

New expressions of Quaker community

Experimenting with new and radical ways to connect
with each other, those around us and the wider world



New expressions of Quaker community

This resource is for meetings interested in being a more creative community; who are open to exploring new ways of being a Quaker community; and who are seeking radical or fresh ways of engaging with local communities outside their meeting house door.

If we were able to pare back to what is really necessary, might it be possible to explore different ways of being together? Might we be able to come together in ways that may be more open to seekers and enquirers, whilst still being authentically Quaker? Is it possible to experiment with alternative shapes and ways of meeting together that could make Quaker worship and community available to those who might currently find it inaccessible? Might it also give vitality and a renewed sense of purpose to our meetings, helping us to focus again on the things that are essential?

The contents of this resource are:

- Introduction, guidance and ways of working
- Session 1: My journey into Friends
- Session 2: Understanding ourselves and the communities around us
- Session 3: Shaping possibilities for the future
- What Next? Ideas and links

Please note that this resource is not designed to help a meeting resolve differences.
Please contact Quaker Life if you are seeking help with difficult issues in your meeting.

Produced in October 2014 by Quaker Life, acknowledging the work done by John Gray.

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Introduction

The following example may give you an idea of the kind of creativity this resource aims to encourage. Quaker Life recently received a communication about Quakers. This is not the original, but it went along these lines:

Dear Friends House,

We are a group of parents of young children (under 2 years old) who meet once a week on Wednesday mornings for company and support. We meet in our homes, and whilst we make time for chat and sharing experiences we also try to have about 15 minutes 'quiet time' during each get-together. Obviously it can get a bit tricky with the children crawling around our feet, but we're able more or less to keep going for the 15 minutes – we recognise the importance of silence to help us reconnect with ourselves and each other each week.

What we would like to ask you is, can we call ourselves Quakers and be part of your community?

Yours sincerely, etc.

Imagine your meeting receiving this request from a group of people in your town or local community. How would your meeting respond? Might it respond, "Yes, you can be Quakers if you come along to meeting on Sunday morning at 10:30"? Or would your meeting find another way – a surprising or creative way – of including these families in your community, even though it may not be the most familiar way of 'being' a Quaker community?

Many churches and faith groups are exploring new forms of worship and community that might reach out to a wider variety of ages, outlooks and experience. What can we learn from them? They're finding that it's not the theological tradition or individual leadership that marks the difference between a thriving or struggling community. Rather, it is the strength of the church's community, its willingness to:

- have a clear vision for growth – a deep reflection, commitment and a desire for experiment and renewal
- change and adapt, to try out new things – a "let's give it a go" mentality
- self-reflect and continually learn
- actively engage with children and teenagers
- actively engage with those outside the existing church community
- welcome and follow up with visitors – bringing a sense of belonging and caring.

Have a look at the findings of research conducted by the Church of England's Church Growth Research Programme (see www.churchgrowthresearch.org.uk/report). Could your meeting learn from these insights?

Quakers in the 1650s began with their spiritual experience. They then developed relevant structures and forms of worship suitable for their time to help them share and live out this experience.

Imagine you are creating new ways for those outside your Quaker community to encounter Quaker worship and build community together. What for you would be the essentials of Quakerism that might form the building blocks of these experiments?

What new ideas – new expressions – could Quaker meetings find to allow the core, the seed of Quaker community, to flourish in the local community and the wider world? The three sessions in this resource pack are designed to help your meeting begin a journey to explore answers to these questions.

Guidance for using this pack

New expressions of Quaker community offers three 1.5-hour sessions. Whilst a whole meeting might want to commit to doing all three sessions together, in other meetings there will be a smaller group of Friends who want to use the resource as a study pack.

To ensure your meeting has a sense of ownership of the process, it is important that the meeting knows about and supports any group of Friends wanting to work through the resource. This could happen through discussion at an elders' meeting, outreach committee or local business meeting.

