Why do Liberal Friends not *Record* Ministers or Spiritual Gifts?

Most liberal Quaker meetings in the 21st century find the recording of ministers or spiritual gifts distasteful - for good historical reasons. Starting in the early-20th century the formerly-labeled Hicksite meetings (today labeled “liberal” meetings) started embracing spiritual egalitarianism because of the value placed on mysticism - due to the influence of Rufus Jones (and others). Mysticism began to be viewed as the engine of liberal Quakerism. And today the degree of egalitarianism practiced by liberal Quakers varies from meeting to meeting. Nonetheless, this egalitarianism of liberal Friends makes them sensitive to not present the impression that some Friends are elevated as more spiritually gifted than others. This is because spiritual gifts come in all shapes and sizes that humans would often miss, as they sat in judgment of spiritual gifts upon recording them. A “club” of recorded ministers or spiritually gifted might hinder others from growing their own gifts as the Spirit guides them on their spiritual journey. Even if the intention is not to create a “club”, it would likely be perceived that way. Egalitarian spiritual groups mature to their full potential when such labeling is not practiced. And liberal Quakers seem to have grasped that.

An egalitarian spiritual community would be working against its own nature to start officially listing some members as spiritually gifted. A truly egalitarian spiritual community would understand that gifts of the Spirit might come from any one, at any time, in any situation. Just as there is ‘that of God’ in everyone, there are spiritual gifts in everyone as well – waiting to be manifested whenever the Spirit calls them out – at just the right moment. A liberal Quaker meeting that understands this chooses to simply encourage its Friends to be diligent as individuals and as a community to always listen for spiritual wisdom from anyone among them, including themselves. Designating certain Friends as possessing spiritual gifts could cause Friends to miss the spiritual gifts that abound within and among ALL of us - just when they need to be heard and experienced.

In summary, having the need to formally “record” certain individuals to publically recognize them is an ego-mechanism that an egalitarian spiritual community would not want to embrace. Likewise, in an attempt to further enhance egalitarianism many liberal Quaker meetings no longer put any weight to formally recording (recognizing) members; and while they may still provide the recording of a Friend’s membership upon request, such recorded members are not viewed differently from non-recorded members. True membership, just like genuine spiritual gifts, is demonstrated humbly in an egalitarian liberal Quaker meeting, as Friends serve each other and the spiritual community that they are part of. There’s no need to announce to Friends in the meeting who among them have a spiritual gift, nor who is committed to the meeting community. All Friends are already well aware as they witness the care and concern offered by Friends to each other - just when it has been needed.