring up a child in accordance with the religious principles of the Society may apply for acceptance of that child into membership, while he or she is under the age of sixteen. The application, stating this intention, should be in writing and give the full name and date of birth of the child and be signed by both parents or by those with parental responsibility or guardians. Area meetings may, in special circumstances, dispense with the signature of one of the parents.

- 11.16 On receipt of the application the area meeting may appoint Friends to visit the parents or those with parental responsibility or guardians before reaching a decision as to admission into membership. The decision of the area meeting is to be conveyed to the parents or those with parental responsibility or guardians in writing. The names of the children so admitted are to be entered on the official register of members with the date of admission and the date of birth, and the appropriate local meeting is also to be informed.

Options available to those admitted on parental application

- 11.17 Membership acquired on parental application constitutes full membership and the member is under no obligation to confirm it on reaching a certain age. It is entirely valid, however, for a member to wish to indicate a personal acceptance of membership acquired in this way, or to wish to resign and seek re-admission as a 'convinced' Friend. Such requests may be made after much serious thought and area meetings should respond carefully, being guided by the spiritual needs of their members rather than by the desire to establish or follow a uniform practice.

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11.18 A member whose admission was secured under section 11.15 - 11.16 may at any time take one of the following courses of action:

- a. continue in membership acquired on the application of parents without making any formal statement;
- b. indicate personal acceptance of membership acquired on application of parents and have this personal acceptance formally recognised by the area meeting (the member may in addition desire the appointment of one or two Friends as visitors);
- c. resign from membership and, at the same or some later time, seek admission 'by convincement' under the normal procedure;
- d. resign from membership without further formality since he or she does not consider himself or herself a member.

A member wishing to follow course b, c or d shall so indicate in writing to the area meeting clerk, whereupon the area meeting shall take such action as it thinks appropriate. It should record in its minutes the action taken.

11.19 Overseers should bring these options to the attention of younger Friends on reaching maturity but should be sensitive enough not to press them to make any decision when they might not be ready for it (see 12.13.g).

See also 11.30 Resignation by the individual

Nothing in this section precludes young people under the age of sixteen from applying under the procedure described in 11.04-11.12

TRANSFERRING MEMBERSHIP

Principles

11.20 It is necessary for the accuracy of the Society's records and the effectiveness of its two-way communications, as well as for the convenience of the individual, that up-to-date records are kept.

Transferring membership

Therefore it is important for each area meeting to know its members' current address, phone number and email address (where used), particularly when members are moving geographically from one part of the Quaker community to another. After a move has taken place, it is desirable for membership to be held with the area meeting which covers the area in which the Friend is living.

The reciprocal nature of the relationship between members and their meetings means that, when changing address to the area covered by another area meeting, and when transferring membership to another area meeting, action is required both by the individual member and by the area meetings concerned.

Any part of the process may be conducted via electronic media. It is advisable that hard copies are made of such communication for the record.

Change of address

Responsibilities of the member or attender

- 11.21 On change of address, whether temporary or permanent, to an area covered by another area meeting with which the member or attender is likely to become associated, it is necessary as soon as possible to inform the clerk of their 'old' area meeting of the new address, postcode, and telephone number and email address if appropriate.

Responsibilities of clerks

- 11.22 On receiving notice of a change of address, either in-coming or out-going, the clerk should immediately forward the details to overseers.

Responsibilities of overseers

- 11.23 On receiving details from their clerk, overseers of the 'old' area meeting should immediately forward them to the clerk of the 'new'

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area meeting. Printed forms for these notices can be obtained from the Recording Clerk. Overseers of the 'new' area meeting will want to make timely contact with their new member or attender.

A notice should be sent even when a member or attender is moving some distance from any meeting or abroad. If the move is to a country where there is no known group of Friends, Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) should be consulted as to where the nearest Friends live so that contact may be made. If it is to an area where several yearly meetings overlap, FWCC may be able to advise on the most useful point of contact.

