

Central England Area Meeting

Guidance for the preparation of Memorial Minutes and Testimonies

It is usual for Quaker meetings to prepare a Memorial Minute for members and well-loved long-standing attenders who die whilst in membership of the Area Meeting¹. A Memorial Minute is not an obituary – its aim is not to give an account of a Friend's life as a whole, rather its purpose is to note those aspects of it for which Friends are particularly thankful.

Initially, Local Meetings should appoint two or more Friends to prepare the draft minute. It is best if close family members are not part of the drafting group, however it is usually helpful to consult with the family at some stage of the drafting process. The final draft of the minute should always be shown to the family before it is presented to Local Business Meeting so that they can check that they recognise the Friend as described. At this point permission should be sought for publication of the minute on the Area Meeting website and elsewhere as appropriate; this permission should be included as an addendum to the minute.

The drafting group should also always consult outside our Area Meeting and, indeed, outside the Society where the Friend has spent a significant part of their life elsewhere, and engaged in non-Quaker activity.

There is no set length for a Memorial Minute, but usually around 500 words should be sufficient.

The time taken to draft the Memorial Minute should neither be hasty nor unhurried, though typically three months ought to give sufficient time for the process to be completed.

Once agreed by the Local Meeting the Minute should be forwarded by email to the Area Meeting office. It will then go into the papers in advance for the next Area Meeting to be accepted by Area Meeting. Elders and Pastoral Friends Support Group should consider all Memorial Minutes to determine whether they should be expanded into a testimony.

Testimonies to the Grace of God as Shown in the Life of the Deceased Friend

Sometimes during the process of compiling the Memorial Minute it will become clear to the drafting group, to the Local Meeting, to Area Meeting or to Elders and Pastoral Friends' Support Group when it considers the Minute that the Grace of God has been particularly Shown in the Life of the deceased Friend:

The purpose of a testimony concerning our deceased, worthy Friends [is] intended as a memorial, that they have walked as children of the Light, and of the Day, and to excite those that remain to take diligent heed, and yield obedience to the teachings of the still small voice, that they may follow them as they followed Christ, the great captain of their salvation.

Hertford Monthly Meeting, 1780, quoted in Quaker Faith and Practice 4.28

The Drafting Group of the Local Meeting should not write the Memorial Minute with the intention of it becoming accepted as a testimony, but a Local Meeting may minute their suggestion that further work may be done on the Minute to expand it into a testimony;

¹ Occasionally Friends express a wish in advance of their death that they would not wish such a document be prepared; these wishes should be respected.

Elders and Pastoral Friends' Support Group will consider this suggestion, or indeed make such a suggestion itself when it considers the Minute. When recommending a Memorial Minute for expansion into a Testimony, suggestions should be made as to what additional information it should cover. It is important to emphasise that the lives of all Friends are of worth – a lack of recommendation for a Memorial Minute to be expanded into a Testimony should not be seen as indicating lesser worth.

If Elders and Pastoral Friends' Support Group suggests expansion into a Testimony, the Drafting Group should feel free to co-opt other Friends to help them. As with a Memorial Minute, there is no set length for a Testimony, but 1,000-2,000 words would normally be appropriate. To do full justice to the Friend in question, to ensure that the testimony truly shows the Grace of God as Shown in their Life, it may well take a further three to six months of work.

Once complete, the draft Testimony will again be considered by Elders and Pastoral Friends' Support Group before formal receipt at Area Meeting for Business, at which final consideration will be given to forwarding the Testimony to Yearly Meeting or other appropriate body.

Technical Notes

Please give the full name of the Friend together with their full dates of birth and death at the head of the minute. At the end, note the Meeting from which it comes together with any other Meetings or organisations consulted, the names of the Friends on the Drafting Group, and the date when the Minute was received by the Local Meeting.

Please expand all abbreviations in full on their first use.

Regardless of their length in formal membership, Friends should be considered and described as being Quakers from when they became actively involved in the Society.

Quaker Faith and Practice 4.28-4.30 can be consulted for more information.

These guidance notes should be sent to the clerk of the Local Meeting by the Area Meeting office upon each notification of the death of a Friend.

Summary of steps

1. Local Meeting appoints Friends to prepare draft Minute,
2. Final draft of Minute shown to family before presentation to Local Business Meeting, with wider publication permission explicitly minuted,
3. Local Meeting forwards agreed Minute to AM Office,
4. AM Office includes the Minute in the papers in advance of Area Meeting
5. Area Meeting accepts Minute
6. Elders and Pastoral Friends' Support Group consider whether the Minute should be expanded into a Testimony
7. If agreed, Drafting Group carries out further work on a Testimony
8. Elders and Pastoral Friends' Support Group considers draft Testimony
9. Testimony is included in the papers in Advance of Area Meeting
10. Area Meeting receives Testimony and forwards to Yearly Meeting / elsewhere.