

Thinking of Joining Our Church?

Maybe the idea of joining our church is something you've thought about for a long time, and just haven't yet taken the step to do it. Maybe it is a relatively new thought. Maybe you've not even thought about "joining" until now. Regardless, we invite you to review this material and prayerfully consider if this is a spiritual family you can call your own. We certainly hope it is!

Membership is a concept we're all familiar with. In fact, chances are high that you are already a member of something. Here are a few examples of memberships you might already have...

- AAA or AARP
- Country Club
- Reward programs
- Costco or Sam's Club
- YMCA or YWCA
- Lion's, Rotary or some other club

"Membership has its privileges" is a catch-phrase for many organizations. There are benefits of being a church member, too, but there's much more to it than a few perks or cheaper prices. Let's dig in to find what the Bible has to say about being a follower of Christ and a member of His Body, the Church.

Biblical Membership is a Commitment to Serve

In many secular organizations, you pay a fee to become a member, and you get some perks or privileges in return. What would happen if we carried that mindset into membership in the church? We would end up with entitlement thinking rather than servant thinking. We'd end up with the very opposite of what Jesus teaches in Matthew 20:25-28:

"You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus calls us to serve one another, just as He came to serve, and this IS a privilege! Not so from the world's perspective, but from the Kingdom perspective those who serve are "great"!

The church offers many ways to serve one another. It is true that you don't HAVE to be a member to serve, but what a joy it is when there is a common bond of commitment, a common desire to see the Lord glorified and people loved in His name. Membership allows us to be a committed part of a larger vision and effort to serve.

Biblical Membership is Finding Your Role in the Body of Christ

When the Bible uses the word "member" it is not in an organizational sense, but as part of a body. Look at Romans 12:3-8:

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

There are two important truths made known here. First, we do not all have the same function, but every part is necessary. You are important to the success of the whole. Without you filling your role, the Body of Christ would be missing what God uniquely designed you to do.

Second, as the Apostle Paul states, "...each member belongs to all the others." We have a mutual concern for and connection with one another because of our common life in Christ. You don't find that in many secular organizations. Church membership is one way of saying, "I'm here for you, and I believe you are here for me." There is a mutual accountability and desire to see each other grow and thrive in this Christian life. Take a look at some of the "one another" passages of scripture to see how this is lived out in the Christian life:

Romans 12:10 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love."

Romans 12:10 "Honor one another above yourselves."

Romans 12:16 "Live in harmony with one another..."

Romans 15:7 "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you..."

Romans 15:14 "...instruct one another."

Romans 16:16 "Greet one another with a holy kiss."

Galatians 5:13 "...serve one another in love."

Ephesians 4:32 "Be kind and compassionate to one another..."

Ephesians 5:19 "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs."

Ephesians 5:21 "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Colossians 3:13 "Bear with each other..."

Colossians 3:13 "...forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another."

Colossians 3:16 "...teach and admonish one another with all wisdom..."

1 Thessalonians 5:11 "...encourage one another..."

1 Thessalonians 5:11 "...build each other up..."

1 Thessalonians 5:13 "Live in peace with each other."

1 Thessalonians 5:15 "...always try to be kind to each other..."

Hebrews 10:24 "...spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

Hebrews 10:25 "Let us not give up meeting together..."

It is clear that God does not intend Christians to be "islands" unto themselves. You can be a member of AAA and not know any other members. Not so in the Body! We are to love and care for one another.

Biblical Membership is a Spiritual and Practical Connection

We'll take this idea of belonging to one another one step further. We are to be "connected" to one another. The Apostle Paul again uses the analogy of the body in Ephesians 4:11-16:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

The last sentence gives us the picture of being "joined and held together by every supporting ligament..." Can you imagine a person with an arm that refuses to be "joined" to the rest of the body? The arm might say, "Well, I just don't want to be tied down," but its separation hurts both the arm and the body. Church membership is a way of declaring your "connectedness" to the Body of Christ.

