

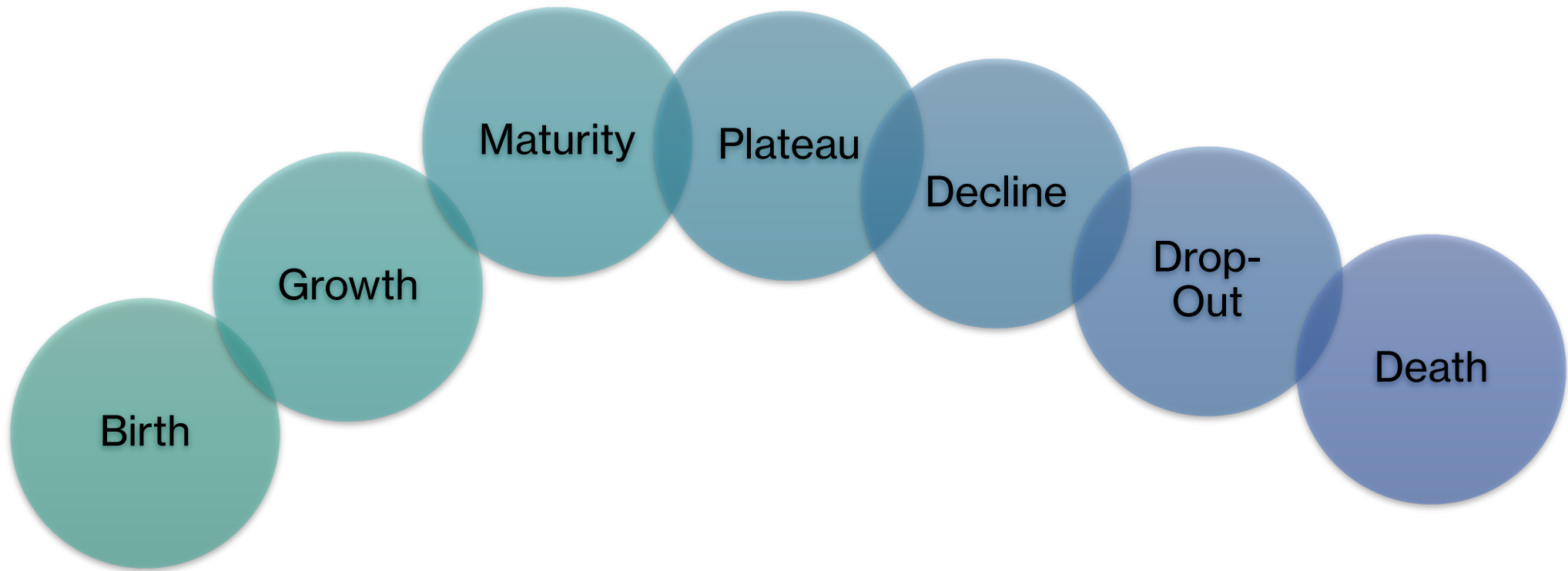


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The Role of Yearly Meetings



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



Endings



Neutral zone



New
beginnings

Transitions

Simplifying Committee Structures: The Toolbox

- Focus on people, gifts, and leadings
- Think about tasks, not roles
- Committees, working groups, task groups, volunteer roles, and staff (released ministers)



Sharing, Repurposing, and Selling Buildings



Assessment (of building and of neighborhood)



Spiritual/emotional factors related to physical space



Options: stay and share, stay but sell, stay and negotiate, transition and then move, sell and move



Keeping discernment grounded

**How might a
local meeting
be
restructured?**

Executive meeting

Preparative meeting

Worship group

House church

Online meeting

What could merging meetings look like?

- One meeting comes under the care of another, possibly as a worship group.
- Two or more meetings become preparative meetings under a single monthly meeting but continue to have separate worship, facilities, and legal identity.
- Two or more meetings become preparative meetings under a single monthly meeting and continue to have separate worship *but* share facilities and a legal identity.
- Two or more meetings combine to become a single monthly meeting, worshiping together and sharing property and a legal identity as a single unit.

Laying down the meeting is...

