

The Role of Regions

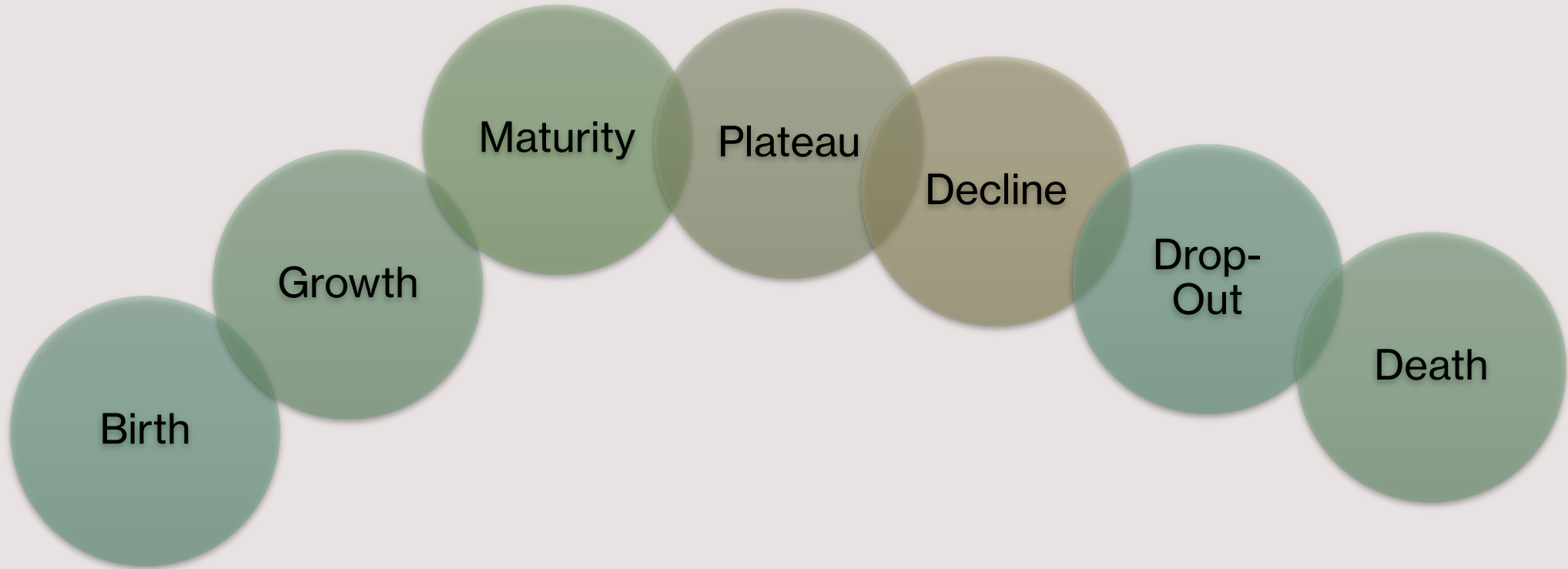
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The Life Cycle of Meetings



How do we recognize a meeting that may be near its end?

- * **Essential functions:** a local meeting holds worship, does business, holds membership [if appropriate in yearly meeting context], and conducts marriages and memorial meetings. Can the meeting do these things?
- * **Changes in size:** the number attending worship is not an indicator, but shifts in that number are. Is the average attendance significantly lower than it was five years ago?
- * **Age of Friends:** the average age of people attending (not the average age of members) can be a helpful indicator. Is the average age of Friends attending over 65?
- * **Mutual care:** this refers to physical, emotional, and spiritual care, within reasonable boundaries. Does the meeting care for its members and attenders?
- * **Ministry outside the walls:** part of the call of a local meeting is to follow God's leadings to have some form of impact beyond itself. Does the meeting have any form of ministry beyond worship and mutual care?
- * **Vitality:** a vital meeting is one in which God's presence is felt. Is this meeting vital?
- * **Viability:** a viable meeting is one that can meet its financial and property-related obligations. Is this meeting viable?

Ghost meeting: a meeting that exists legally or technically but meets for worship rarely or never. It may hold membership, own property, and/or have financial assets but probably is not actively attending to those things. A ghost meeting may not be capable of discerning its own future, but that does not mean that no one cares about its future.



Accompaniment
and relationship-
building

Discernment
support

Practical or
financial support

Property
transitions

Restructuring the
meeting

Laying down the
meeting

What does
the meeting
need?

Spiritual Dynamics

God's leadings can always be heard (if we are able to listen).

If possible, the meeting discerns its own future.

We don't usually experience leadings to do things we've never heard of as possibilities.

Emotional Dynamics

Friends will move through a grief process.

Expressing emotions usually comes before action.

More people care about the meeting than are immediately obvious.

Practical Dynamics

Property is a practical, emotional, and spiritual concern.

Hire a lawyer and check establishing documents.

Preserving the meeting's history matters to the future and to living Friends.

What is this experience like for the Friend outside the meeting – the accompanier/midwife?



Trust comes first.



It's a lot of work.



There may be gaps between your discernment and the meeting's discernment.



You can build a team, and it doesn't have to be who the book says.



Making transitions normal in the abstract can help.



You can't pour from an empty cup.

Related available resource: *Faithful Always*



Questions for Discussion

- * Do you know what your book of discipline says about struggling meetings?
- * What feels most intimidating or difficult about this work?
What feels hopeful?

Additional Resources

- * [“Faithful Always: Transitions and Endings for Quaker Meetings and Churches Near the End of the Life Cycle”](#) – a downloadable PDF
- * [“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
- * [”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
- * [The Good Friday Collaborative](#) – an ecumenical organization that supports closing congregations
- * [Toward the Better Country: Church Closure and Resurrection](#) – not written for Quakers, but true stories and examples of congregational closing processes
- * [Ending with Hope: Resource for Closing Congregations](#) – includes various chapters that will be helpful for specific populations, like rural meetings or historical meetings
- * [Transitions: Making Sense of Life’s Changes](#) – not about congregations but change more generally
- * [The Soul of the Congregation: An Invitation to Congregational Reflection](#) – recommended for Friends looking for a less practical but deeply spiritual and reflective approach to working with congregations