Biblical Membership is a Spiritual Communion

There is something beautifully unique about the connection we can enjoy within the Body of Christ. It cannot be duplicated anywhere else. It is what Paul called "*koinonia*", a Greek word translated "fellowship" or "communion" in the New Testament. What makes *koinonia* special is the dual bond that exists between members of the Body of Christ with each other AND with the Lord. It is the fellowship of believers in the context of fellowship with the Holy Spirit. It is horizontal and vertical at the same time. You can find horizontal fellowship anywhere someone is willing to sit with you, even in a bar. You can find vertical fellowship with God any time you choose to open yourself to His glorious presence. But you will only find *koinonia* with Christians who gather in the name of Jesus. Look at the promise Jesus gave us in Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

Church membership does not cause this to happen, but it is a public way of declaring our dual communion with the Lord and His people.

How does one become a member of the Body of Christ? Is being a member of a church enough? These are most important questions. What a tragedy it would be if someone had their name on a membership roll of a church and somehow believed that would save them! Let's examine what is involved in becoming a child of God, and a member of the Body of Christ.

Starting a Relationship with Jesus

Put simply, as sinners we are in no condition to fellowship with God, who is holy. In fact, the Bible clearly teaches that “the wages of sin is death...” (Romans 6:23). If we got what we deserved, none of us would have a chance to enjoy life with God in heaven. That scripture, however, does not stop there! It goes on to say, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” What fantastic news!

Jesus' death on the cross was so much more than the cruel end of a good man's life. The very purpose of Christ's coming was to provide redemption for humankind. God's justice had to be satisfied—the wages of sin is death. But it was God's love that sent Jesus to pay the penalty for our sins. “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10). By his death, Jesus opened the way for forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, the hope of eternal life, and the many benefits of God's presence and power in our lives.

This relationship is offered to us as a gift. Think about what that means! Gifts are offered in love, completely paid for, and intended to be received, enjoyed and appreciated. God's grace for salvation is *received*, not earned. In fact, there is nothing we can do to earn or deserve God's gift. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Here is the point: It is not our goodness that makes us a Christian, but God's grace. Ours is but to receive His grace, and His presence, with great thanksgiving and faith!

If you have yet to receive Christ and his gift of grace, here is a model prayer that might help you:

“Dear Lord, I realize that I am sinful and in need of a Savior. Thank you for dying on the cross for me. I believe your sacrifice has paid the penalty of my sin, and I accept your forgiveness and grace. Please come into my life and help me to live in ways pleasing to you. Thank you! Amen!”

If you prayed that sincerely, you are now a Christian, and you have embarked on the most exciting journey of your life! But this is just the starting point! God's plan for you is to help you grow and become a part of His Kingdom work. You are born again; now become His disciple!

Ways God Helps Us Grow

God helps us grow in this new relationship, first and most importantly, by giving us His Spirit. God doesn't leave you to do this in your own strength. Here's how Jesus put it:

John 14:16-18 “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

Secondly, God has provided the Bible as the authority and guide for our lives. Sometimes we call the scriptures the “written Word of God.” It is important to see that God speaks through the scriptures when our hearts are being led and taught by the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit that inspired the men of old to write the Bible is present with you to help you understand it! When the words on the page are combined with the Spirit's teaching and quickening, then you are receiving the Word of God, and that is powerful!

Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Finally, God gave us each other. Christianity is meant to be lived in community. You are not an island! In his wisdom, God has called imperfect but redeemed individuals to live, serve, worship, and learn with one another.

It should be abundantly clear that we are not intended to be “lone ranger” Christians. In fact, the Bible speaks of our being “built together” to be a temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells (Ephesians 2:22). And, as we have already seen, we are called the “body of Christ” made of many members, and connected together to form one body (Romans 12:4-5).

When you accepted Jesus' gift of salvation, you became His child. You are a member of His Body in spiritual sense, but now that must become practical by committing yourself to fellowship with other believers. Church membership is a public way to acknowledge your commitment to the body of Christ, and to both be strengthened and strengthen others in our walk together with Christ. With the help of His Holy Spirit, and the guidance of the written Word of God, we can be assured that we will “...grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

The Local Expression of the Body of Christ

God does not use a cookie-cutter! What an amazing variety we see in God's creation. The same is true in the Body of Christ. There are very enthusiastic and demonstrative worshippers, and there are the quiet, reserved types. There are formal and liturgical followers of Jesus, and those

who value spontaneity and being led by the Spirit. You get the idea; there is a wide variety among those who trust Jesus for salvation and are a part of the Body of Christ. Each expression has value, and we must be careful not to judge the manner of worship when the Lord Jesus is truly exalted.