It is essential to advertise the process widely and inclusively, without assuming who may or may not be interested – perhaps in notices after meeting for worship or a note in your monthly newsletter. You may also need to approach specific individuals to encourage them to think about getting involved.

This resource is suitable for groups of four or more. If you have more than a dozen people wanting to take part, you will need to adapt or shorten some of the exercises to make sure all participants get the chance to share ideas and comments.

The reflection and discernment outlined in this resource will likely require continuation after the three sessions. The journey may throw up unexpected discoveries; tenderness and consideration may be needed along the way.

Guidance for facilitators

Sessions are likely to work well if there are two co-facilitators who jointly prepare and lead the group through the sessions. As you prepare for the sessions think about the following:

How you will work with your co-facilitator

- Who will be responsible for what (e.g. preparation, facilitation, coordination)?
- How will you support one another?
- How will you work together?

The environment you want to create

- Have you thought about the space you will work in? Is it a safe one where participants will feel happy to explore the topics, share their experiences and work together?
- Is it the right size for the number of people in the group and for the exercises you have planned?
- Where will participants sit? Is there a variety of seating to suit those with back or mobility problems?
- Do you have tables for people to work at if necessary?

The group you are working with

- How old are they? Is there a greater number of adults than young people, or vice versa?
- Are they all from the same meeting? Do they know one another well?
- For what reasons might people be coming to the sessions? What are the needs of participants? How will you facilitate in light of these?
- How will you balance the needs of different participants? For example, how will you cater for both vocal and quiet participants? And what about participants who learn through discussions as opposed to those who learn through activities? Think about how the composition of the group might affect pair work and group work.

Planning your sessions

Each session begins with ideas for an opening activity. This is followed by a range of creative activities and questions for discussion in small groups. Each section concludes with ideas to enable individual reflection. You are encouraged to adapt and add to the sessions as you see fit to meet the interests or experience of your group.

- Make sure you have at least one planning session with the other facilitator before each session.
- Gather together the resources each session needs (sticky notes, pens, flipchart paper, etc.).

Reviewing the session

Seek feedback from the participants, either at the end of a session or after the process has finished. Ask people what they have taken or learnt from the session and whether there is anything they would like to do differently next time.

After the session, as facilitators, reflect together on how the session went:

- Did everyone have the opportunity to speak and be listened to?
- Did everyone have the opportunity to reflect?
- How did the activities encourage people to:
 - think about what is at the core of being a Quaker community?
 - think about their relationship to their local meeting?
 - think about the meeting objectively?
 - imagine creative or radical ways forward?



All of these activities can be adapted so that children, young people and adults can do them together. Children and young people can be very creative and imaginative, and they have a direct interest in the life of the meeting.

If you have children and young people in the meeting but don't feel that an all-age group is possible, the sheet overleaf gives you some ideas for *New expressions* activities suitable for children and young people's groups.

Working with children in a children's group

Obviously much will depend on the age of the children and young people in the group. The following are ideas for activities and questions – do adapt them to suit the ages and abilities of those participating:

- a) Draw a picture or make a collage to show what is special or important about a Quaker meeting. An activity from issue 87 of *Journeys in the Spirit* might be helpful:
Go to www.quaker.org.uk and search for 'Journeys in the spirit 87'.
- b) Questions for discussion:
 - What do you think your friends in your street or at school would like about Quakers?
 - What could the meeting do to help more of your friends connect with Quakers in a new or different way?
- c) You could ask what activities might be exciting to take part in. Ask the children if they think having children's groups at different times of the day, or on different days of the week, would help. Or how about doing new or different things?

It might help to seed the discussion with ideas for new activities involving a wider group of people, such as Bridport Meeting's 'Junior Peace Time': www.bridportquakers.org.uk/stop_press_3.htm. Or how about a craft day or heritage day?

Seeking the views of everyone in your meeting

One way of engaging the whole meeting in this process (in addition to the three sessions and if working separately with the children) is to create an ongoing visual dialogue in the lobby or other public room in your meeting house (if you have one). The meeting can then offer valuable ideas and comments that the group can take into account during the three sessions.

