

**For those who are new to Quaker *Meetings*, we wanted to provide a translation of Quaker expressions so that you understand what they mean, where they came from, and how they relate to each other. Please let us know if there are others we should include.**

*word in italics* = defined term

*Abbreviations and acronyms:*

- Quaker organizational names:

Local:

- *BFM* – Bethesda Friends Meeting. [www.bethesdafriends.org](http://www.bethesdafriends.org)
- *FMW* – Friends Meeting of Washington is a sister Quaker Meeting on Florida Avenue in the District. [quakersdc.org](http://quakersdc.org)
- *BYM* – Baltimore Yearly Meeting, the grouping of *Monthly Meetings* of which BFM and FMW are a part. Geographically, it includes most of Virginia, the portion of Maryland west of the Chesapeake Bay, central Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, and parts of West Virginia. It has 40 established Monthly Meetings plus 13 Preparative Meetings and Worship Groups. It meets annually. [www.bym-rsf.org](http://www.bym-rsf.org)

National:

- *FCNL* – Friends Committee on National Legislation is a Quaker-based entity that lobbies Congress and the administration to advance peace, justice, opportunity, and environmental stewardship. [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org)
- *AFSC* – American Friends Service Committee describes itself as a Quaker organization devoted to service, development, and peace programs throughout the world. Its work is based on the belief in the worth of every person, and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice. [www.afsc.org](http://www.afsc.org)
- *FCG* – Friends General Conference provides services and resources for individual Friends, meetings, and people interested in the Quaker way. It is made up mostly of *unprogrammed meetings*, such as *BFM*. [www.fgcquaker.org](http://www.fgcquaker.org)
- *FUM* – Friends United Meetings – similar to FCG but largely focused on the *programmed meetings* worldwide. It encompasses most of the ex-US large Quaker communities such as those in Kenya, Costa Rica, Belize, and Palestine. (Note: African Quakers account for more than 50% of world Quakers. North America accounts for 20%.) [www.friendsunitedmeeting.org](http://www.friendsunitedmeeting.org)

- Bethesda Friends Meeting's committee name abbreviations:

[www.bethesdafriends.org/Officers-&-Committees](http://www.bethesdafriends.org/Officers-&-Committees)

- ARE – Adult Religious Education
- M&W – Ministry and Worship
- O&C – Outreach and Communications
- PC – Pastoral Care
- P&SJ – Peace and Social Justice
- S&F – Stewardship and Finance
- RE – Religious Education (for children)

Following are some terms you may have wondered about:

- References to *Spirit* or the *Inner Light* occur numerous times. Because Quakers emphasize the **experience** of the divine, rather than **beliefs** about the divine, they use many metaphors to try to capture the essence of their experience.
- Some Quakers do use the word God, while others use words such as Spirit, the Inner Teacher, the Light, the Inward Light, the Seed, the Living Waters, the Inner Guide, or Divine Truth.
- Because the Quaker movement arose in a Christian culture (England), some also reference Christ and Jesus.
- Within the Quaker movement, some more clearly identify themselves as Christian, while others identify more with *Universalism*.
- Many people who attend a *Meeting for Worship* come from non-Christian traditions (e.g. Judaism, Islam, Buddhism) or no religious tradition at all. Quakers are held together by the belief that there is that of God in every human being.



Source: Kimo Press Quakers are Hilarious

*Other terms you may hear (in alphabetical order):*

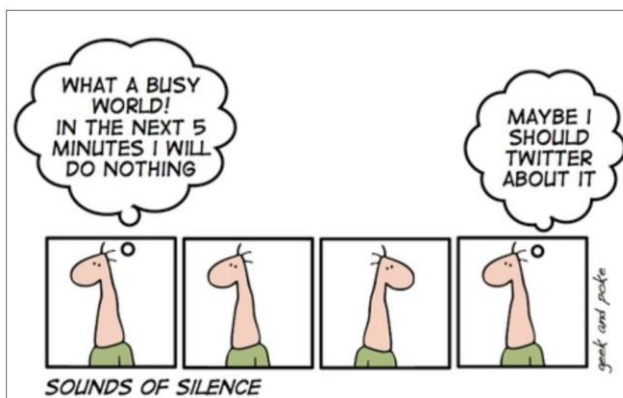
Attender - Someone who attends *meeting for worship* and participates in *meeting* but has not chosen to formally join. (See *Member* and *Clearness Committee* below).