It should not surprise us when we see groups form around certain aspects of faith that are important to them. We call those groups denominations. They are part of the Body, to be sure, but may look and feel vastly different one from another. You have made choices about where you worship and the church with which you associate. Some of your choices were simply preferences. Some of them were, no doubt, made under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. God knows where you fit the best, and that is where you will most glorify God by serving, growing and pointing others to Jesus.

Every denomination has a history, a specific way in which God moved to bring that group into being. Sometimes the group formed in reaction to the abuses or false-teaching of the time. Sometimes it was a clear and specific call of God to move in a new direction. And sometimes, as is the case with Friends, it is a combination of the two.

The Beginnings of Friends

Friends began in a time of spiritual upheaval and emptiness. The Church of England had become a puppet of the government, and had lost much of its spiritual life and power. Young George Fox became disillusioned with the emptiness he saw in the church. He had tried the advice of many “priests” and “professors” (those who professed to be Christians), but none of their suggestions seemed to help. He went off by himself, fasting, praying, reading his Bible.

I fasted much, walked abroad in solitary places many days. I often took my Bible and sat in hollow trees and lonesome places till night. Frequently in the night I walked mournfully about by myself, for I was a man of sorrows in the time of the first workings of the Lord in me...

As I had forsaken the priests, so I left the separate preachers and those esteemed the most experienced people. I saw there was none among them that could speak to my condition. When all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, oh, then, I heard a voice which said, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition.” When I heard it my heart did leap for joy.

Then the Lord let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition that I might give Him all the glory. All are under sin and shut up in unbelief as I had been—that Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence, who enlightens, gives grace, faith and power. When God does work, who shall hinder it? This I knew experimentally.

My desire after the Lord grew stronger—zeal in the pure knowledge of God, of Christ alone, without the help of any man, book, or writing. Though I read Scriptures that spoke of Christ and God, yet I knew Him not but by revelation. He who has the key did open and the Father of Life drew me to His Son by His Spirit. The Lord gently led me along and let me see His love, which was endless

and eternal. This love surpasses all the knowledge that men have in the natural state or can obtain from history or books. That love let me see myself, as I was without Him. (George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox*. Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 1976, p. 75-83)

Even as he grew in the Lord, Fox shared his new-found experience with Christ with others. In 1652 Fox was “moved of the Lord” to climb Pendle Hill. Fox wrote, “From the top of this hill the Lord let me see in what places he had a great people to be gathered.” The people of England were hungry for something real, and when he preached that one could know and experience Jesus Christ directly, without the aid of priest or ritual, it was like setting a flame to kindling. The fire spread rapidly!

Within six years, the movement had grown to about 50,000 people. Young people, called “The Valiant 60,” traveled all over England, Ireland and Scotland proclaiming the Good News. Missionaries soon carried their message to other countries and beyond the seas.

“Itinerant preaching spread their ideas from the fertile soil of the northern counties to the midlands, eventually reaching London, Bristol, and beyond. Thereafter they crossed the sea westward to Ireland, the West Indies, and North America; eastward to the Dutch Republic, German territories, and Ottoman Empire; southward to France, Spain, and the Italian states. Significantly, women took an active part in these missions and their preaching was defended.” (Ariel Hessayon, *Reviews in History*, Goldsmiths College, University of London)

They also put the Good News into print, earning them the nick-name “Publishers of Truth.” Kate Peters, in her book *Print Culture and the Early Quakers*, estimates that about one hundred Quaker authors had their writings published by 1656, contributing to a total of 291 publications.

Growing Pains

As you might imagine, such rapid growth with little or no organization led to problems that had to be dealt with. First, there was the problem of persecution. Fox, and the early Friends were persecuted and jailed frequently for following their convictions. Charges included blasphemy; refusal to pay tithes; use of plain language; refusal to use titles, bow or remove hats to those who considered themselves socially superior. Traveling without a pass, unauthorized worship, and causing disturbances also got them in trouble. In all, around 14,000 Friends were imprisoned and 400 died in prison or were put to death.