Tape two or four sheets of flipchart paper together. Draw a tree with lots of branches. Cut out plenty of 'leaves' using pale green paper, or make sticky notes available. Invite people to write their answers to the questions below on their 'leaves' and to stick them on the tree.

The questions are:

- What is vital or fundamental to being a Quaker community? (Emphasise that this is more than just "What do I like?" or "What is important to me?" but "What is core/essential?") Friends might even do a bit of historical reflection about this. What did being a Quaker community mean to early Friends? How have Friends built community in the past when they have found themselves in new and unfamiliar places?
- What do you think local people might be interested to discover about Quakers? Or, what is there in our life, witness and spiritual tradition that might be a point of connection with groups or individuals in the local community?
- What ideas do you have about opportunities that might exist or be created to share an experience of Quaker worship with others?

Leave your tree to grow its 'leaves' over a two- or three-week period, bringing it to the meeting's attention as much as possible. You will need to plan this process so that the meeting's responses can be fed into your *New expressions* group.

The aim of this first session is to help the group share ideas and experiences with trust and openness.

Exercise 1 (20 minutes)

Sharing our stories

Explain that this first exercise invites each participant to share a story of one milestone (perhaps an individual encounter or something heard or read) that was especially significant on their journey into Quakers.

Say that we'll do this part as worship-sharing. Explain what this means: people are free to pass; leave a good few moments' silence between each person's contribution; this isn't an exercise for asking questions or getting into discussion; each contribution is carefully listened to in silent worship.

If there is a long silence during the process, ask a question such as "Who would like to go next?". Asking the question in this way affirms the right to pass.

Encourage people to be fairly brief, especially if it is a large group. The exercise should take about 20 minutes. If you have a group of more than nine or ten people, you may want to divide into two smaller groups so that each person has more time. Make sure the two groups sit apart from each other to make the listening in each group easier.

After the round, if there is time and it feels appropriate, invite any responses from the group about what it was like to take part in the exercise.

Exercise 2 (35 minutes)

What is the core of Quaker community?

The aim of this exercise is to help people articulate what lies at the core of being a Quaker community.

Two options for this exercise are offered:

Option A

Step 1:

Invite people to sit together in pairs. Give each person a pen and 3 or 4 sticky notes. Invite them to have a conversation to help them answer the question, "What is a Quaker meeting for?", or, to put it another way, "What are the fundamental principles and purposes that underpin a Quaker meeting?". Write answers on the sticky notes.

Stress that it is one answer per sticky note, so each person is likely to write several. Leave a pack of sticky notes in the middle of the room so that anyone can help themselves to more if they want to.

When everyone is clear about the exercise, allow five minutes for the conversation.

Step 2:

In advance of this session, draw a circle in the middle of a piece of flipchart paper (or, for larger groups, use two pieces of flipchart paper taped together).

Place the sheet of paper in the middle of the room and invite the group to bring their chairs and re-form the circle around it.

Explain that the inner circle on the flipchart paper represents what they think is fundamental or essential in terms of being a worshipping Quaker community. Outside the circle are the things that are helpful or valued but not essential. Each person will have the chance to place their sticky notes on the paper according to whether they think their answer is 'essential' or 'not essential'.

The point of this exercise is not to get everyone to agree. The value of the exercise is in having the discussion and disagreement together, and in seeing what the answers show us about what we think are the essential or fundamental elements and core purpose of a Quaker community.

When everyone is ready, invite someone to come forward with one of their sticky notes. It will probably work best if there is a lot of turn-taking, rather than each person in turn putting down all their sticky notes at the same time. This means there can be more discussion.

If time is short you may need to curtail some discussions.

You can let this exercise run until there is about ten minutes of the session left. Once all the sticky notes have been placed, the group could discuss what they have discovered from the exercise.

Option B

Continuing the reflective process from 'My journey into Friends', invite a second round to answer the question, "What is a Quaker meeting for?". Or, to put it another way, "What are the fundamental principles and purposes that underpin a Quaker meeting?".

