

Burlington Friends Meeting Handbook

Welcome to Burlington Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends..... where a living tradition of Quaker worship continues to grow. We celebrated joyfully our 50th anniversary in Burlington in 2009.

Meeting for Worship is held every Sunday at 11:00 a.m. and on Wednesdays. From mid-September through mid-June, on the first and third Sundays of the month, there is a First Day School class for school-age children and child care for younger children during worship. Children join the adults for 15 minutes during worship.

Meeting for Worship begins when Friends gather and sit in silence together as Quakers have done for more than 350 years. In this silence we renew our shared belief in the possibility of direct individual and corporate communication with God. We make a purposeful attempt to move away from the distractions of our daily lives and our preoccupation with ourselves. With practice, we learn to instead focus on the Inner Light, which is that spirit of Christ which we believe dwells in everyone.

The silence is at times broken by vocal ministry. Such ministry is not planned and anyone present may be moved to rise and speak. Ministry may be offered in the form of a prayer, song or verbal message expressing hope, thanksgiving, or the challenge of a pressing concern. Friends find it important to allow a period of silence between messages. We are cautioned against long discourse, discussion or debate.

Vocal ministry focuses and deepens the silent worship that follows. In this creative and reverent silence, we open our hearts to God and strengthen our bonds to each other. Often, we find peace of mind and a renewed sense of purpose and direction.

Meeting for Worship lasts about an hour and ends when those appointed shake hands in token of conclusion. There is a brief period of joys and concerns, introductions, and announcements, followed by hospitality. All are welcome!

Our **Monthly Meeting for Business** is held on the second Sunday of the month after worship and hospitality. Committees bring their concerns and proposals for consideration by the group. Decisions are made by seeking a “sense of the meeting.” No votes are taken. If there is not general agreement on a particular issue, the matter is held over until there is a resolution that is acceptable to the entire group. In certain circumstances, a member who strongly disagrees with a decision of the meeting may ask to “stand aside” because they recognize the “sense of the meeting” and do not wish to oppose it, or may ask to be recorded by name in the minutes as opposing the decision.

Beyond Meeting for Worship: the ongoing work of the Meeting

Burlington Meeting has no paid staff. The work of the Meeting is shared by members and attenders. The following represents the list of offices and committees serving the meeting community. Term of service for all offices and committees is three years unless otherwise indicated. An individual's term may be extended based on the Meeting's needs, recommendation by the Gifts and Services Committee and approval by the Meeting.

The **Presiding Clerk** is responsible for maintaining an overview of the life of the Meeting. She or he arranges the agenda and clerks (or presides at) the monthly meeting for business, while keeping track of the schedule of tasks for the business meeting to take care of during the year. The clerk also signs official meeting documents, consults with clerks of the Meeting committees, and maintains links between the Meeting, New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM), and other Quaker and community groups.

The **Recording Clerk** writes and keeps minutes. The **Corresponding Clerk** assists the Presiding Clerk with receiving, transmitting, and acknowledging correspondence. The **Recording Clerk** keeps permanent records of changes in the status of members, such as births, death, marriages, membership applications, transfers, and withdrawals. The **Treasurer** keeps accounts, receives and disburses fund, and makes financial reports to the Meeting.

Committees

Ministry & Counsel oversees and nurtures the spiritual and pastoral life of the Meeting community. It is composed of two sub-committees: Ministry and Worship and Pastoral Care. The two sub-committees currently meet together monthly as Ministry and Counsel.

- The **Ministry and Worship Committee** oversees the worship and spiritual life of the Meeting, seeking to support and nurture God's will in our lives. This committee has oversight of Meetings for Worship, regularly held on Sunday morning and Wednesday noon, and plans for religious education of adults. It prepares the annual State of Society Report and has oversight of Shelburne Allowed Meeting. It appoints ***clearness and oversight committees*** for marriage, membership, and other matters requiring Friends to reach clearness for themselves and the community. Ministry and Worship oversees the work of ***adult religious education*** through planning and implementation of regular Sunday morning curriculum and special workshops for adults.
- The **Pastoral Care Committee** provides for supportive care of all members and attenders. Care includes providing transportation, meals, and visits to the sick and hospitalized, and memorial meetings. Pastoral Care also coordinates the provision of hospitality for Sunday Meeting for Worship and helps to arrange activities or workshops on topics of member interest. ***Standing support committees*** are appointed by the Pastoral Care Committee to provide ongoing encouragement and a sounding board for individuals who are engaged in work, either within the Meeting or in the larger community. ***Temporary support committees*** are convened for a shorter time to help a person who faces a particularly difficult life situation.