Fox himself was arrested and taken to court more than sixty times, and spent more than six years in harsh imprisonments. It was actually one of Fox’s early run-ins with the law that gave birth to the nick-name “Quaker.” In Derby, England, a judge mocked Fox’s exhortation to “tremble at the word of the Lord” calling him and his followers “Quakers.” The nick-name stuck, and from that time Quakers and Friends have been synonymous (*The Missing Cross to Purity*, website: www.hallvorthington.com).

In 1662, the Parliament of England passed The Quaker Act. This legislation made it a criminal offense for Friends to gather in groups of five or more. In towns like Reading, Bristol and Cambridge, authorities imprisoned the entire population of adult Friends. In Reading, every Friend over the age of 16 was thrown into prison, but the children decided to keep their meeting going. Entry to the meetinghouse was impeded by armed guards and a padlock on the door, so

they found a meeting space inside an empty granary nearby. And there, answering the call of God upon their own hearts, they met for worship (*A Quaker's View*, West Hill Friends website, Portland, OR).

Another outcome of the rapid growth of Friends was the need for accountability and structure. The open format of Quaker meetings gave opportunity for another group, the Ranters, to gain entrance and create disturbance. The Ranters were a sect that believed they were free from all traditional restraints and that sin was an invention of one's imagination. It soon became evident that structure and doctrinal direction were needed. Howard Brinton explains:

“When George Fox was released from his three years' imprisonment at Lancaster and Scarborough in 1666, he found the Quakers suffering severely because of the Conventicle Act (1664) which forbade attendance at any assembly for worship other than those of the Established Church. There were also a number of other serious difficulties. Nearly all the leading Friends were in prison. Fanatics, such as the hysterical women whose adulation of James Naylor had earlier led to public scandal, were bringing the movement into disrepute. The followers of John Perrot were teaching that the essence of religion required no outward frame of reference. This party held that even fixed times for public worship were man-made devices. To counteract such tendencies toward religious anarchism a group of leading Friends issued a letter asserting the authority of a meeting to exclude from its fellowship persons who persisted in rejecting its judgment... This letter, by definitely subordinating individual guidance to the sense of the meeting as a whole, marked an important step in Quaker development” (Howard Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*, page 101).

After his release from prison in 1666, Fox went about setting up Monthly Meetings as executive units in the Society of Friends. The Monthly Meeting is still the primary gathering of members through which the Lord's wisdom is sought for decisions affecting the church.

The Influence of Friends

As Friends lived out their faith, certain patterns appeared. Over time, these became known as the “testimonies” of Friends. Fox wrote: *“Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone; whereby in them you may be a blessing, and make the witness of God in them to bless you.”*

Equality

They became convinced that all people are created equal and each person has the opportunity to know God (Galatians 3:26-28). This conviction led to several areas of social reform, including the effort to end slavery and humane treatment of prisoners. William Penn's Frame of Government, which emphasized government by the will of the people, was an important step toward democracy and the forming of our Constitution.

Simplicity

This is “simply” to say that we should live in a way that focuses on what is most important, and is not caught up in the latest fads and frills. Friends believe that a person’s spiritual life and character are more important than the quantity of goods he possesses or his monetary worth (Luke 21:34). Friends also believe that we should use our resources, including money and time, in ways that are most likely to make life truly better for yourself and others. This implies a stewardship of life (2 Corinthians 8:13).

Peace

If all are created in God’s image, are loved by God, and can know God, Friends found their conscience would not allow them to participate in war. The peace testimony is not always cut and dried. Friends continue to wrestle with how to live at peace with all people. Some have registered as conscientious objectors and served in alternative service during times of war. Others have served in the military in non-combatant roles. Still others have felt led to bear arms as a means of keeping the peace. The common thread is that these responses have been formed out of personal struggle to be faithful to the Spirit of God in the midst of complex political and social settings (Isaiah 2:3-4; Romans 12:18-19; Romans 13:4).

