

Resource Packet on Clerking

This resource packet was created for a workshop on clerking for Northwest Quarterly Meeting with Jan Hoffman and Jackie Stillwell on October 29, 2016 at Burlington Friends Meeting. It is posted on the NEYM website (neym.org/resources-clerking) where the individual documents are also available and may be freely copied with credit.

Our basic text is (of course) *Faith and Practice* on meetings for business

New England Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice 1985

Part II, Chapter 2: *Faith into Practice in the Life of the Meeting:*
The Meeting for Business

page 110 or neym.org/faith-practice/part-2/chapter-2/meeting-business

Part IV, Chapter 1: *Organization and Business Procedure:*
Conduct of Business Meetings

page 221 or neym.org/faith-practice/part-4/chapter-1/business-meetings

New England Yearly Meeting Interim Faith and Practice 2014

Chapter 3: Corporate Discernment in Meetings for Business

page 37 in the 2014 printing

page 62 in the larger print 2015 edition with Study Guide

It is included here as a separate document and in the complete *NEYM Interim Faith and Practice 2014* (neym.org/fandp/interim) on the NEYM website.

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Chapter 3: Corporate Discernment in Meetings for Business

Given Preliminary Approval at the 2011 NEYM Sessions

Inward yielding and waiting for a sense of unity to grow among all present are characteristics of the way Friends conduct their business. The spiritual disciplines of corporate discernment are grounded in the faith that we can perceive and affirm God's guidance for the gathered community. Our experience of worship undergirds our understanding of reaching unity in the Spirit, a sense of the meeting that sometimes comes as an unexpected blessing when we have labored hard to discern our way. As we listen to each other and seek together for Divine guidance, we can affirm the unity that enables us to respond faithfully.

Our business meetings begin and end with worship, framing the work at hand with centered awareness in the divine presence. Although the business to be addressed requires attention to facts, details, and varying options, we seek to remain spiritually grounded throughout the discernment process. Our decisions do not rely on majority rule, but rather on a unity found through calm attention to the Light Within. The Spirit may speak through anyone present and it is our task to listen and speak with humility and to trust in the Spirit's guidance.

The heart of Friends' business process is the nurturing of spiritual openness and deep listening that allows the sense of the meeting to emerge. At times, there may be unanimous agreement that a proposed action should be carried out. However, when those gathered are not in simple agreement, careful consideration will be given to each speaker, and silent worship may be requested. If all in attendance draw on their disciplines of worship and stay mindful that the purpose is to seek the will of God for the gathered body, unity can be found and acted upon. Sense of the meeting is the understanding of where the gathered body is led and does not mean that every individual present is completely satisfied or in total agreement. Contrasting views and perceptions may be expressed and some disagreements may remain. The sense of the meeting emerges from the committed efforts of a loving community and strengthens its bonds.

The Meeting for Business

Prior to the meeting for business, the clerk prepares the agenda, with input from the appropriate committees and individuals. Notice of complicated or controversial issues should be given to members in advance to allow Friends to come more fully informed and inwardly prepared for the discipline of the meeting. Those reporting to the meeting for business should provide written materials as needed to facilitate the knowledgeable conduct of business. In most meetings, the clerk and recording clerk will sit at a table facing the group and the meeting will begin with a period of worship. In some meetings, a few Friends are appointed to hold the meeting in prayer throughout.

The clerk sets the pace of the meeting, as Friends who signal their desire to speak wait to be recognized. Allowing time to reflect between each contribution and addressing the clerk rather than the previous speaker help maintain an atmosphere of prayerful corporate seeking. Part of the discipline of the process is to refrain from stating concerns or ideas that have already been expressed. While it may be helpful to the clerk to say, "That Friend speaks my mind" when we

agree with a previous speaker, care should be taken that this does not become a veiled means of voting.