*Birthright Quaker* - A Quaker who was born into a practicing Quaker family (as contrasted with a “*convinced*” Quaker who made the decision to become a *member*). Historically, a *birthright Quaker* was automatically considered to be a Quaker. However, within Baltimore Yearly Meeting, even someone born into a Quaker family needs to make a positive choice to identify themselves as a Quaker and seek formal membership.

*Calling* - A sense that you are being guided by *Spirit* to take an action. See *Led* as well.

*Centering down* - A process of becoming still and focused yet open to hearing the guidance of the *Spirit* or Inner Teacher.

“The quieter you  
become, the more you  
are able to hear.”  
--Rumi



Source: [geek-and-poke.com/](http://geek-and-poke.com/)

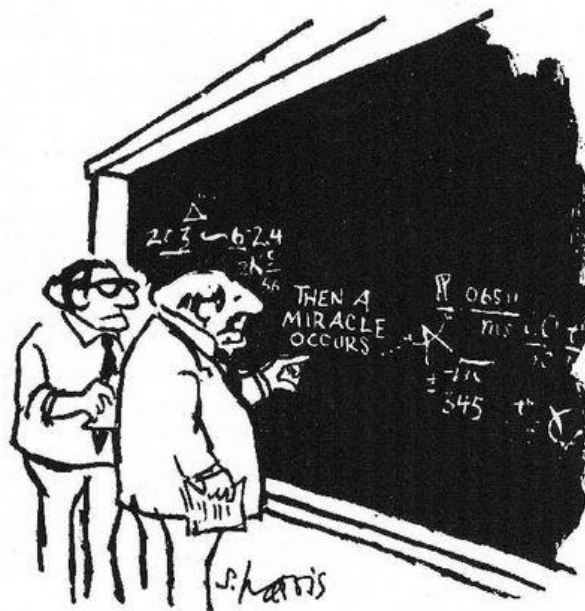
*Clearness Committee* - Quakers put a value on “*discerning*” whether something is the right thing to do or not – seeking to hear whether it is Spirit-led and grounded in truth vs. ego-led. *Clearness committees* are convened routinely when someone asks to become a *member* or to be married *under the care* of a *Meeting*. A *Clearness Committee* can also be convened at someone’s request to help them *discern* whether some course of action they are contemplating is well-grounded or not.

*Clerk* - the person who presides at business or committee meetings. This role includes setting the agenda (in consultation with others), keeping track of issues and schedule, *discerning*/articulating the “*sense*” of the group on the issue at hand, and ensuring a *Minute* is generated which document the activities of the group.

*Concern* - An interest or concern based in *Spirit*.

*Continuing Revelation* - While in current Quaker practice, there is varying interest in and authority given to the Bible as a source of spiritual guidance, initially the Quaker

movement used the Bible extensively as a source of inspiration and guidance. Even then, Quakers believed the *Spirit* that inspired the writers of the Bible continued to be active in the world and was accessible to all. Deeper understandings unfold as we allow ourselves to be guided. As Quakers, we believe we are meant to listen for *continuing revelation* and to help that emerge. For example, the Quaker *testimony* of equality initially applied to gender and social status, then was applied to race and later sexual orientation. It continues to unfold, as we consider the humanity of every individual.



"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

Source: S.Harris

*Convinced Quaker* - A Quaker who has gone through the formal process of becoming a *member* by having a *clearness committee* created to *discern* whether the person has a clear *leading* for wanting to become a Quaker and aspires to live according to Quaker values.

