

# Attending Palo Alto Friends Meeting

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*Photo: Rik Panganiban*

We are glad that you came to worship with us. Each week the experience as we gather is different, so we encourage you to come several times to get a more complete experience of our worship. If you wish to get to know us better, talk to us following Meeting for Worship, peruse our library, attend our Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, sign up to receive our newsletter, join our e-mail discussion list, or volunteer for one of our committees.

**To receive or to discontinue the newsletter by e-mail**, please visit <http://lists.pafm.org/listinfo.cgi/newsletter-pafm.org>. To submit items by e-mail to [newsletter@pafm.org](mailto:newsletter@pafm.org)

**Please join our Meeting's e-mail discussion list.** To subscribe, visit <https://mailman.stanford.edu/mailman/listinfo/pafriends>. To post a message to the list, send the message to [pafriends@lists.stanford.edu](mailto:pafriends@lists.stanford.edu).

We hope you will come again. Whether or not you return, we are glad you stopped by on your spiritual journey.

## Worship

Our worship is unprogrammed, which means we have no ordained or paid clergy, no planned ministry. Meeting for Worship in the manner of Friends is a corporate activity distinct from meditation, adoration, confession, or prayer, but often contains elements of each. We all sit as equals in the meeting waiting for divine revelation. Like all others, you bring something unique to our worship.

*Isaac Pennington has written (c. 1679): "Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another... and helping one another up with tender hand."*

Speaking in worship: Since God is accessible to everyone, anyone may feel the call to ministry, led by the Spirit to speak. We let the Holy Spirit minister to us and through us as it will. Be obedient to the inward prompting, whether it is to speak or to remain silent. Spirit-led spoken ministry does not come from our thoughts, no matter how moving they may be; it contains an insight that comes through the speaker from a deeper Source beyond oneself. We do not rely on prepared or scholarly content, restrict ourselves to any particular religious language, nor do we formulate strident, dogmatic declarations on theology or politics. We simply offer our part of the truth, as it comes to us. Sufficient time is left after messages, so that listeners have adequate time to absorb and ponder the ministry. We listen with a loving spirit for the truth within the spoken message (even if it is disturbing). After vocal ministry, many search for some special meaning applicable to their own lives. One does not respond to or debate a prior offering. If you are called to ministry, rise if you are able to stand, and speak in a loud, clear voice, so that all can receive your gift.

## Queries and testimonies

**Queries** are questions we ask ourselves to aid in the process of spiritual discernment. Advices and Queries are in the newsletter each month. They often point toward standards of faithful living to which we aspire and are a good way to get to know our values. Though the Quaker movement still draws much from its Christian, 17th-century English roots, all are welcome.

**Testimonies** flow from our belief that there is that of God in every person. Quakers seek to improve social conditions, practice good stewardship, simplicity, and integrity. We traditionally oppose war and seek justice and equality. Quakers have a commitment to community and to living our values.

Although Quakers have no fixed creed or dogma, the Yearly Meetings of the Society of Friends publish a book called ***Faith and Practice***, which we hope can serve as a spiritual guide. *Faith and Practice* includes both queries and testimonies to spark individual reflection. Copies are available in the office.

*“Love was the first motion, and thence a concern arose ...”*  
*John Woolman, 1763.*

Wilmer A. Cooper describes the testimonies as “the moral and ethical fruit of the inward leading of the Spirit . . . that must be translated into action.”

Quakers maintain that Worship can happen “whenever two or three are gathered together”; it is not confined to special buildings, special days, special words, or special rituals.

## Quaker organizations

***Palo Alto Friends Meeting*** is a ***monthly meeting*** (which meets for business monthly), which is part of the larger family of the ***Religious Society of Friends (“Quakers”)***. Our monthly meeting is one of 24 meetings in the region that are part of the ***College Park Quarterly Meeting***. That meeting is in turn part of ***Pacific Yearly Meeting*** (often referred to by its initials ***PYM***), which meets every summer. The monthly meeting is the base unit of the Society of Friends. Individual membership resides in the monthly meeting.

Yearly meetings are often affiliated with larger Quaker organizations. Of these, the most common are Conservative Friends, which use unprogrammed worship with a more universally Christian theme; Evangelical Friends International (EFI), which has pastors, programmed worship, and an evangelical outlook; Friends General Conference (FGC), which is an association of mostly unprogrammed yearly meetings; or Friends United Meeting (FUM), which predominately includes yearly meetings that use programmed worship. PYM has chosen to be independent from these organizations.

