

GLOUCESTERSHIRE AREA QUAKER MEETING JOB DESCRIPTION

Title: AM Elder

General Context of the Role:

Read Quaker faith and Practice 12.12 and other sections to which that leads you — then return to this paper! The duties may look extensive and some can be difficult. But they *are* do-able.

Area Meeting appoints Elders to be responsible for sustaining the proper holding of its Meetings for Worship. This is long-standing practice in most AMs. Although early friends strove to be a “priesthood of all believers” (and a few Meetings try to do without Elders today), the position of Elder (even without the title at first), has existed for over 300 years.

Meetings for Worship do not happen by accident and it is not just a matter of luck whether they are deeply inspirational or dry and tedious. They are like gardens and need nourishing; and at times drastic pruning or other remedies. Elders therefore need to be aware of practical matters but also have the opportunity to remind us all from time to time to “look at the roses”.

Our Quaker Meeting is a wonder and a mystery and not to be made the subject of “targets” or “mission statements”; but it is right that friends ask themselves from time to time how their Meetings for Worship are. One LM regularly reviews “Recent Meetings for Worship” to try to be clear how things are and to discern what might be done, where necessary, to improve.

Experience and qualifications sought:

You’ll be a regular worshipper at Meeting and participate in business meetings, worship or study groups and so on. As a Member you’ll know and be known and you may have other informal roles in the group. It helps if you are acquainted with other people in the AM area. You don’t have to be someone who often speaks in Meeting. You will have some general knowledge of and feeling for the Quaker tradition and methods. A basic requirement is humility and sensitivity to the leadings of the spirit. The skills and inadequacies you bring may be just what God is seeking. You can develop into a “good enough” Elder.

No-one being nominated (or asked to consider letting their name go forward) should feel daunted by the duties listed in QF AP. Elders don’t do everything all at once. They work best when, like any gathering of Friends, they are truly listening for the promptings of love and truth in their hearts. You will work *with* other Elders, not alone, sharing problems and ideas.

An Elder will try to develop the capacity to perceive clearly how the processes of worship are undertaken, undermined or inspired - and part of how we sense these things comes from somewhere deep within us beyond the reach of most formal training or skill development. It comes from being a true worshipper and striver after truth, however humble or untrained. And it may come in unlikely guises. A very articulate Friend may sound fine but not be at home in seeing what God is asking him or her to do. Elders do not trust in their own strength: within the compass of God’s wisdom and love, they confidently

wait on strength to be given them. They do not expect to perform miracles; they offer and test their own ideas. You are not asked to give more than you can.

Main Responsibilities:

A basic task is to care for your own local Meetings for Worship with other Elders, to ensure there are enough of them and that they start, are held and finish appropriately. You will sit on the Elders bench, shake hands and so on as needed. Promoting worship-sharing or study groups is an Elder's responsibility. So too is ensuring that Attenders are helped to find out more about Quakerism and to seek to move towards membership if they desire to. These duties are not very onerous and everyone has an interest in supporting Elders in them; but there may from time to time be difficulties to be dealt with.

You meet with other LM or AM Elders (and sometimes jointly with Overseers) to pray for your Meeting and for those who attend (or who are prevented from so doing) and to see in what ways help may be given them, being aware of their and your needs and capacities. At such sessions, too, careful thought can be given on how to improve things or to solve any problems there may currently be within the Meeting itself.

You are also invited to Meetings with other AM Elders. These meetings give an opportunity for worship with a wider group than your usual Sunday morning one and there is much sharing of concerns and good ideas. Sometimes MM assigns work to the Elders group.

At Yearly Meeting the duties of Elders take a new turn. You are asked to support and pray for the 400 to 1000 Friends present and for the Clerks who serve YM. It is a wonderful opportunity to learn and understand more about our Religious Society, massively different in scale from our local Meetings in our home areas. Elders sometimes give specific guidance to the YM on how it manages its business; and experienced Elders lead in such matters. There is often a special meeting for Elders and Overseers during the time of YM.

The work is interesting, especially as you become more familiar with the requirements and with the personalities of other Elders and those you meet, though there will be times when deciding how best to work with a baffled, divided or hurt Meeting may be unclear and testing. At such times especially you look to each other and to God for succour and for guidance.

In practice this means attending various Meetings or meetings:

At Meeting for Worship itself, seeing to its order, discipline and closure.

LM Elders meeting c. 6 times per year. (there is much local variation) (? 12 hours p.a.)

AM Elders meetings currently held about every 2 months (12 hours p.a.)

Elders' responsibilities at BYM (if you are there)

Rewards and satisfactions of the job:

Helping fellow Members and Attenders to be part of the Meeting and to develop spiritually is itself rewarding. Helping the Meeting and its subgroups and processes be orderly and productive also brings satisfaction, though the way may at times seem thorny or steep. And we are all well reminded that we are God's children and here to "help each other up with a tender hand" and to pray for each other and for ourselves.

Adopted by MMNC
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