Not a failure,
because
every
meeting ends
eventually.

An occasion
for grief and
honoring the
life of the
meeting.

An
opportunity
to think about
legacy.

One way to
respond to
how God is
calling us.

Statistician	A Friend who tracks data of any kind, possibly including number of members, age of members, attendance at worship, number of visitors, financial records, births, deaths, etc.
Recording Clerk	A Friend who writes minutes reflecting the sense of the meeting either in business meeting or committee meetings.
Recorder	A Friend who tracks changes in membership for a meeting, including births, deaths, acceptance of members, release of members, and transfer of members. This Friend may also track personal information such as addresses, phone numbers, and birthdays.
Historian	A Friend who tells, writes, reads, remembers, or records in art forms the stories of the meeting, most often as narrative (not data).
Treasurer/Bookkeeper	A Friend who maintains the financial records of the meeting.
Archivist	A Friend who stores various types of meeting records or submits them for storage elsewhere, primarily for the sake of historic preservation.

Record Keepers

The record keeper can:



Report observations and trends



Pose good queries to the meeting



Research how changes have been handled before



Provide data

The record keeper can:



Tell the stories: “the record of our spiritual journey responding to the presence of God in our history.”



Place the transition in context, both historical and future-oriented, and in the wider world of Friends



Create avenues for Friends’ stories to be recorded



Propose ways forward that honor the meeting’s essence and history

How might trustees initiate an adaptation in the meeting?



Notice changes that are happening in the meeting, especially related to viability



Articulate the changes truthfully but without pressure



Be prepared to tell the story several times before Friends respond



Be specific and honest about the consequences of inaction



Remember that the meeting discerns its own future

How might trustees support the discernment about an adaptation in the meeting?



Suggest helpful outside resources in a timely way



Research a little bit ahead of the meeting's progress



Tell the historical stories of the assets



Honor Friends' grief



Maintain trust (with open communication, including to distant Friends)

How might trustees act on the discernment of Friends about an adaptation in the meeting?



Hire professionals



Connect with other Friends to get a sense of how they have handled similar situations



Ask if help is available through a council of churches or interfaith group



Report on your work from multiple perspectives: (1) data, (2) logical progression, (3) emotional/historical story, (4) spiritual journey.



Honor your own experience and the experiences of other trustees

The Role of Regions

Most books of discipline give the responsibility of supporting struggling meetings to regions, if the book of discipline acknowledges struggling meetings at all – which many don't.



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.

Statistics

Who has been attending these consultations?

**763 registrations from
272 individuals from
148 local meetings.**

Friends need help, but
no yearly meeting has
to do this alone.



Resurrection
**is not the same as
resuscitation**

The Role of Yearly Meetings

When the region is not functioning, the yearly meeting will have to step up with either direct support or (even better) assistance with networking.

Do regions need strengthening? Or is it time to lay down some regions?

The Role of Yearly Meetings

Just talking about restructuring, merging, laying down, simplifying, etc. as normal – and telling the stories of meetings who have done these things – can help mitigate feelings of guilt or shame.

Some local meetings will need financial assistance to transition, especially if they're navigating legal and/or property difficulties that require professional advice.

The Role of Yearly Meetings

Yearly meetings that are able can offer workshops, programming, conversation circles, etc. that are open to Friends from anywhere. *This benefits everyone.*

Yearly meetings themselves have life cycles, and nearly all in North American and Europe are past the maturity and plateau stages and now in decline. The concepts of simplifying, restructuring, and merging are equally relevant to yearly meetings as to local meetings.

Questions for Discussion

Do you know what your book of discipline says about support for struggling meetings?

What do you think the yearly meeting's appropriate role might be in supporting struggling meetings? Is that the same as what's in your book of discipline?

What concerns or opportunities are rising for you as you consider the local meetings in your yearly meeting?

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
- [“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
- [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
- [Transitioning Older and Historic Sacred Places: Community-Minded Approaches for Congregations and Judicatories](#) – highly recommended resource with practical tips toward approaching a variety of property-related matters
- [The Good Friday Collaborative](#) – an ecumenical organization that supports closing congregations