Transfer of membership: procedure

Responsibilities of the member

- 11.24 It has been found in general that it can take up to three months for a member to familiarise themselves with their 'new' area meeting. When within this time it seems right, the member should ask the clerk of either area meeting to arrange for a transfer of their membership. This can be done by letter, email or phone.

Responsibilities of clerks

- 11.25 On receiving such a request from its member, their current meeting should issue a certificate of transfer, or the receiving meeting should apply for one. If a request for transfer of membership is not received after three months of leaving an area meeting's area, that meeting may issue a certificate of transfer, or the receiving area meeting may apply for one. Printed forms for these certificates may be obtained from the Recording Clerk.

On receiving such a certificate, the clerk should immediately inform the local overseers and request their advice as to the acceptability of the transfer of membership.

The membership is not transferred until the certificate of transfer is accepted by the receiving area meeting and a confirmation of that

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acceptance has been received by the issuing area meeting. Printed forms for certificates of acceptance are available from the Recording Clerk.

In cases of doubt regarding the address in another yearly meeting to which a certificate should be sent, the Recording Clerk would be able to help and may also be able to give general information concerning meetings and Friends resident abroad (and see 11.23).

Responsibilities of overseers

- 11.26 Contact should be made with the Friend concerned as soon as a certificate of transfer has been received. Overseers are responsible for advising the area meeting with regard to the transfer.

In some rare cases, a receiving area meeting may object to the transfer. It is expected that this will be done only in exceptional circumstances. Area meetings are reminded that, though a Friend may have taken little or no part in the life of the meeting, even for many years, their move may prove an occasion for renewed participation in the life of the Society.

Nevertheless, a meeting may properly return a certificate of transfer:

- a. where it seems clear that the Friend will not become part of the receiving area meeting;
- b. where in the view of the receiving area meeting the Friend is likely to remain, or to become, more closely associated with the issuing meeting or another;
- c. where in the view of the receiving area meeting the issuing area meeting should consider whether termination of membership may prove to be more appropriate.

It may be desirable that the overseers of the issuing meeting write to the clerk to the overseers of the receiving meeting giving such information as may seem useful.

Overseers are reminded that where information is supplied in confidence the Friend concerned has the right under the Data Protection Act to see any correspondence (4.45).

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- 11.27 If because of special circumstances a Friend's membership is not transferred to the area meeting in the area in which the Friend lives, he or she should nevertheless be encouraged to give such service as seems appropriate within that meeting. (See also 4.08 & 4.32.)

SOJOURNING MEMBERSHIP

- 11.28 An area meeting may at its discretion accept as a sojourning member a Friend maintaining membership outside Britain Yearly Meeting who wishes to be associated with the area meeting while residing temporarily within its compass. Sojourning members are expected to share as fully as they are able in the life of the area meeting, and to live under the discipline of Britain Yearly Meeting. Sojourning membership is not a category of membership for those who move permanently into the geographical area of Britain Yearly Meeting.

The request shall be supported by a minute or certificate requesting the association from the home meeting of the Friend concerned (or Friends World Committee for Consultation if the Friend is on the international membership list).

Decisions on sojourning membership shall be recorded by the area meeting in its minutes and the number of sojourning members entered on the annual tabular statement (see 4.10.h and 6.07). The area meeting is advised to review the status of its sojourning members regularly to ensure it does not become permanent.

The area meeting shall inform the home area meeting (or Friends World Committee for Consultation if the Friend is on the international membership list) when a sojourning Friend has left the compass of the meeting or has become inactive, and shall record this termination by minute. Sojourning membership will also be terminated if the Friend's membership is later transferred into the area meeting (see 11.23-11.24) as remains the normal recommended practice. (See also 4.32 and 6.14)

TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

- 11.29 The membership of any Friend shall cease when a record to this effect is made in the minutes of the area meeting to which he or she belongs. Either the Friend or the area meeting may initiate steps leading to the termination of membership. The termination recorded in the minutes of the area meeting shall be understood as no more than a record that meaningful spiritual membership has ceased to exist (but see also 11.30).

