

# Restructuring Local Meetings

Emily Provance

[epro Vance@hotmail.com](mailto:epro Vance@hotmail.com)

[quakeremily.wordpress.com](http://quakeremily.wordpress.com)



# Assessing Where We Are

How certain do we feel about our purpose as a meeting?

Do we have thriving neighborhood ministries?

Have we been covering our routine expenses using our savings?

Do we feel enthusiastic and passionate about our meeting?

Is it hard to figure out who's going to do the work?

Are more Friends attending worship now than five years ago? Ten years ago?

What's the average age of Friends in our meeting?

How is religious education going—for adults, for teens, and for children?



# What is a healthy meeting?

Vitality

Can discern  
God's call

Viability

Can act on  
God's call

If small changes aren't  
enough...



How might a  
local meeting be  
restructured?

Executive meeting

Preparative meeting

Worship group

House church

Online meeting

# Executive meetings:

- Have the same legal and Quaker status as a monthly meeting, but they meet for business "as necessary," usually less often than monthly.
- Meeting for business less frequently takes some pressure off Friends and allows for more spiritual energy to go toward other purposes.
- But to be effective, it must be accompanied by other changes, such as focusing on one ministry and letting others go, by hiring staff, by giving up the building, etc.

# Preparative meetings:

- Are under the care of a monthly meeting and join that meeting for business meetings; the preparative meeting does not require its own clerk (or the role is different); it may not have a complete committee structure; it does not own property; usually, it is not a legal entity and does not hold separate funds.
- Becoming a preparative meeting means a lot less work for Friends in the local meeting.
- But it does not mean *no* work, and the preparative meeting must find a monthly meeting under whose care it can be. If the preparative meeting keeps its building, that means the monthly meeting accepts responsibility for the building.



# Worship groups:

- Are under the care of a monthly meeting and do not hold separate membership; they do not have clerks or committee structures; they do not own property; they are not legal entities and do not hold funds. They meet only to worship and socialize.
- Becoming a worship group is a good solution for groups that are only led to worship and build community together.
- Worship groups do not write minutes or initiate business (though individual members can as part of the larger monthly meeting). Worship groups must find a meeting to take them under their care.

# House churches:

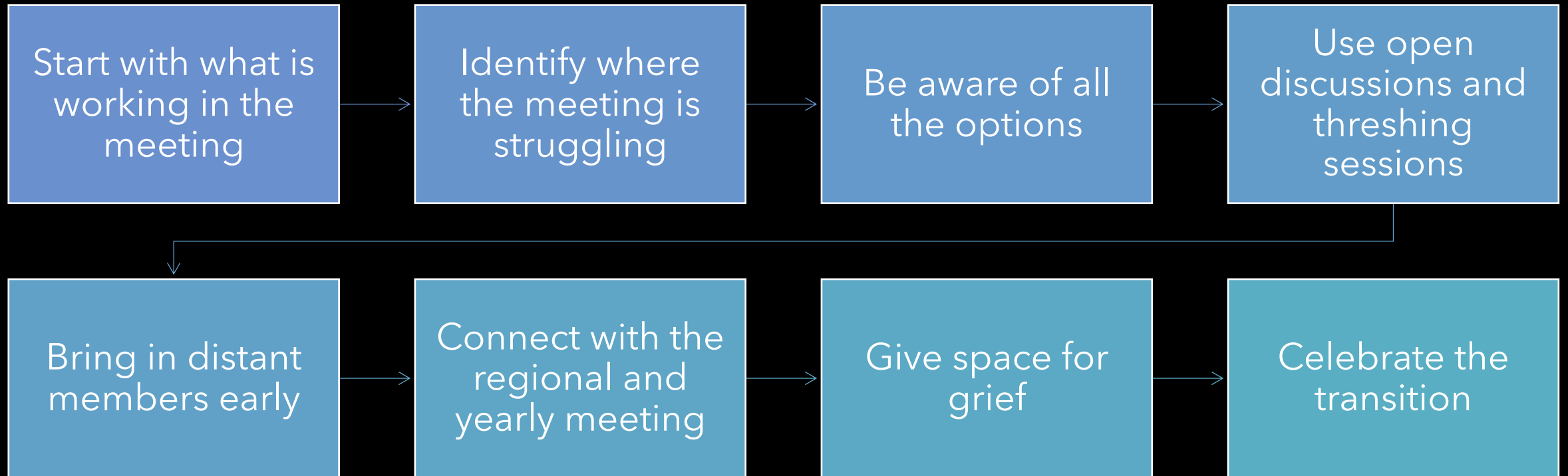
- May be monthly meetings or worship groups or etc.; gather for worship and other activities in private homes.
- A house church often builds powerful community, and it does not need its own property or much funding.
- Houses churches are limited in size, and they can be difficult for newcomers to find and join.

# Online meetings:

- May be monthly meetings or worship groups or etc.; do not have a geographic location; gather online only regardless of purpose.
- An online meeting is accessible to Friends who may not be able to access in-person meetings. They can be flexible about structures and may require no funding.
- The nature of an online community is different from a physical community. Because the meeting is not geographical, Quaker affiliations may become confusing or less relevant. Neighborhood ministries often are not possible.



# Making the Transition



# Questions for Discussion

- What have you heard today that feels relevant to your meeting or a meeting you know?
- What feels missing from this conversation so far?



# Additional Resources

- ["Faithful Always: Transitions and Endings for Quaker Meetings and Churches Near the End of the Life Cycle"](#) - a downloadable PDF; look especially at the article "All or Nothing" on page 14
- ["The Life Cycle of Meetings"](#) - a themed issue of New York Yearly Meeting's *Spark* newsletter; stories of meetings in a variety of stages of their life cycles making various sorts of transitions
- ["Guidance for Meetings"](#) - texts and queries specifically crafted for online and hybrid meetings, published by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting
- ["Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God's Way Forward in Decision Making"](#) - an excellent book about discernment processes in general and how to move forward as a meeting through difficult decisions