Integrity

This is the belief that we should live true to ourselves, true to God, and true in dealing with others. It means consistency of inward and outward living, following through on what you agree to do, and dealing honestly with others. It is not only about telling the truth—it is applying ultimate truth to each situation. For example, Friends believe integrity requires avoiding statements that are technically true but misleading.

When many Quakers became successful in business, they set a fixed price for goods on sale rather than setting a high price and haggling over it with the buyer. Quakers believed that it was dishonest to set an unfair price to begin with. By having fair fixed prices, even a child could be sent to the store to make a fair purchase.

Quakers also refused to “swear” to tell the truth. They believed, as the Bible states, that a simple “yes” or “no” should suffice (James 5:12; Matthew 5:37). If one swears to tell the truth, will he not be held to truth at other times? Because of this Quaker conviction, today’s courts allow us to “swear or affirm” to tell the truth. It may seem a small thing, but it is part of what it means to be people of integrity.

It is impossible to accurately know how far-reaching the influence of Friends has been. As they lived out their faith and the “testimonies” above, changes in society were inevitable. Here are just a few examples:

- a. Prison reform
- b. Reform of the treatment of the mentally ill
- c. Promotion of education
- d. Business reform, including the use of price tags
- e. Equality among races and gender
- f. Abolition of slavery (and the “Underground Railroad”)
- g. Influence upon politics and governments

- h. Testimony of direct relationship to God through Christ, without the need for priest or ritual

What Makes Us Different?

The belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, along with the high view of the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures are areas we hold in common with most other believers. There are ways, though, that Quakers believe God has called them to think and act differently. Here are some of those ways:

Difference in the Way we Do Business

We do not vote, but rather wait and listen to the Holy Spirit for direction. We see hints of this in Acts 15:28. When faced with how to incorporate believing Gentiles into what had previously been a Jewish movement, the early church sought the Lord, and then reported: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements...” This goes right back to the idea of *koinonia*, fellowship with one another in the context of fellowship in the Holy Spirit. If Christ is present through His Holy Spirit, shouldn't we trust Him to make his will known to those who are in fellowship with Him?

We should say that this is the ideal. Our business meetings fall short of the ideal when we allow personal agendas, time pressure, or other issues to distract us from achieving communion with and direction from the Holy Spirit.

How does this work practically? We have a clerk whose primary responsibility is to present business items recommended for approval. The clerk opens the floor for people to share their sense of what God would have us do. This is different than asking for opinions. If the clerk discerns direction, he/she will then state what he/she believes to be the “sense of the meeting” and will ask for the meeting's approval. There are times when the sense of the meeting does not come easily. The sense of the meeting is not the same as consensus. Consensus means everyone must agree. The sense of the meeting is the conviction that the Lord has spoken and the meeting can go forward even if not everyone agrees. In such cases, individuals who disagree are asked if they would be willing to “stand aside” in order for the meeting to proceed. Usually, there is willingness to do so, a humble acknowledgement that they do not have a corner on the truth.

Is this system of doing business perfect? No. As long as we live in the world where selfishness and sin abound we will make mistakes in discerning the will of the Lord. It is, however, an attempt to go beyond a majority vote. And we believe the Lord honors the desire to have Him lead us.

Differences in Practice of our Christian Experience

You may have noticed subtle differences from other churches in the way we worship. We often have a sharing time, or praise and prayer time, during our worship services. This is an outgrowth of the Friends belief and scriptural teaching that all believers have opportunity to be used by God to encourage, teach, admonish, and strengthen the faith of others. Look at 1 Corinthians 14:26:

“What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.”

It is clear from scripture that it takes more than just the pastor to build up a church! We believe that all believers are ministers. We have different gifts, so not all are preachers, but all are ministers.

You may also notice that we are not liturgical. That is, we don't follow a written liturgy or form for worship. A written liturgy is not bad (look at the Psalms!), and there may be times when we will use some form of responsive reading or the reading of scripture aloud together. We believe, however, that if we lean too hard on a written form for worship, we may not leave room for the moving and leading of the Holy Spirit. That would be tragic!