Sometimes it is the task of a committee to present the necessary background information and bring suggestions for possible courses of action. With a difficult issue, a preliminary threshing session may be arranged to allow members an opportunity to express their views and listen to others without the expectation that a decision will be reached at that time. A threshing session is a time of worshipful listening that allows Friends to gather information; to express their thoughts, questions, and concerns; and to hear one another. Detailed minutes of comments and discussion will be helpful, especially to those unable to attend.

Working through the agenda, the clerk or recording clerk will attempt to articulate the sense of the meeting by proposing a minute. Once the sense of the meeting has been reached, it should be promptly recorded as a minute and read back to the meeting for its approval. The clerk and recording clerk may need time to compose a minute together and will ask the body to uphold them as they do so. Any member may offer a substitute for the proposed minute, and the meeting may approve, modify, or reject it, in exactly the same manner as a minute proposed by the clerk. Friends have not completed their action until they have approved the minute, and no body of Friends will be better prepared to give or withhold its approval than the one that has just reached unity. Since the group is seeking divine guidance together as a faith community, only those present can experience the movement of the Spirit within the group. In some meetings it is accepted practice for a Friend unable to attend the business meeting to give the clerk a written statement of his or her thoughts beforehand, understanding that those present will hold this concern in the Light as they move toward unity.

Often all minutes will be approved at the same meeting for business, although some meetings only read back and approve minutes on complex or sensitive matters. The reading back of the minute tests that the minute captures the unity which has been found. If all are clear, Friends approve the minute, thus completing their action on this item of business. In some cases, when Friends are not clear, the sense of the meeting can best be expressed in a minute of exercise, which states the various perceptions in the meeting on a given matter. This is a helpful tool in recognizing where the meeting is on a given concern.

At times, individuals may feel uncomfortable with an action the rest of the body appears ready to approve. It is important that these concerns are heard and carefully considered. Expediency, time constraints, and impatience to move on are frequent stumbling blocks to deep and careful discernment of God's will. The clerk may find it useful to call Friends into silent worship to calm heightened emotions and seek divine guidance for a way forward. Faithfulness to the truth given, no matter how inconvenient or incomplete, is essential for the spiritual health of the meeting.

It is the clerk's task to support the body in discerning where it is being led and whether additional time is needed to clarify the group's understanding of divine guidance. Passionate devotion to a cause can lead Friends to speak from their own desires rather than from a deeper place of shared spiritual discernment. It is a tender and difficult balance to listen with love to all concerns, while recognizing that the body may be led in a direction with which some individuals are not comfortable. Friends who have strong reservations about the action the group seems

ready to take should examine their motivations to determine if the Spirit is calling on them to speak, or if stubbornness or personal preference is motivating their discomfort.

Sometimes after this examination and patient listening to the meeting, a Friend may express misgivings about an action the body seems ready to approve. The clerk must be open both to the meeting's readiness to act and to any Friend's sense of discomfort with that action. The group may need to remain undecided for a while longer, holding the possibility that a previously unrealized way may open. It is also possible that the Friend will express willingness to "stand aside" from the proposed action, recognizing that the meeting has reached unity. The act of "standing aside" is an expression of community with the meeting as it seeks God's will in the matter. It is an acknowledgement that the action being taken is how the meeting is led at this time. What we seek is not unanimity, but unity in the Spirit, which is able to encompass discomfort with the approved action. The clerk may then propose a minute expressing the sense of the meeting. Once a concern is heard, it is no longer carried only by the individual who raised it. It now rests in the community and the name of an individual standing aside is not recorded. The concern may be recorded in the minutes and is part of the sense of the meeting.

On rare occasions, after spiritual searching to ascertain that personal feelings are not blocking divine guidance, a Friend may be unable either to unite with or to stand aside from the decision the body is ready to make. The person with the conviction presents his or her concerns, gives the reasons, and asks the group not to proceed. The meeting must discern whether the objection has enough spiritual weight to require waiting for further light. The phrase "standing in the way" has been used to describe this request not to proceed, but an *individual* never has the power to prevent the meeting from acting. A *concern*, however, may have enough weight to cause the meeting either to hold the matter over for further discernment or to abandon the action entirely.