The Children's Religious Education Committee is responsible for planning and implementing an educational program for the Meeting's children and youth. This committee plans the curriculum and involves other adults as appropriate to work with the children.

The Communications Committee plans and coordinates communication inside and outside the Meeting. This committee maintains a website <www.burlingtonquakers.org>, produces a newsletter, coordinates an e-mail listserv, maintains the database of members, publishes a directory of members and attenders (including names of current clerks and committee members), and manages the flow of printed information in the Meetinghouse.

The Library Committee develops and maintains the collection of books and other media owned by the Meeting and manages a system for tracking the lending and return of books.

The Peace, Justice & Earthcare Committee serves Burlington Friends Meeting by interfacing between members and the larger community on the issues of peace, nonviolence, equality, and right-living. It strives to cultivate a deeper awareness of our connections with all of creation.

The Property Committee oversees the use and maintenance of the Meeting House, the Bassett House, and the grounds.

The Finance Committee works to ensure the fiscal soundness of the Meeting through work on the annual budget, appeals for donations, and applications for grants and loans.

The Naming Committee is convened annually to bring forth a slate of nominees to serve on the Gifts & Service Committee.

The Gifts & Service Committee recommends members and attenders to fill the positions and committees that serve Burlington Monthly Meeting. Through interviews with Meeting participants, the committee discovers the gifts individuals have to offer and how they wish to serve the Meeting.

BFM Policy on Confidentiality

In all work before committees of Burlington Friends Meeting involving personal matters or concerns of individual members and attenders, committee members shall use the utmost care in maintaining confidentiality. Confidentiality is defined as follows:

Confidentiality is a state of trust in a relationship, between individuals and in community. Violating the trust harms the relationship and creates obligations to accept responsibility for the breach and to repair the harms it caused.

The following queries 1 are suggested as a guide for discernment:

“When a question of confidentiality versus disclosure arises, Friends might consider, at a minimum, the following:

“Is anyone's safety at risk? If so, how is his/her safety best insured-by what degree of confidentiality and what degree of disclosure?

“Is anyone's psychological well-being at risk? If so, by what degree of confidentiality or disclosure is her/his well-being best protected?

“What is the need of any individual or part of the community to know certain information? Is that need of greater importance than the need for confidentiality that some other individual or group has?

“When we serve on committees, do we exercise discipline if we confide in our partner?

“If there is a need for the community as a whole to know something of the matter, how it's processed, or its ultimate resolution, can publication of what needs to be known be done in a way that respects the individual's need for confidentiality?”

“What record of this matter would serve both the needs of this meeting and the individuals involved?”

In general, no written or electronic documents containing confidential information should be retained by the meeting, committees, or committee members after their work on a confidential matter is completed. Official reports from standing, ad-hoc or clearness committees read into the minutes and approved by the Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, however, will be retained in BFM records. One clear exception is storage of an individual's requests for end of life medical and memorial decision-making, to be maintained by Ministry and Counsel in a locked cabinet or storage box. The clerk will remind the Business Meeting of these policies annually in June and in a written notice in the newsletter.

This policy is not meant to take precedence over state laws requiring the reporting of known or suspected emotional, sexual or physical abuse of vulnerable persons.

¹ Adapted from Friends General Conference: *Resources for Fostering Vital Friends Meetings. Compassionate Use of Information-Confidentiality vs. Disclosure*. Portland (Maine) Friends Meeting, NEYM

Approved Child Safety Policy, Approved February 10, 2013

The Burlington Friends Meeting takes responsibility for providing a diverse, enriching, and multi-generational experience for our children. In creating and sustaining this programming, many Friends are required to nurture both the program as well as our children as they grow. To support this program and ensure the overall safety and well-being of our children, we have developed the following policy to establish baseline expectations for both the environment and those adults assisting with the First Day program.

Part of a comprehensive Quaker children's religious education program is teaching, fostering, and encouraging positive peer interactions. While this document is aimed at giving guidance to the behavior of adults, equal consideration and careful attention will be paid to how children interact with one another. Teaching children in this instance would include modeling healthy communication, actions, and problem solving.

- At the rise of Meeting, the supervision of the children is returned to their parents/ caregivers and the larger Meeting community.
- All classes (or larger classrooms) will have a minimum of two adults (or an adult with a responsible teenager) present in the room for the duration of the class and/or until each child has been reunited with their parent(s).
 - If a second adult is not available, the door to the classroom space will be left open.
 - One adult may work with a group of older middle school or high school young people as long as they are not alone with a single child.