Our church tends to be less formal than some, and probably more formal than others. This is not based on a biblical conviction, but is rather just our particular style and culture. There should always be freedom within our “style” to experience and accept those who come from a different flavor of Christ-centered worship. We can learn from one another, but generally people gravitate toward where they are most comfortable. That is why some churches are more formal, and some are less. Some are more demonstrative, and some are less. God is pleased when His people worship Him from their hearts, and not according to man-made traditions or expectations.

Difference in our View of Sacraments

Friends have a unique and very special view of the sacraments. A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual reality. Most denominations would agree with that definition. There are two ways that Friends view the sacraments differently than many Christians:

1. Friends do not see the sacraments as a means by which one receives grace for salvation; some Christians do. Some believe that one is saved by faith AND baptism. Or, that the bread and juice of the Lord's Supper is necessary for communion with the Lord. Friends do not see that in scripture. What we do see is that salvation and communion have to do with faith in Christ, not a ritual. Friends have put this belief into a statement that makes a lot of sense: “If we have Christ, nothing else is necessary. If we do not have Christ, nothing else will suffice.”
2. A second way Friends view sacraments differently is that we do not limit the ways or the things God can use in a sacramental way. All of life can be sacramental! So, the Lord's Supper can be sacramental, but so can a meal shared with your loved ones at home. It can be a reminder that Jesus provides the physical bread we put on our tables, and is also the “bread of life” we need for our lives to be fulfilled. The water of baptism can be an outward symbol of the “washing” we receive from the Lord, but so can a beautiful snow that reminds us we are made “whiter than snow.” The Latin “sacramentum” is a thing set apart unto God as holy. Shouldn't all of our lives be set apart unto God as holy?

Friends have viewed the “ordinances” of baptism and the Lord's Supper as symbolic reminders of the inward working of God's grace. The water of baptism and the bread and grape juice of the Lord's Supper can be meaningful symbols and outward testimonies of faith, but are not necessary for salvation or communion with God. Some Friends choose to avoid the use of the physical elements altogether, focusing entirely upon the spiritual baptism and communion. They

do this, not because they think it is wrong to use the symbols, but in order to avoid confusion about what is most important, and to preserve the Friends testimony that it is through faith in Christ ALONE that we are saved.

Farmland Friends takes a more open stance regarding the sacraments or ordinances. We teach that it is through faith alone that we are saved, and that true communion is spiritual and inward, but we also allow for the use of outward symbols. The bread and juice remind us of Christ's broken body and blood poured out for us that makes true communion possible. Baptism in water reminds us of the spiritual cleansing that was accomplished inwardly the moment we put our faith in Christ for salvation. We are careful to keep the focus on what Christ has done for us, rather than upon a ritual, but we recognize that the outward symbols can be meaningful for the individual as well as a witness for one's family and friends. They also provide an opportunity for the community of believers to celebrate together in faith and life.

A Bit about Structure

Friends are organized into Yearly Meetings, Quarterly Meetings and Monthly Meetings. As the names imply, these are periodic gatherings for worship and business. Here's a brief description of each, and how Farmland Friends is connected:

Yearly Meeting: Our church belongs to Indiana Yearly Meeting. The Yearly Meeting is made up of about 50 like-minded and Christ-centered churches in Indiana, western Ohio, and eastern Illinois (and soon, Kentucky!). The Yearly Meeting gathers once a year at Quaker Haven Camp for worship, business, fellowship and teaching. In between the yearly sessions, a Representative Council and Executive Committee (made up of committee clerks and officers of IYM) meet to give attention to important details of our shared ministry. We have appointed members who represent our church at IYM sessions and Representative Council, and several of our members serve on IYM committees. Together, we support missions, Quaker Haven Camp, and White's Residential and Family Services. The Yearly Meeting also helps local churches with consultation, pastoral searches, training, and financial grants and loans.

Quarterly Meeting: Farmland Friends is a part of the Winchester Quarterly Meeting. In the early years of our Yearly Meeting, Quarterly Meetings were of great importance for communication, decision making, fellowship, worship and the carrying out of ministry. In recent years, with advancements in communication and transportation, the Quarterly Meeting is not as needed as it once was, and has become primarily a time of fellowship and worship. There are some appointments to the Yearly Meeting committees that come from the Quarterly Meeting level, but most business is handled on the Yearly Meeting level now.