It is important that all members of the meeting proceed with the understanding that everyone is acting with sincerity and based on their understanding of the leadings of the spirit. An inability to find a common understanding of God's will can create a rift in the meeting community. In such cases, all members of the meeting must work to repair the wounds of this break—reaching out to others in love, seeking to rebuild trust one with another.

If the meeting decides to proceed when one or more Friends are unable to stand aside, the resulting minute will be very similar to a minute written when someone does stand aside, except for recording that a Friend(s) is unable to unite. Again, names are not recorded. In this case particularly, the meeting should humbly consider the possibility that minuting a careful and detailed record of the concern might be of use to the meeting in the future.

Corporate discernment requires practice and the discipline and faith of all Friends present. We must take care to build a loving community, with trust among members and trust in the spirit-led process to which we commit ourselves. We labor together in love and humility, with openness to divine guidance, seeking the will of God.

Advices on Corporate Discernment

1. *Being orderly come together [you are] not to spend time with needless, unnecessary and fruitless discourses; but to proceed in the wisdom of God, not in the way of the world, as*

a worldly assembly of men, by hot contests, by seeking to outspoke and overreach one another in discourse as if it were controversy between party and party of men, or two sides violently striving for dominion, not deciding affairs by the greater vote. But in the wisdom, love and fellowship of God, in gravity, patience, meekness, in unity and concord, submitting one to another in lowliness of heart, and in the holy Spirit of truth and righteousness, all things [are] to be carried on; by hearing, and determining every matter coming before you in love, coolness, gentleness and dear unity.

Edward Burrough 1662

2. Remember that we are only able to act according to our present sense and judgment, in the faith that the light we are given is enough for our needs today. Let us be humble both with one another, and in anticipating that there may be more and different steps to take tomorrow.
3. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.
4. In searching together for the will of God in matters before the meeting, Friends are seeking the truth, so that all may join in its affirmation. We are not engaging in debate, or trying to win an argument. Know that working together as a community of spiritual seeking is often more important than simply getting things done.
5. On entering the meeting, avoid falling into conversation. Take your seat quietly, entering into a receptive silence. As the meeting moves forward, listen carefully to what others say, that you do not burden the meeting by repetition. Allow time for quiet reflection after each speaker so that their words may sink in and receive due consideration. Should you disagree with what has been said, show respect for those who have spoken by offering another viewpoint in a humble spirit.
6. Address the clerk rather than another individual and speak only to the matter under consideration. Do not attempt to speak for Friends who are absent as they are not present to sense the movement of the Spirit in the gathered group.
7. Hold the clerks and the whole group in prayer, especially when difficult matters are being considered.

Advices for Clerks

1. Prepare an agenda in advance to balance the flow of business in a thoughtful way, listing committees which are to report and actions or concerns calling for discernment.
2. Remember to keep in mind the relationship of each agenda item to the larger life of the meeting.
3. Announce difficult matters in time to allow Friends to come prepared.
4. Open the meeting with worship.

5. Recall that your role is as servant to the meeting rather than participant in discussion. Employ listening more than speaking.
6. Remind Friends to address the clerk when speaking, rather than responding directly to other speakers.
7. Remember that worship during the meeting can keep Friends gathered in the Spirit.
8. Allow time as needed between agenda items for the recording clerk to compose minutes.
9. Some Friends speak easily and often. Take care they do not prevent quieter, more hesitant Friends from participating.
10. Conclude with worship.

Advices for Recording Clerks

1. Pre-write standard minutes (opening and closing, committee reports, outstanding business, etc.) but remain open to the possibility that the Spirit will lead the meeting elsewhere.
2. Expect to compose substantive minutes to be read back to the meeting for approval at the time.
3. You may ask the clerk and the gathered body to hold you in prayer when working on a difficult minute; remember it is the meeting's minute, not your own.
4. Primarily minute actions and decisions. At times, additional context may be provided for clarity. "Less is more" is a good rule.
5. Minutes should reflect the sense of the meeting rather than a list of individual comments or perspectives.
6. If no decision is reached, a minute of exercise can capture where the meeting is in its discernment at that moment in time.
7. Names are not recorded unless the action pertains directly to specific person(s): marriage, traveling minutes, memorials, membership, etc.