*Covered Meeting* - A *covered meeting* goes further than a *gathered meeting*; not only does it infuse the group with the presence of *Spirit*, but there is also a sense that *Spirit* is conveying a deeply important sense of things or mobilizing the group in a specific direction.

*Discern or discernment* - Quakers are focused on distinguishing the right course of action. This involves listening deeply to the Inner Guide, or *Spirit*. This process takes patience and faith that a deeper truth will be revealed. Quakers engage in *discernment* both as individuals, in *clearness committees* and in *Meeting for Business*.

*Faith and Practice* – This is the handbook that describes what Quakers do and why. It is issued and periodically revised by the *Yearly Meeting* (in *BFM*'s case, by *BYM*). It contains history, explanations, "statements of faith and advice on organization and practice". [www.bym-rsf.org/publications/fandp](http://www.bym-rsf.org/publications/fandp)

*First Day* - Sunday. Quakers were (and are) willing to question the decisions of the prevalent culture. In the 1600s, when Quakerism was founded, they rejected using the names of the days of the week, as they were named for Viking pagan gods. They called

Sunday “*First Day*,” and subsequent days by their order after First Day. (They had issues with months too, but in most cases have stopped referring to months with numbers).

*Friend* - Quakers are also called the Religious Society of Friends, so “*Friend*” is a term often used to address others in the meeting.

*Friendly Ear* - As there is no pastor in an *unprogrammed meeting* like BFM, the Pastoral Care Committee designates a person to serve in that capacity at the end of the *Meeting for Worship* to listen to the cares and burdens of others or to answer any questions they may have.

*Gathered Meeting* - This is a Quaker term pertaining to *Meetings* where the presence of Spirit is palpable. <http://quakerspeak.com/quaker-worship-gathered-meeting/>

*Holding in the Light* - The Quaker version of “we’ll pray for you.” However, holding someone in the Light is more than a simple supplication on behalf of that person. Instead, there is a sense of joining with *Spirit*, or the Light, to enfold the person in love and comfort, or of joining with the Light in the faith that the Light will reveal what is deeply true for that person. Holding someone in the Light does not preclude trying to be of concrete use. One’s actions may be guided by one’s experience.

*Head of Meeting* – One person is designated each week by the Ministry and Worship Committee to preside over the *Meeting for Worship*. They ensure everyone has a name tag. They close the door when *Meeting for Worship* begins, signal the transition to Joys and Sorrows, and make/elicit announcements at the end of *Meeting*.

*Inner Light* - Quakers believe there is “that of God” in each of us. It’s also referred to as the Light Within, Walking in the Light, the Inward Guide, Spirit, Tender Seed, the Divine Principle, the Spirit of Truth, or the Truth. Because of this belief, Quakers have tended to be pacifist and were early abolitionists. It is difficult to justify killing or enslaving someone who has divinity within.



Source: [www.zazzle.co.uk](http://www.zazzle.co.uk)

*Joys and Sorrows* – After the silent portion of the *Meeting for Worship*, the *Head of Meeting* will signal it is a time to share personal joys or sorrows so others may celebrate the joys or *hold in the Light* those experiencing sorrow. The person sharing joys and sorrows is encouraged to say the name of the person/people they are asking to be *held in the Light* so that it can focus the sending of the Light.



Lay down - To discontinue an activity, committee, or meeting when the work is done or the energy to continue it is no longer present.

Lay over - A procedural step in reaching a *sense* of how to proceed. Some items are laid over by tradition, such as applications for membership. This gives the *Meeting* an opportunity to reflect and seek clarity. Other items are *laid over* for a period of time, usually a month, to enable everyone who wishes to provide input and consider them further.

Leading/Being Led: Quakers speak of feeling *led* (or feeling a *leading*) when they sense they are being called by Spirit to undertake a specific action. *Leadings* often arise from a *concern*.