Responses can be discreetly captured by the facilitators and written up on a flipchart after the round is finished. Invite a brief discussion on the responses – similarities, differences, anything the group would add to the list.

Then pose the question, "If we were starting from scratch in our city, town or community, and using nothing but these fundamentals, what might the Quaker meeting look like?". For example, who would be attending, when and how might they be worshipping, how would they be living their witness within the local community?

Let the conversation run until ten minutes remain in the session.

Closing the session (10 minutes)

Invite people to take part in a closing round, completing the sentence, "A thought or a question I'm taking away with me is...", followed by a short period of closing worship.

Preparation for next time: invite group members to take time before the next session to research or think about the needs, opportunities and make-up of the communities local to the Quaker meeting. This could be a general invitation, or individuals could agree on specific steps they'll take as part of this research process.



The aim of this session is to help the group generate a sense of the strengths and challenges within their local Quaker meeting, and to pool their knowledge about the people and groups within the meeting's local area and identify gaps in their knowledge.

Introduction (10 minutes)

Opening worship

Opening round: facilitators should choose a short but meaningful way of 're-gathering' the group. For example, devise a round to answer the question, "How are you as you start this session?", or ask each person to complete the phrase, "A positive conversation or encounter I had today was when...".

Remind the group of the discussions from the last session – perhaps the 'My journey into Friends' stories they shared and the 'What's essential?' exercise they did together.

Say that today's session is about looking inward and then looking outward. We'll look first at our own local Quaker community, its strengths and challenges; and then at the communities around us and the links we have with them. The purpose is to give us more information, to help us in the next session to decide what we might do together as a meeting in the future.

Exercise 1 (20 minutes)

Our meeting – our strengths and challenges

Draw a line down the middle of a piece of flipchart paper and head one column 'Strengths (things we're good at)' and the other 'Challenges (things we find more difficult)'. Invite the group to say what they think should go on either side of the line (or you can invite answers first to the 'Strengths' before turning to the 'Challenges').

As this is a brainstorm activity, discussion about particular answers will happen afterwards – the aim is first to hear what ideas people have to put on the flipchart.

When it feels like you have enough answers, invite the group to continue as a whole-group discussion. Questions for the group could include:

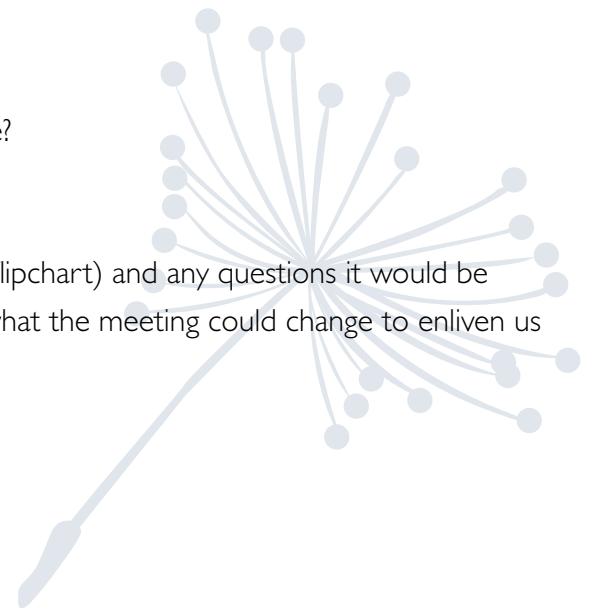
- What do we notice about the answers in each column?
- What is it about our Quaker community that enlivens us, and what drains our energy?

- What could we do *differently*, without necessarily having to do more?
- What could we stop doing?

Summarise the discussion (perhaps by capturing the main points on a flipchart) and any questions it would be useful to come back to in the next session (for example, ideas about what the meeting could change to enliven us more).

Exercise 2 (30 minutes)

Looking at the communities around us



The aim of this exercise is to help the group understand more about the network of formal and informal groups and communities outside the formal Quaker worshipping group.