Resignation by the individual

- 11.30 Any Friend who has attained the age of sixteen may address a letter of resignation to the clerk of the area meeting. Area meetings should arrange for such letters to be referred to the local or area meeting overseers for advice. Normally a resignation should not be accepted until after a visit on behalf of the area meeting. On the acceptance of a resignation the area meeting clerk shall immediately inform the Friend concerned.

Termination by the area meeting

- 11.31 Area meetings may take the initiative in terminating membership in cases where:
- a. over a prolonged period a Friend has ceased to show any interest in the life of the Society and there seems no reasonable likelihood of renewed participation;
 - b. a Friend's address has been unknown for a period of at least three years and cannot, after a careful search, be ascertained;
 - c. the conduct or publicly expressed opinions of the member are so much at variance with the principles of the Society that the spiritual bond has been broken.

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- 11.32 In the relationship between Friends and their local meetings there may be periods of misunderstanding or strain. Though the main responsibility of pastoral care properly rests, in most area meetings, with local overseers, they may not necessarily have the sense of perspective or required skills to reach right judgments in all cases. A proper desire for confidentiality may make local overseers reluctant to bring such matters to area meeting overseers, and area meetings are therefore urged to see that clear and workable arrangements exist whereby local overseers can bring a few judicious Friends from elsewhere in the area meeting into consultation at an early stage in any membership matter which is likely to prove difficult.
- 11.33 If any Friend, by conduct or publicly expressed views, appears to be denying the Society's beliefs and principles or bringing it into disrepute, and private counsel has proved of no avail, the area meeting shall appoint well-qualified Friends to attempt to restore unity. If it appears that advice and counsel are, and are likely to continue to be, without their desired effect, the area meeting may record a minute of disunity with the action of that Friend and, in exceptional circumstances, terminate membership.
- 11.34 Area meetings should not normally terminate membership under 11.31 a or c until after a visit. An official letter inviting the Friend to reply should be issued by direction of the area meeting, signed by the clerk and sent to the Friend concerned before a decision to terminate membership under a or c is reached. On the actual termination of membership the area meeting clerk should immediately inform the Friend or Friends concerned, drawing their attention to the right of appeal should they feel aggrieved by the decision of the area meeting (see 4.25).
- 11.35 Pleas for the continuance of formal membership on sentimental grounds should have no place in a religious society, but area meetings are reminded that many Friends go through periods, sometimes prolonged, when their association with the life of the meeting is tenuous. Area meetings are urged to be very tender in all such cases and to beware of undue haste or unwarranted assumptions in proposals for the termination of membership.

Termination of membership

Children

- 11.36 Letters of resignation on behalf of children who have not attained the age of sixteen should normally be signed by the parents or those with parental responsibility or guardians. Area meetings are at liberty in special circumstances to dispense with the signature of one of the parents. Such a resignation should be accepted by the area meeting unless in its judgment this is contrary to the best interests of the child. Area meetings may also initiate the termination of membership of the children of any Friends whose membership has ceased under 11.29 or 11.30. If it seems likely that any child whose membership has been terminated will continue in association with the meeting, the area meeting should transfer the name to the list of children connected with the meeting but not in membership.

Classification for returns

- 11.37 For tabular statement purposes (see 4.10.h, 6.07) returns shall be classified under:
- a. resignations on the initiative of the member;
 - b. terminations of membership on the initiative of the area meeting;
 - c. resignations on behalf of children.

Area meeting clerks shall complete a footnote stating how many terminations under b are in each of the categories in 11.31 and how many under c are on the initiative of the area meeting. It is therefore important that minutes recording the termination of membership be specific.