Let your life speak - This is a classic Quaker expression for reflecting the guidance of Spirit through actions. It's akin to "walk the talk" of Quakerism and is demonstrated by how you show up, how you treat others, and what you give priority and attention to.

Meeting: Quakers focus on the group of people more than the space. *Meeting* refers to the people gathered. They could gather in someone's home, or in a field, or in a *Meeting House*.

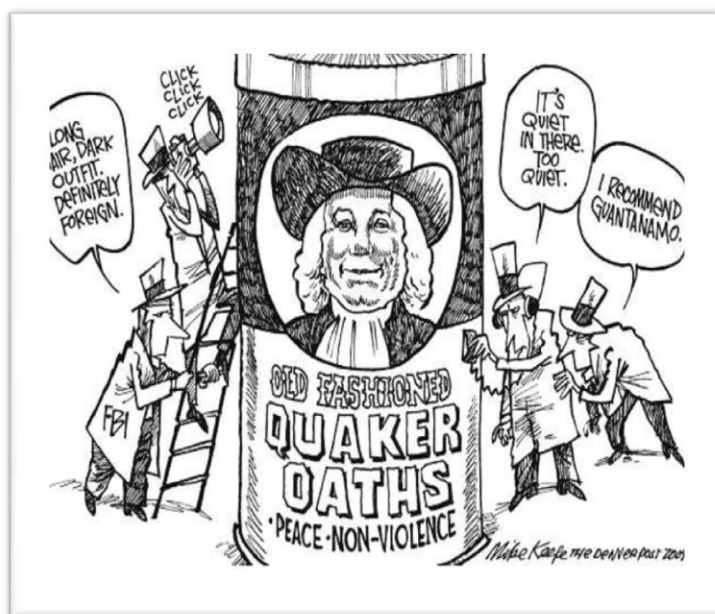
- Meeting House - the place where most *Meetings* take place. In an *unprogrammed meeting*, like *BFM*, it is not a consecrated place. It is just a space for the *Meeting* to gather.
- Meeting for Worship - *Meeting for Worship*, usually held weekly, is a Quaker worship service. *BFM* is an *unprogrammed meeting*, which means there is no pastor leading the service. We gather and settle ourselves into silence, with the expectation that in doing so, we may create the conditions for connection to *Spirit*, or the "still small voice" of God. While many Quakers love music and readings, they're not present during *Meeting for Worship* to enable the silence needed to tune in internally. Sometimes people may rise to speak (or even sing) from this silence, which is called "*vocal ministry*". Those who speak attempt to do so from a sense of connection to the Spirit.
- Meeting for Business (the full name is Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business) - Once a month, we attend worshipfully to our business matters. A *clerk* presides but does not make the decisions. The *clerk* guides the gathering to listen deeply to one another and for divine guidance. In most cases, that leads to a "*sense*" of the *Meeting*. When there is no clear *sense* of the *Meeting*, the decision is *laid over*. It will be taken up at a subsequent *Meeting for Business*. Because there is no paid minister, all the business and tasks of the meeting are handled by the congregation, and much of it in committees. Committees report to the *Meeting for Business* and bring issues that are best addressed by the full

congregation. Decisions are documented in minutes, which are available for all to see. *BFM* holds its *Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business* on the first Sunday of the month before *Meeting for Worship*. All are welcome.

- *Monthly Meeting* – *BFM* is a monthly meeting. Once a month, we gather in a *Meeting for Business* to consider issues important to our community.
- *Yearly Meeting* – A “Yearly Meeting,” is a group of *monthly meetings* that come together once a year to consider and decide upon issues important to all the *monthly meetings* in that yearly meeting. *BFM* is part of *Baltimore Yearly Meeting*. *BYM* has its yearly meetings each summer over about five days.