As a way of introducing the exercise, you could use or adapt some of the following information:

Quaker Life is aware that one way of bringing more energy into a meeting is to create better connections to the outside world. It brings in new ideas as well as new people with their enthusiasm and different ways of looking at things.

Many of us feel that Quakerism has something vital to offer those seeking meaning or spiritual community but who do not find a home within mainstream churches. Britain Yearly Meeting is learning more and more about effective outreach and its relationship to the shared life of our meetings. A review of Quaker Week 2011 noted the strong connection between our spiritual lives, a spiritually grounded, engaged Quaker community, and effective outreach.

Meetings engaging with children, young people and families, a 2011 report written by Simon Best at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, noted a rigidity of thinking within some Quaker meetings about how worship is regarded, particularly all-age worship and the timing of worship. The report threw down a challenge by contrasting modern Quaker attitudes to those of the 1650s, which generated forms of worship relevant to the seekers of the time.

So one of the central purposes of *New expressions* in our local meeting is to look beyond the members of our own worshipping community and discover the communities we know of and which of them we are already connected to.

Stage 1 (5 minutes)

Give each group member a pen and six A5-sized sheets of paper. Put a pile of spare sheets in the middle of the room for those who need more.

Invite the group to identify the significant communities or groups of people (whether formal or informal) in their local community. These should include non-Quaker groups who use the meeting house and organisations to which the meeting sends formal representatives, such as Churches Together. The group might come up with types of people or the names of organisations or buildings. So you could ask them to give examples such as asylum-seekers, other church or spirituality groups, art groups, the local Council for Voluntary Service, breakfast or after-school clubs, youth clubs or forums for older people.

An additional option: invite everyone to write down a non-Quaker organisation, community or group engaged in the community that they admire. What is it about them they admire? What could they learn from them?

Use one sheet per answer. People could work on their own or you can invite them to work in pairs.

When people have finished, ask them to draw a dot in the top right hand corner of any of the groups or communities with which they already have a personal connection (for example, if they are members of the group themselves or are users of their services). Ask them to think too about those groups they are aware of with whom they have no connection and whose work and membership they need to know more about.

Stage 2 (25 minutes)

Say that we're now going to organise our responses to create a community 'map' on the floor.

Invite one person to choose one of their sheets and put it on the floor in the middle of the circle, reading out the name of the group as they do so. If anyone has a similar group, or one that is connected, they can read out the name of their group and place it next to the first one to create a small cluster.

Keep inviting people to read out their sheets until all of them have been placed on the map. You may need to move them around as the map takes shape.

Once the map is complete, invite people to look at it and to say what it shows them. Discussion questions could include:

- What does this tell us about what we know about our local community?
- Are there groups to which we're already strongly connected? Are they represented amongst our meeting community?
- Are there groups missing from our map? How will you know this? (Sheets can of course be added to the map at any time.)

- How could we create transformational relationships with the groups on the map? (Transformational means that the relationship is two-way and that through the relationship we are open to our own growth and change.)
- What provision might we make to meet the needs of the community as we perceive it?

Note: During the discussion you may need to affirm that the map is only a subjective one, but if the meeting wanted to it could find ways in the future of making the map more comprehensive and accurate. At the end of the session you might want to keep the map or take a photograph of it for future reference.

In advance of the next session invite participants to reflect on how we might engage with (groups in) our community in a new way. What possibilities are there? What resources do we have/might we need? What might we do next?

Closing exercise (15 minutes)

Either in worship-sharing or in pairs, and then feeding back, complete the following statement: "As a result of today's session, a question or idea I'm holding about our meeting community is...".

Note: In this final exercise make sure the group sticks to worship-sharing as it is a way of closing the session rather than opening up a new discussion.

Finish with a short period of closing worship after the last speaker.

Lastly, thank people again for coming and explain that next time we will be using the thinking from this and the previous session to consider our meeting and what new expressions of our Quaker community we might create together.



