

‘Overseers’ and pastoral care in the Meeting

It is laid upon overseers: to encourage caring friendships within the Quaker community.

Quaker Faith and Practice 12.13

‘Overseers’ is the name (which many find rather off-putting) given to the individuals appointed to be responsible for overseeing – rather than completely undertaking - the pastoral care of Members and Attenders of the Meeting.

They meet regularly to administer and discuss matters which affect this, such as

- the maintenance of an accurate List of Members and Attenders (including new Attenders);
- the preparation of rotas and initiatives for welcoming everyone to Meeting;
- the development of ways to help Members and Attenders to enjoy all the facilities and possibilities on offer.

Each Overseer has a ‘caring list’ of Members and Attenders (individuals, couples, families) for whom they are a link to the care of the Meeting as a whole. This care may be performed by the Overseer him or herself, for example by visiting an elderly or unwell Friend, but an Overseer often only needs to make others aware that a situation has arisen where some attention is needed, for friendship and support to pour in from many sides.

We are aware that Friends look after each other without being named ‘Overseers’, and indeed some Overseers introduce different members of their caring groups to each other, so that they can get to know, and even help to support one another, in what is a very large Meeting.

If you are asked by your own Overseer to give him or her some help in visiting or supporting another Friend in the caring group, or if you are asked by Nominations to become an Overseer yourself, please do not be afraid that you are being asked for your unconditional friendship to a group of people you hardly know and in circumstances where you have little time to spare.

An Overseer is simply the focus for the care which is offered by all Friends to other Friends; it is an interesting and rewarding post to hold, and one gets to know other Friends and other Overseers in a deeper way.

Anna Baldwin & Alison Ralph, Co-convenors of Friargate overseers 2013

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