## Conducting business

***Monthly Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business*** is held on the second Sunday of each month, following light refreshments. All are welcome. We make decisions by seeking unity among those present. Unity is different from consensus. Unity, as Quakers use the term, is collective decision-making led by the spirit. Responsibility for good order falls to all of us.

Committees report to Monthly Meeting for Business. Recommendations and seasoned concerns are brought for consideration and action. The Clerk is responsible for good communication among committees. A Recording Clerk takes notes or minutes, which are published in the newsletter.

The process requires an ability to truly listen and change . . . and will lead to truth, unity and love.

## Caring for one another without clergy

While all of us provide mutual care, three committees address the pastoral and ministerial functions of the meeting. Care & Concerns is responsible for the welfare of the members and attenders and listens to personal concerns. It also appoints ***clearness committees***, small groups of people sitting together to help someone achieve clarity on a life decision, as needed. It handles membership matters, marriages and memorials, contacts ailing members, and offers support to families.

Worship and Ministry Committee endeavors to strengthen the spiritual life of the Meeting and to deepen the spiritual lives of individuals within the Meeting community; it is responsible for the Meetings for Worship.

Care for others: There are those among us who have allergies, often severe. Please limit scented products (artificial fragrances in perfumes, colognes, after-shaves). We must avoid certain food products (peanuts, shellfish) in the School House because of the allergies of children attending Friends Nursery School. A number of people in our Meeting are especially sensitive to communicable diseases such as colds, sore throats, and the flu. When you plan to attend Meeting please consider your health and the health of others. Also, please keep this in mind if you are responsible for bringing children to the Meeting who may be ill or recovering from an illness.

## Who's caring for the space and money?

The Buildings and Grounds committee oversees maintenance issues. Our annual budget of about \$40,000 is used to maintain our facilities, to fund regional associations of Friends, to support good causes and to do the work of our committees.

The Finance Committee and Treasurer report quarterly to the Monthly Meeting for Business. Their report details how we manage our funds. Donations are welcome in the office, by mail, or in the box above the guest book table. We do not collect money during worship but send out an annual appeal each November.

Our facilities are occasionally made available to non-Quaker groups that share our principles. One such permanent resident is the Friends Nursery School, which has occupied our front building (the "Schoolhouse") for over 50 years. Outside groups using meeting facilities go through the clerk or a committee for approval; ongoing use goes through Meeting for Business. Materials on our bulletin boards and in the foyer are provided by committees or through the clerk.

## Children at Meeting

The children's program (called ***First Day School*** in accordance with Quaker tradition of numbering the days of the week from Sunday) occurs at 10:30 during the time of Meeting for Worship. We pay the people who supervise play for toddlers and pre-schoolers. Volunteers lead religious education programs for elementary and middle-school children. School-aged children usually join the meeting for the last 15 minutes of worship. Teens join adults in meeting for worship about half the time, and on other days conduct their own business.

Childcare during meeting for business: During monthly Meeting for Worship on the Occasion of Business, childcare is provided for all age children from 12:15 to 1:45 pm in the Old Meeting House. The regular staff for the preschool program provides the childcare. Advance sign-up is not required, but children should be in the program by 12:30. (If no children show up, the staff leave at 12:45.)

## Library

Members, attenders, and visitors are welcome to check out materials from the library, which includes books, pamphlets, newsletters, Meeting records, videotapes, audio tapes, and many other resources. Record your checkout on the card provided in the book and leave it in the file. If you are not listed in the directory, leave your phone number on the card, as well. The current catalog is available in the “Resources” section of the meeting website (<http://www.pafm.org>) as a 10 MB PDF file. The Library Committee also recommends books for reading, especially to newcomers.

*Pendle Hill is a place in England where George Fox received some enlightenment. It is also a Friends study center in Pennsylvania. They publish Pendle Hill Pamphlets, a series of essays and addresses on matters of interest to Friends. See the library.*

## Activities

The following activities are either ongoing at present or have been sponsored by the Palo Alto Friends Meeting in recent years:

***Hymn singing:*** In our Meeting, a number of people who enjoy singing hymns gather by the piano from 10:00 to 10:25.

***Lunches:*** On the fourth Sunday of the month, everyone is invited to a lunch provided by the Meeting, prepared by a committee.