Session 3: Shaping possibilities for the future

The aim of this session is to draw together the threads from the previous sessions, and to help the group consider what's next – as a meeting and/or group taking this *New expressions* thinking forward.

Introduction (10 minutes)

Opening worship

Opening round: “How are you as you start this session?” (or a sentence-completion go-round: “A highlight of my day has been...”).

Remind the group of the work done in the previous session. This is probably most easily done by showing them the flipchart of the meeting's strengths and challenges and the communities 'map' that the group created together. Remind them also of the discussion afterwards and any ideas or suggestions that came from the exercise.

Exercise 1 (15 minutes)

Writing our meeting's reply to the letter in the Introduction section of this resource pack

Dear [name of your meeting],

We are a group of parents of young children (under 2 years old) who meet once a week on Wednesday mornings for company and support. We meet in our homes, and whilst we make time for chat and sharing experiences we also try to have about 15 minutes 'quiet time' during each get-together. Obviously it can get a bit tricky with the children crawling around our feet, but we're able more or less to keep going for the 15 minutes – we recognise the importance of silence to help us reconnect with ourselves and each other each week.

What we would like to ask you is, can we call ourselves Quakers and be part of your community?

Yours sincerely, etc.

Invite people to sit together in pairs or threes and make sure one of them has a pen and paper. When everyone is settled in their small groups read out the letter.

Allow ten minutes to enable the groups to draft their reply. Explain that the priority within the time is not to produce a finely crafted letter, but rather to identify the main messages each group would want to include in the letter. If they can get to writing out the sentences, that's all the better.

After the ten minutes invite each group to read out its letter, or, if they haven't finished drafting, to explain the letter's main points.

After hearing each letter, have a general discussion about the replies. Questions for the group could include:

- What was similar about our replies? What were the differences?
- Are there any other ways in which we could include these families in our local meeting community? Does anyone have any unusual or very different ways of engaging with them?
- How would we know if there really were groups like this in our community?
- What is it that makes us Quaker?

Exercise 2 (20 minutes)

Holding our meeting in the light

This is a guided reflection exercise. Invite group members to sit quietly. After a few moments read out the following, allowing silences between each group of sentences:

- 1 As we sit here, we can imagine in our mind's eye our Sunday morning meeting for worship. Take a moment to visualise the worshipping group and yourself sitting there amongst the meeting.
- 2 Hold the group in the light. Imagine the sense of healing power and love that flows within a deeply gathered meeting.
- 3 As you visualise our worshipping community, what are your feelings about it? Are your feelings positive or negative? How are we doing as a community? Do we feel strong together? Are there challenges we're facing? Do we need to change or grow? Are there sources of energy and enthusiasm we could nurture?
- 4 If there is one change you could make within this Quaker community, be it how we are together or how we engage with the wider world, what would that change be? Imagine you have one wish for yourselves as a group: what would your wish be?
- 5 And what one thing could you do, large or small, to help that change begin to happen?
- 6 To end, go back in your mind's eye to the Sunday morning worshipping community. Imagine the feelings of love and support within the meeting are growing and flourishing, and touching each one of you.

Then, in worship-sharing, take time for each person to share their hopes for the meeting's future and ways in which the meeting as a community could flourish within the local communities around it.

Exercise 3 (30 minutes)

Where do we go from here?

It is important to stress that this is only the beginning of a process – one that involves risk, cost and experiment. The group has an opportunity to think now about ways forward, even if the ideas or possibilities are not yet fully formed in people's minds. The group should plan to meet again to allow for more individual reflection and discernment.

Group discussion about taking forward the work we've done together in these sessions

This can be an opportunity to reflect on the connection between what we have explored together and what we do next. Can we identify the things that are core to being a Quaker community and the things that are more about structure and tradition? What new possibilities might that open for us in our worship and witness as a Quaker community? How might we connect and share our experience with others – perhaps those we identified in our 'map' of the local community?

