

Guidance on Attending Area Meeting

“The area meeting is the primary meeting for church affairs in Britain Yearly Meeting. Its role is to develop and maintain a community of Friends, a family of local meetings who gather for worship and spiritual enrichment. It should provide that balance between worship, mutual support, administration, learning, deliberation and social life which can make its meetings enjoyable occasions and build up the spiritual life of its members.” *Quaker faith and practice* 4.02 (part)

“The area meeting is open to all its members. Other Friends should notify their presence to the clerk before the meeting begins and, if drawn to speak, should be sensitive to the fact that it is not their area meeting (see also 11.26). Attenders may be present only with permission of the clerk, which should be sought well in advance of the day of meeting. It should be borne in mind that some matters, particularly membership, are confidential and cannot easily be discussed with non-members present.” *Quaker faith and practice* 4.08

Area meetings are meetings for church affairs. They are not public meetings for worship and may be dealing with sensitive matters such as membership or finances – hence the stipulation in *Quaker faith and practice* 4.08 that attenders seek the clerk’s permission to be present.

However, just as local meetings “will encourage regular attenders at meeting for worship to participate in meetings for worship for church affairs on suitable occasions” (*Quaker faith and practice* 4.32), regular attenders at local meetings are encouraged to participate in area meetings too. It is in this spirit that the clerks of Central England Area Quaker Meeting feel led to use the language of welcome rather than permission.

If you are a regular attender at a local meeting coming to an area meeting for the first time, speak to your local meeting clerk or elders about what to expect and how to come with heart and mind prepared. Your local meeting clerk should also inform the area meeting clerks that you will be joining for the first time so they are aware of who you are and can support you.

Whether you’re an attender coming to an area meeting for the first time or a long-standing member, consider Advices and Queries 14 and 15:

“Are your meetings for church affairs held in a spirit of worship and in dependence on the guidance of God? Remember that we do not seek a majority decision nor even consensus. As we wait patiently for divine guidance our experience is that the right way will open and we shall be led into unity.

Do you take part as often as you can in meetings for church affairs? Are you familiar enough with our church government to contribute to its disciplined processes? Do you consider difficult questions with an informed mind as well as a generous and loving spirit? Are you prepared to let your insights and personal wishes take their place alongside those of others or be set aside as the meeting seeks the right way forward? If you cannot attend, uphold the meeting prayerfully.”

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