Queries on Corporate Discernment

Although Queries may often be answered with a simple affirmative or negative, it is vital to ask corollary questions such as "why," "how," or "when." A qualified answer arising from introspection is more meaningful and constructive than an uncritical "yes" or "no."

North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) 1983, p.33

1. Do you seek the leadings of the Light in meeting for business as you do in worship?
2. How do you prepare your heart and mind for meeting for business?

3. Do you come prepared for the business at hand, having read relevant material or with committee reports ready for distribution?
4. Do you make an effort to maintain your awareness that God is with us as we work?
5. Do you proceed in a peaceable spirit with forbearance and warm affection for each other?
6. Do you trust that the Spirit has guided those involved with the process which has brought the group to its current place and do you respect the decisions that have already been made?
7. Do you attend to the clerk, speaking only when acknowledged and refraining from conversations back and forth across the room?
8. As a member of a spiritual community, do you acknowledge differences and seek to settle conflicts promptly in a manner free from resentment and all forms of inward violence?
9. Do you take care to consider, in a patient, loving and prayerful spirit, the perspective of those with whom you disagree?
10. Have you considered whether God's will for you as an individual may differ from God's will for the meeting?
11. When a decision is being reached with which you disagree, are you faithful to your responsibility to speak if led?
12. When the meeting comes to a decision, do you accept it as "our" decision rather than "theirs"?
13. Are we willing to recognize when we are in a place where we should not act, but rather to wait patiently for further guidance to come?

Extracts on Corporate Discernment

3.01 Central to Quaker process is the understanding that our task is not so much to figure out what to do as to understand what the Spirit is asking of us as a corporate body. When we come to business meeting, committee meetings, or smaller meetings of individuals with this perspective, the focus shifts away from outcomes and towards community. Our task is to seek together, the same way we seek in meeting for worship, the experience of God in our midst.

Westport Monthly Meeting 2006

3.02 George Fox: Epistle 418: To the Six Weeks Meeting in London. (*The six weeks meeting was a group of Friends from different London Meetings who were particularly concerned with financial affairs.*)

The Six Weeks Meeting is for to see that all their meetings are preserved by the wisdom of God in the unity of the spirit, the bond of peace, and in the fellowship of the holy ghost... . And that all may be careful to speak short and pertinent to matters in a Christian spirit, and dispatch business quickly, and keep out of long debate and heats; and with the spirit of God keep that down, which is doting about questions and strife of words, that tend to parties and contention: which in the church of God there is no such custom to be allowed. And likewise not to speak more than one at a time; nor any in a fierce way; for that is not to be allowed in any society, neither natural nor spiritual; but as the apostle saith, “Be swift to hear, and slow to speak;” and let it be in the grace, which seasons all words...

George Fox 1690

3.03 “Consensus” is a word sometimes used to describe a Quaker-like process. Yet Quakers would insist that this is not the most suitable term. Consensus (or unanimous consent, or general agreement) are based on the work of human wisdom and reason, whereas “the Sense of the Meeting” is based on the prompting of the Spirit. Consensus is commonly understood to require mutual compromise—shaving away at positions until we find a core which is objectionable to none. The Quaker approach tries instead to reach toward a higher and greater Truth that speaks to all concerns in ways that could not have been foreseen. We discover what God wants for us, as opposed to what we thought we wanted. “Consensus is the product of an intellectual process. Sense of the Meeting is a commitment of faith...” .

Most Friends are painfully aware of how our humanness falls short of the spiritual ideal, and of how fragile our process can seem. Corporate discernment of the will of God is a risky and imperfect proposition. In relying so extensively on the Holy Spirit, we make ourselves vulnerable to pitfalls and failures. However, far from being a weakness, such vulnerability is central to our understanding of the power of worship (and business) “in spirit and in truth.” To fall into the hands of the living God requires leaping, laying ourselves open to risk. Our commitment to this process, and our assurance of its outcomes, can only be proven [at the end of time], but still we give testimony to the truth we have been given, and are able to say that we have tested this method and found that it does indeed bring us into Unity with the will of God.