Questions could include:

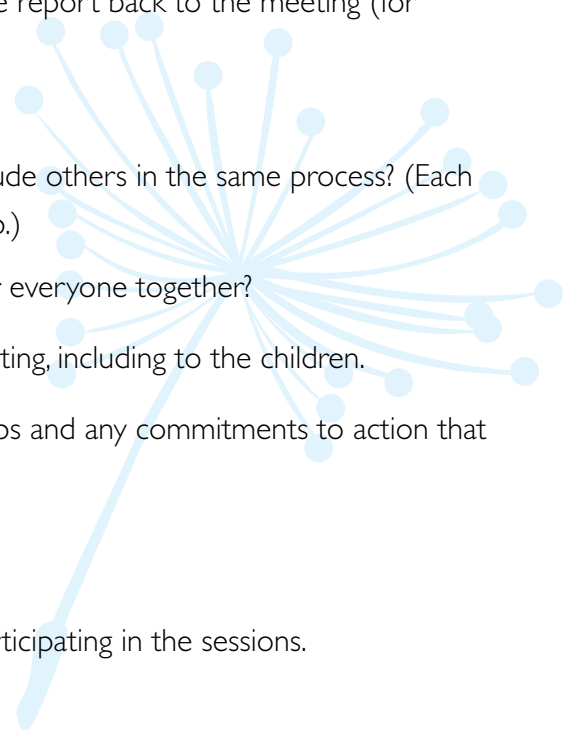
- What ideas do we have as a result of these sessions? What should we report back to the meeting (for example, to elders, business meeting, or the meeting as a whole)?
- What is each of us prepared to do, or would like the meeting to do?
- Is there interest in meeting again as a group? If so, how could we include others in the same process? (Each person could invite someone else from the meeting to join the group.)
- If we want to meet again, who will take the necessary steps to gather everyone together?

Make sure the group agrees on how it wants to report back to the meeting, including to the children.

To close the discussion, the facilitators should summarise any agreed steps and any commitments to action that people have made.

Closing worship (5 minutes)

Finish with a short period of closing worship. Lastly, thank people for participating in the sessions.



What next? Ideas and links

Depending on how far your group progressed within the three sessions, people may want to meet again to reflect on the experience of the sessions and to make more definite plans (who, what, by when?) for taking ideas forward.

Another possibility is that the sessions have gone well, but the outcome is that any future action will be up to the facilitators to lead if they wish to. In this eventuality the facilitators need to discern carefully what they want to take on and how they will seek the meeting's support.

You may wish to be in touch with other meetings who have also used this resource via the Quaker Life Network. Contact qlnetwork@quaker.org.uk for more information.