*Member* - Someone who has formally gained membership, either by converting a junior membership into a full membership or by going through a *clearness committee* to become a Quaker.

*Minute* - Quakers document what they’ve agreed to. A *Minute* is a formal record. There can be *Minutes* for a birth, a marriage, a death, a tribute to someone, a decision reached on an important issue, etc. A *Minute* is different from the minutes taken in committee meetings or *Meetings for Business*. A *Minute* concerns a specific issue.



Source: Mike Keefe The Denver Post

*Programmed Meeting* – Some Quaker Meetings have a worship service much like regular Protestant services, usually with a minister. These are more common in the Midwest and western US, along with Africa and other regions. *BFM*, along with all the *Meetings* in *BYM*, is an *unprogrammed meeting*.

*Quaker* - Originally quaking was a biblical description of a person experiencing the trembling of a spiritual experience. A judge derisively applied the term to George Fox, the founder of the movement in England in the mid-1600s. Quakers eventually appropriated it. Many early Quakers were persecuted, tried, and imprisoned for their beliefs.

*Queries* - Quakers have a tradition of asking themselves questions to stimulate reflection and spiritual deepening. These are called *queries*.

[www.bethesdafriends.org/monthly\\_queries.aspx](http://www.bethesdafriends.org/monthly_queries.aspx) At *BFM*, we read them on the first Sunday so people can contemplate them through the month.

*Right Relationship or something Rightly done* - Quakers are concerned about whether they are doing things from the right place and for the right reasons. If one is acting in accordance with Quaker values and responding to one's Inner Guide, Quakers believe that one will be in right relationship with an issue or situation and will take spiritually sound actions.

*Rise of Meeting* - When *Meeting for Worship* ends, the *Clerk* shakes hands with the person next to them to signal it's over.

*Seasoning an issue* - Quakers make decisions based on a *sense* of the *meeting*. Sometimes an issue is sufficiently important and possibly controversial that it requires "*seasoning*." This process may take months. It may involve gathering relevant facts and speaking to Quakers both within and outside the *Meeting*. After allowing open inquiry and discussion, Quakers believe they are better positioned to come to a spirit-led *sense* of how to proceed. That sense is called the "*sense* of the *Meeting*."



Source: [www.quickmeme.com/meme/r0awm](http://www.quickmeme.com/meme/r0awm)

*"Sense" of the Meeting* - Quakers' decisions are not made by majority rule, voting, or consensus.

Those processes don't factor in the role of *Spirit* in helping to guide decisions. Instead, there is discussion, debate and quiet reflection until a "*sense*" of the *Meeting* emerges. The person/*clerk* guiding the process states what that "*sense*" is and gauges the response. If an individual doesn't agree, they have two options. They may disagree but "*stand aside*" and allow the emerging "*sense*" to prevail, or they can continue to hold out if *Spirit* has *led* them to do so. In the latter case, a decision cannot be made by the group.

*Speaks to my condition or Speaks my mind* - signals agreement with what someone else has said.

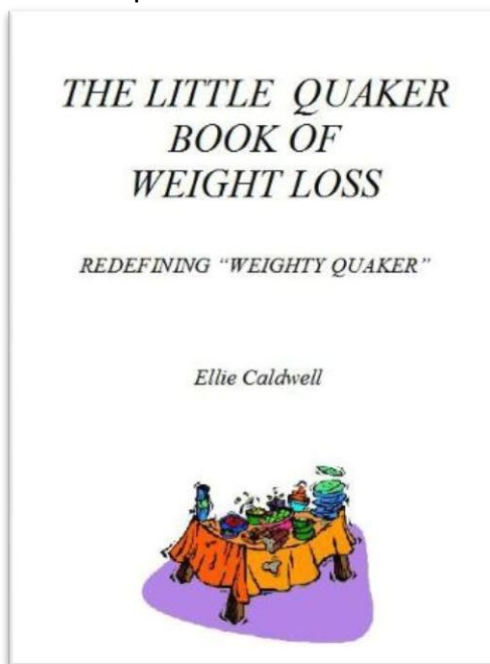
*SPICES* - This is an acronym for the most well-known Quaker *testimonies* or values: Simplicity; Peace; Integrity; Community; Equality; and Stewardship. They largely replace creed, doctrine or holy writings. Over the 400+ years of Quaker experience, there have been a larger number of testimonies. These are the best-known at present.