***Adult education sessions:*** A study group on Early Quaker Writings or bible study is held at 9 am on 1st, 3rd, and 5th Sundays. No preparation is necessary. We occasionally offer Quakerism 101, a course on the foundations and testimonies of Friends. Watch for other events.

***Buildings & Grounds workdays:*** Every few months, the Buildings & Grounds Committee schedules a workday at which members and attenders can help with the upkeep of the Meetinghouse and its grounds.

***Community service:*** We help prepare an evening meal for the homeless one Monday each month from 3 to 6:30pm at First Methodist Church at Hamilton & Webster Avenues. Monthly, we collect cash donations to be given to the Ecumenical Hunger Program (EHP). EHP provides resources to families in need in East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, and Palo Alto.

***Friendly Eights:*** We periodically hold small potluck groups to help members and attenders get to know one another more informally.

***Harvest Festival:*** An annual fundraiser to benefit Friends lobbying is on the last Saturday of September; it includes a rummage sale, crafts, food and music.

***Hotel de Zink:*** Unhoused Palo Alto residents sleep in our Meeting room during the month of December. People sign up to bring food.

***Meeting retreats:*** We hold occasional retreats for the meeting, often at Hidden Villa, a farm/hostel/camp founded by Quakers Frank and Josephine Duveneck, or at Ben Lomond Quaker Center. All retreats welcome newcomers and spouses.

***Midweek worship:*** 6 P.M. Wednesdays, for 45 minutes. Worship sharing at 7.

***Peace and Social Action:*** Our P&SA committee serves as the focal point for the concerns about social action and peace. See the bulletin board for an idea of the range of concerns the meeting carries.

***Unity with Nature:*** The Committee has discussions, environmental service, outings.

***Worship Sharing for Caregivers:*** Open to anyone caring for a loved one of any age.

***Mindfulness Meditation:*** 7:15-8:30 AM, Wednesdays. Includes both Buddhist meditation practices and Christian contemplation.

***Stanford Quaker Activities:*** In recent years, several different activities have been planned to reach out to Quakers at Stanford. E-mail [quakerfriendsjoin@mailman.stanford.edu](mailto:quakerfriendsjoin@mailman.stanford.edu) to be added to the e-mail list for announcements.

## Getting involved

Meeting has numerous opportunities for you to get to know people in smaller groups and to join our community in learning, sharing, working and serving. As an all-volunteer organization, the leadership of our community is spread widely, so it may be difficult at first to figure out whom to approach to get involved. Here are some starting points. The nominating committee may also be helpful to you if you want to volunteer, even if you have no idea what you might do. The list of committee members is posted in the office.

The Meeting is also involved in numerous local, state, national, and international projects and issues, all of which provide opportunities for newcomers to bring their faith into action in the world. The Meeting's Community Service Committee, Peace and Social Action Committee, and the El Salvador Project can help you make connections to these activities.

## Glossary

**First Day** means Sunday, and the other days of the week following in sequence. Thus Fourth Day is Wednesday. Quakers traditionally refer to months by number as well, starting with **First Month** (January). This use came from early Quaker objections to the names of the days of the week and the months of the year being named after pagan gods or Roman emperors.

**AFSC: American Friend Service Committee** does outreach on Quaker concerns, including war and disaster relief, peace, justice, and equality.

**BLQC: Ben Lomond Quaker Center** is a local conference & retreat center that hosts programs and camps. <http://www.quakercenter.org>.

**FASE: Friends Association on Services to the Elderly** operates Friends House, a retirement community in Santa Rosa.

**FCL: Friends Committee on Legislation** is a lobbying group that works on behalf of Quaker concerns in Sacramento. [www.fclca.org](http://www.fclca.org).

**FCNL: Friends Committee on National Legislation** is a lobbying group in Washington DC that works on concerns from Friends meetings. [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org).

**FWCC: Friends World Committee for Consultation** is an association of Friends from yearly meetings around the world that supports communication among the various branches of Quakerism. <http://fwccamericas.org/>

**QUNO: Quaker United Nations Office** is an NGO that serves as our presence at the UN and sponsors mid-level quiet diplomatic encounters.

**SFC: Sierra Friends Center** is a retreat center in Grass Valley that offers camps [www.sierrafriendscamp.org](http://www.sierrafriendscamp.org) and "the Woolman Semester" for high school Juniors and Seniors: <http://woolman.org/>