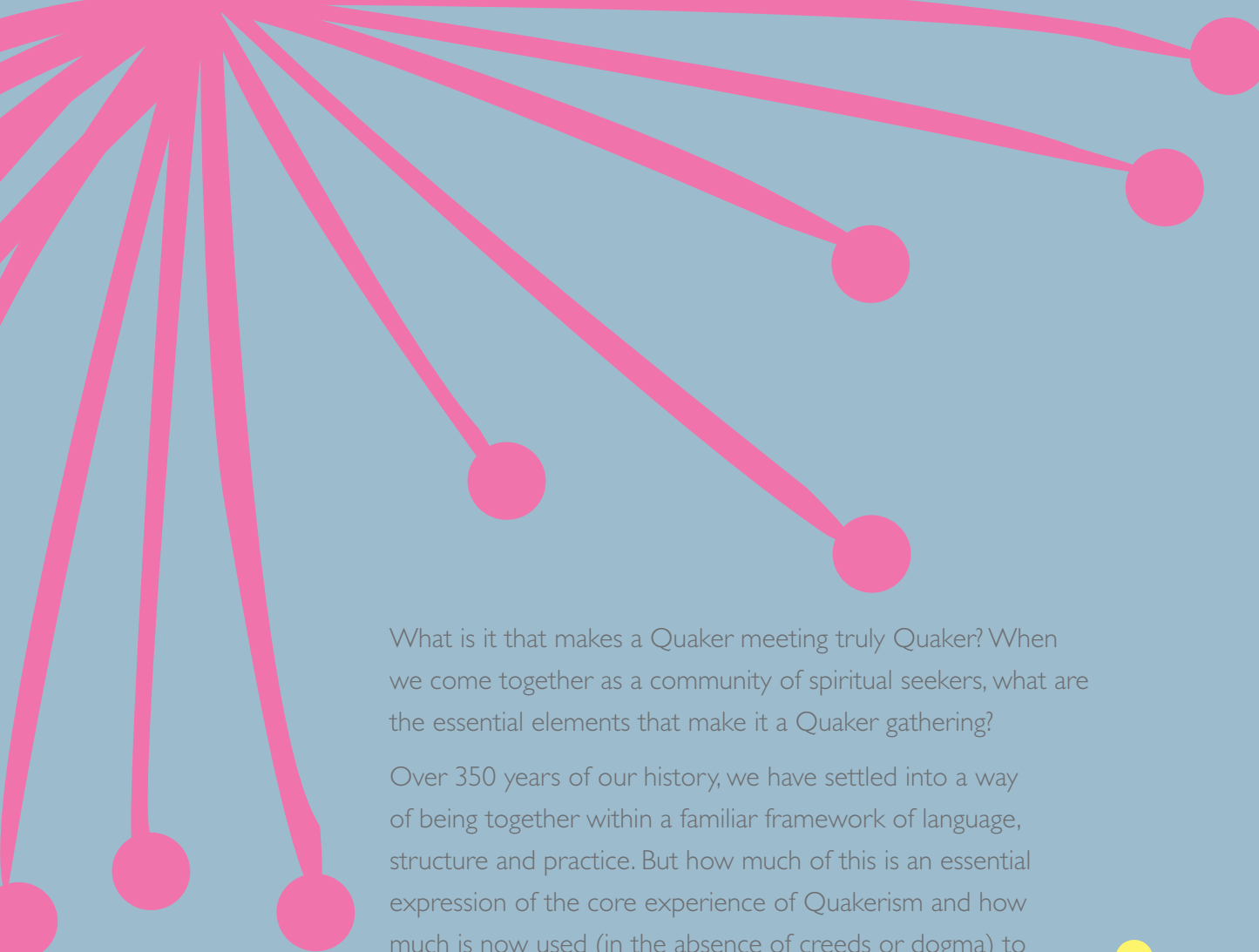
There is more information about working with children and young people and all-age communities at www.quaker.org.uk/cyp.

This resource forms part of a larger learning and development resource produced by Quaker Life and Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre called *Being Friends Together*. This contains many more tools for deepening the communal worshipping and witnessing life of Quaker meetings and will be available from January 2015: <http://together.woodbrooke.org.uk>.

Produced in October 2014 by Quaker Life, acknowledging the work done by John Gray.

For additional copies or further information email qladmin@quaker.org.uk or write to Quaker Life Admin, Friends House, 173–177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ.

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What is it that makes a Quaker meeting truly Quaker? When we come together as a community of spiritual seekers, what are the essential elements that make it a Quaker gathering?

Over 350 years of our history, we have settled into a way of being together within a familiar framework of language, structure and practice. But how much of this is an essential expression of the core experience of Quakerism and how much is now used (in the absence of creeds or dogma) to define ourselves as a community? Do some of our forms and structures feel exclusive to others and inhibit us from responding freely to the Spirit?

If we were able to discern what forms, structures and practices are really necessary to live out and express our core Quaker insights in the contemporary world, might it be possible to discover new ways of being together? Might these new ways be more open to seekers and enquirers, whilst still being authentically Quaker? Are there ways of being together that could make Quaker worship and community available to those who might currently find it inaccessible?

This resource is designed to help meetings to engage with these challenging and exciting questions and we hope it will help Friends to explore what new shapes and possibilities this might open to us. We hope too that it might also give vitality and a renewed sense of purpose to our meetings, helping us to focus again on what it means to be Quakers and Quaker communities.



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