RECORDS OF MEMBERSHIP

Official register of members

- 11.38 Each area meeting shall maintain an official register of members and shall appoint a suitable Friend to have care of it. (See 4.45 about data protection.) No alteration shall be made to the register save in accordance with decisions minuted by the area meeting. The official register of members shall be examined annually and checked with the area meeting minutes by the Friends appointed to prepare or check the tabular statement. The official register may be maintained in loose-leaf form provided that proper precautions are taken. Superseded official registers of members shall be preserved by area meetings among their records (4.40).

Lists of attenders and children not in membership

- 11.39 Each area meeting shall maintain a list of attenders and of children not in membership associated with its several meetings for worship or shall arrange that such lists shall be kept by overseers. An attender is one who, not being a member, frequently attends a specific meeting for worship.

Printed lists of members, attenders and children not in membership

- 11.40 It is recommended that in the printed lists of members, attenders and children not in membership the date of birth should be printed and continued until the age of eighteen.

Respecting the essentially private nature of such lists, meetings should exercise care to limit their availability and guard against the risk that they might be put to undesirable use (see 4.45).

Recording of marriages and deaths

- 11.41 Area meetings shall record in their minutes marriages of their members according to our usage. Area meetings shall likewise record in their minutes the deaths of their members. It is recognised that some area meetings will wish to receive information on deaths in a standard form of their own devising while others may be satisfied with a letter from a close relative or local overseer or be content, in certain circumstances, with an oral report.

On records see also 4.40 & 4.45

CONCLUSION

- 11.42 Friends have often had difficulty with the concept of membership and the definition of its basis. However, in practice, there is rarely any difficulty over particular applications.

In 1966 London Yearly Meeting accepted a new statement on membership after a difficult exercise in which problems of disunity were faced. This statement introduced the membership chapter in *Church government* from 1967 to 1995 and it remains an inspiration to many Friends:

‘George Fox and his early followers’, wrote Rufus Jones, ‘went forth with unbounded faith and enthusiasm to discover in all lands those who were true fellow-members with them in this great household of God, and who were the hidden seed of God.’ Our Society thus arose from a series of mutual discoveries of men and women who found that they were making the same spiritual pilgrimage. This is still our experience today. Even at times of great difference of opinion, we have known a sense of living unity, because we have recognised one another as followers of Jesus. We are at different stages along the way. We use different language to speak of him and to express our discipleship. The insistent questioning of the seeker, the fire of the rebel, the reflective contribution of the more cautious thinker – all have a place amongst us. This does not always make life easy. But we have found that we have learned to listen to one another, to respect the sincerity of one another’s opinions, to love and to care

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for one another. We are enabled to do this because God first loved us. The gospels tell us of the life and teaching of Jesus. The light of Christ, a universal light and known inwardly, is our guide. It is the grace of God which gives us the strength to follow. It is his forgiveness which restores us when we are oppressed by the sense of falling short. These things we know, not as glib phrases, but out of the depths of sometimes agonising experience.

Membership, therefore, we see primarily in terms of discipleship, and so impose no clear-cut tests of doctrine or outward observance. Nevertheless those wishing to join the Society should recognise its Christian basis. Words often seem inadequate to convey our deepest experiences, yet words – however imperfect – are necessary if we are to share with one another what we have learned. In *Christian faith and practice* and in the *Advices and queries* we have tried to express those broad principles of belief and conduct on which unity is essential. These find expression in our testimonies, which reflect the Society's corporate insights, and a loyal recognition of this is to be expected, even though precise agreement on every point is not required. We are aware of continual failures in our discipleship, and no one should hesitate, from a sense of unworthiness, to apply for membership.

Membership implies acceptance of responsibility and a sense of commitment. It implies a willingness to be used by God, however imperfect we may feel ourselves to be as his messengers. He will not miraculously deliver us from the trials of temper and temptation, pettiness and pride, which are a part of human nature. In our worship together, and as we learn together in a Christian community, he will help us to overcome the limitations of our nature, to become more fully the people he intends us to be. 'Not as though we had already attained, either were already perfect, but we follow after ... forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, we press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'

See also chapter 10, Belonging to a Quaker meeting