- If inappropriate behavior (as defined below*) is observed or reported to the Children's Religious Education Committee (CREC) (by a child, parent, or other adult present), it will immediately be addressed and documented. This will include speaking to that adult at the time of the incident (which may include asking them to remove themselves from the presence of the children) as well notifying the child's parent, the CREC Clerk(s), the Ministry and Counsel (M&C) Clerk(s) and the Presiding Clerk of the Meeting.
- The Presiding Clerk will promptly call a meeting with the Clerk(s) of the CREC and the Clerk(s) of M&C to discuss any further action that may be required. After due consideration, this convened group may ask the individual to no longer have contact with the children or to assist with the First Day program. If an adult's behavior rises to the level of being a reportable offense under Vermont's Child Abuse Reporting Statute, the Presiding Clerk and/or a mandated reporter who is a member of the convened group, will contact the State Department of Child and Family Services.
- Most situations will not merit a report of any kind being made. If this is the case, then an individual who feels wrongly sanctioned, may ask for a clearness committee (to include at least one member of the original response). However, until that committee has found clarity, the initial request to cease interacting with the children will be honored. The members of the clearness committee shall maintain the standards of the Burlington Friends Meeting Confidentiality Policy.

It should be noted that larger Meetings have discussed and implemented a formal screening process for any adult working with children. BFM has agreed that this additional step is not necessary for our small First Day School program at this time.

** For the purposes of this policy, inappropriate behavior is defined in three ways:*

- *Physically inappropriate behavior includes hitting, shoving, etc.*
- *Emotionally inappropriate behavior includes name calling, swearing, or language that is not developmentally appropriate for the age of the child or children being addressed.*
- *Sexually inappropriate behavior includes sexualized language, touch, or removing clothing inappropriately.*

Beyond Burlington Friends Meeting...

We are affiliated with other Quaker meetings in the Northeast through:

***New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM).** 901 Pleasant St., Worcester, MA 01602-1908. Tel: 508-754-6760; FAX: 508-754-9401; email: neym@neym.org; web: www.neym.org. NEYM has annual sessions in August.

***Northwest Quarterly Meeting (NWQM)** is one of eight quarterly Meetings in New England Yearly Meeting. It has eleven Monthly Meetings (seven in Vermont and two in southwestern New Hampshire and seven worship groups). NWQM meets during the first weekend of Dec. and March at one of the Monthly Meetings. Farm & Wilderness Camp in Plymouth, VT is the site of NWQM's June and September weekend gatherings.

We are connected to the following Friends organizations:

***Friends General Conference (FGC)**, 1216 Arch St. 2-B, Philadelphia, PA 19107. Tel: 215-561-1700; email: friends@fgcquaker.org; web: www.fgcquaker.org.

Friends United Meeting (FUM), 101 Quaker Hill Drive, Richmond, IN 47374. Tel: 765-962-7573; email: info@fum.org; web: www.fum.org.

***Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC)**, World Office, 4 Byng Pl., London WC1E 7JH, England. Email: world@fwcc.quaker.org; web: www.quaker.org/fwcc.

***American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)**, National Office, 1501 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102. Tel: 215-241-7000; email: afscinfo@afsc.org; web: www.afsc.org.

***Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL)**, 245 Second St. NE, Washington, DC 2002. Tel: 202-547-6000; email: fcnl@fcnl.org; web: www.fcnl.org.

***Quaker Earthcare Witness**, 173-B N. Prospect Street, Burlington, VT 05401. Tel: 802-658-0308; email: info@quakerearthcare.org; web: www.quakerearthcare.org.

**The meeting appoints representatives to these Friends organizations as well as to the following local faith based groups: the Joint Urban Ministry Program (JUMP), Greater Burlington Ministerial Association, and Vermont Interfaith Power and Light.*

For more information on Quakerism:

FAITH AND PRACTICE of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1985. This book communicates to members and inquirers the historic and continuing faith of Friends and to outline procedures to be followed by meetings regarding membership, organization, the conduct of their affairs, and the concerns of the Society. *Faith and Practice* can be found in the Burlington Monthly Meeting library, along with other key texts referenced within.

www.quaker.org

Friends Journal, 1216 Arch Street 2A, Philadelphia, PA 19107-2835. Tel: 215-563-8629. Web: www.friendsjournal.org; email: info@friendsjournal.org.

Quaker Life, 101 Quaker Hill Drive, Richmond, IN 47374-1980. Tel: 765-962-7573.

Web: www.fum.org/QL; email: quakerlife@fum.org.

Quaker Books of Friends General Conference, 1216 Arch St., 2B, Philadelphia, PA 19107—
web: www.quakerbooks.org; Tel.: 800/966-4556