Monthly Meeting: This is our local church's official meeting for business. While anyone can attend, and even participate in discussion, it is the members of the church (or Monthly Meeting) that actually make the decisions. Monthly Meeting begins with a devotional thought and prayer. We then hear a reading of the last month's minutes, reports from our treasurer and pastors, and committee reports. When recommendations are brought, there is usually opportunity for discussion or further prayer. When the Clerk discerns a decision can be made, he/she states the "sense of the meeting" and asks for approval. When there is not a sense of agreement, the issue may be tabled for further discussion and prayer. Our Monthly Meeting typically meets on the second Wednesday evening at 7 p.m. and usually lasts about an hour-and-a-half. The Clerk of

our Monthly Meeting may have a “called meeting” if an issue for consideration warrants a meeting at a different time.

Why Membership?

If you’ve been attending for a while and are involved in the fellowship and ministry of our church, you may feel that you are already a member. Perhaps you have wondered if there are any strong reasons to join our church officially. We’re glad you have that sense of belonging! There are reasons, though, to take the next step and become an official member of our church. Here are a few:

1. Membership is an opportunity to take part in the major decisions our church makes through our Monthly Meeting. Your voice and discernment are needed for decisions to reflect the consideration of the whole Body of Christ. Without you, we might miss an important insight or sense of direction that God is giving you.
2. Membership allows you to take leadership. Most of our ministry teams and committees welcome attendees as well as members. The clerks of committees and the officers of our church, however, are to be members.
3. The requirement of membership for leaders and officers helps to protect our church from those who want to lead us astray from the gospel and values of our faith. In Acts 20:28-30 Paul warned the Ephesian leaders to “keep watch over yourselves and all the flock” because there would be “savage wolves” who would try to come in to lead them astray. While we want to have open arms to all, we also know that Satan will try hard to disrupt and divide. Membership helps us protect the flock.
4. Membership allows for greater participation in our Yearly Meeting. It is exciting to see what God is doing locally, and even more exciting to know that He is at work beyond just our church. Being a member allows you the opportunity to serve on the Yearly Meeting level as well as in our local Friends Church.
5. There are legal reasons membership is important. The officers of our church, and the Trustees, who must be members, carry out the will of our church in legal matters, such as the signing of legal documents, the purchase of property, etc.
6. Membership, like the sacraments, can be a meaningful outward expression of your love and commitment to this part of the Body of Christ.
7. Membership says, “You can count on me.” It is a great way to live out your commitment to Jesus in the context of the local church.

How Does One Become a Member?

Becoming a member is actually a fairly simple process. Here are the steps that are typically part of becoming a member:

1. Fill out the application form included with this information, and give it to either a Pastor or the clerk of Ministry and Oversight.

2. A member of Ministry and Oversight or a Pastor may contact you to see if you have any questions, and to ensure that you are in unity with the beliefs and values of our church.
3. Ministry and Oversight will recommend your membership to Monthly Meeting for approval.
4. After approval, you will be welcomed into membership, usually on a Sunday morning. You won't be put on the spot to say anything (unless you desire to). We often extend the "right hand of fellowship" to new members, welcoming them with a handshake.
5. Your name will be added to the membership rolls of our church.

Are You Ready?

If you are trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior, feel unity with the Body of Christ at Farmland Friends, and are ready to say, "This is where I belong," then you are ready for membership. We would love to have you join the team in an official way! See the membership application on the next page, and get the ball rolling!

Application for Membership

Friends receive into adult membership those whose faith in God and Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord is manifest in their lives and who are in unity with the teaching of Christian truth as held by the Religious Society of Friends.

On the basis of this statement, accepting Jesus Christ as my personal Savior and Lord, declaring it to be my purpose to devote my life to His service and to follow His teachings, agreeing to observe the rules and practices of Friends, and to be loyal to the interests of this Monthly Meeting and to Indiana Yearly Meeting, I do hereby make application for membership in

Farmland Monthly Meeting of Friends

Date _____

Signed _____

Approved by the Monthly Meeting on Ministry & Oversight and recommended to the Monthly Meeting this _____ day of _____, _____.

Signed _____

(Clerk of Monthly Meeting on Ministry & Oversight)