*Spirit* - Quaker faith and practice are based on the understanding that we can each have a direct experience of the divine. A direct experience of the divine lies at the heart of Quaker faith and practice. Words for it include: *Spirit*, Seed, Living Water, Light, Inward Teacher, or Christ. Quakerism emerged from a Protestant Christian tradition. Some Quakers use Christian terms such as God, Jesus, and Christ. Others do not. There is also a varying degree of interest in the Bible as a source of spiritual truth.

*Stand aside* – Someone may choose to *stand aside* to allow an emerging “sense” of the *Meeting* to proceed, even if they don’t agree with it.

*Threshing session* - A meeting held to discuss a controversial issue without having the intention of making a decision. Unlike a traditional *Meeting for Worship* or *Meeting for Business*, it is acceptable to speak more than once, and there may be more of a discussion of a topic. It’s usually in preparation for a later meeting in which the *clerk* will seek to clarify the “sense” of the meeting.



Source: Amazon.com

*Universalism* – the belief that the *Spirit* speaks to all people regardless of religion or culture; that all religions are humans’ attempts to respond to this *Spirit*. This led early American Quakers to believe the Native Americans and Quakers were responding to the same universal spirit.

*Under the Care of a Meeting*: This expression is often used in conjunction with marriage. People marry by standing up in the *Meeting* without an officiant. They are married “under the care” of the Meeting after they gone through a *clearness* process with a specially-appointed Marriage *Clearness Committee*, and after the *Meeting* agrees that they can support them. Traditionally, Quaker Schools were *under the care* of the Meeting that founded them (Note: that’s not the relationship between *BFM* and Sidwell Friends School. Sidwell Friends School was established first and isn’t under the care of any *Meeting*.)

*Unprogrammed meeting* - A *meeting for worship* in which there is no pastor or individual in charge, no church, no liturgy, no music, and no sermon. Those gathered settle into worshipful silence, endeavoring to listen deeply to their inner sense of Truth

or Love or *Spirit*. The *Meeting for Worship* may take place in complete silence or may include *vocal ministry*.

*Vocal Ministry* - In an *unprogrammed Meeting* like *BFM*, there is no minister. Quakers gather in silence, trusting that by listening deeply, we hear a deeper truth. People may be *led* to rise and speak. This is called *vocal ministry*. In some cases, the person speaking may find themselves either shaking, or feeling a pounding of their heart; this is what initially led to the term “Quakers.” Not all *vocal ministry* is accompanied by this experience. Some messages may speak to you; others may not. If a message does not speak to you, it may speak deeply to others in the *Meeting*.



Source: Online image

*Way opens* - “As *way opens*” is often defined like *continuing revelation*, we will proceed without present certainty of the path, but with the confidence that *Spirit* will lead us.

*Weighty Quaker* – While there isn’t any one definition, a “weighty Quaker” generally embodies the sense of being infused with *Spirit*. They might be wise, compassionate, clear, calm, connected, or service-oriented. Because they embody these qualities, weighty Quakers tend to carry a certain moral authority.

*Worship sharing* – *Worship sharing* usually takes place in small groups. It is usually focused on a specific *query*. Individuals consider the *query* in worshipful silence, and then speak aloud to reflect on their own experiences, feelings, and meanings. It differs from *vocal ministry* in that it is not a vehicle for *Spirit* to communicate. It is assumed that each person will have an opportunity to speak, though no one is required to. Like *vocal ministry*, there is no discussion; simply deep listening.