Eden Grace 2000

3.04 The danger in Society doth not lie so much in that some few may have a differing apprehension in some things from the general sense, as it doth in this, namely, when such that do so differ so suffer themselves to be led out of the bond of charity, and shall labour to impose their private sense upon the rest of their brethren, and to be offended and angry if it be not received. This is the seed of sedition and strife, that hath grown up in too many to their hurt.

Stephen Crisp 1694

3.05 *In 1757, John Woolman attended Virginia Yearly Meeting. A committee of that Yearly Meeting had examined the Pennsylvania queries and brought them forward for consideration with some alterations. One change troubled him. A Pennsylvania query, “Are there any concerned in the importation of negroes, or in buying them after imported?” had been revised to “Are there any concerned in the importation of Negroes or buying them to trade in?” Woolman*

had been pleased that the Pennsylvania queries found both importing slaves and buying any to be unacceptable. He was troubled at Virginia's change, which implied that while importing slaves was unacceptable, buying them was acceptable as long as they were not bought for resale. Woolman expressed his unease with the alteration.

Friends appeared attentive to what was said; some expressed a care and concern about their Negroes; none made any objection by way of reply to what I said. But the query was admitted as they had altered it.

As some of their members have heretofore traded in Negroes as in other merchandise, this query being admitted will be one step further than they have hitherto gone, and I did not see it my duty to press for an alteration, but felt easy to leave it all to him who alone is able to turn the hearts of the mighty and make way for the spreading of Truth in the earth by means agreeable to his infinite wisdom.

John Woolman 1774

3.06 [It is] our concern that Friends should work with one another in a humble and loving spirit, each giving to others credit for purity of motive, notwithstanding differences of opinion, and being ready to accept the decision of the meeting even when it may not accord with his [or her] own judgment. The mutual forbearance and understanding which are produced by a constant dwelling under the power and control of Christ do much to prevent jealousies, misunderstandings, or any breach of love.

London Yearly Meeting 1931

3.07 *In Mount Toby (MA) Meeting, the clerk poses a question after the opening worship of meeting for business. A period of worship-sharing follows and the recording clerk crafts a minute expressing a corporate response.*

The clerk invites Friends to reflect on the questions, “In Friends’ decision making, what is unity? What is my role and responsibility in reaching unity?”

Friends express the importance of being patient, being willing to hear each other fully and openly. When we take into account our knowledge of one another in community, when we ask ourselves to listen deeply, to release our own individual opinion and surrender our individual will, we find profound connection with others and with the divine. We are all separate ingredients in a pot, each carrying our individual flavors, but simmering together until we create a flavorful soup. This unified creation can be a difficult but amazing process. It brings us closer to one another and to God.

Mt. Toby Monthly Meeting 2008

3.08 *Bill Taber, earlier in the excerpted article, describes the Mind of Christ as that state of consciousness where we feel we are “dwelling timelessly in the light... At this point there may be no words, only a sense of unity, unity, unity.”*

Spiritual discernment seems to flourish best from this contemplative, reflective, nonlinear state of mind, which is a wide, non-judgmental, almost non-attached but very alert attentiveness. Being in the Mind of Christ, however, does not mean being “spaced out,” for the analytic faculties are not suppressed; they are cushioned by a more vast mind which takes all things into account. Indeed, our analytical faculties are at least as sharp, if not sharper, in the Mind of Christ than they are at other times; the difference is that here we know that we are not just our surface mind, as we Westerners tend to assume, and the difference is that this surface mind is no longer the master, but the tool, of the more integrated person we become in the Mind of Christ.

Bill Taber 1985

3.09 The sense of the meeting is not unanimity—everyone present need not agree with the action being taken. I have had the experience of concurring in a sense of meeting with which I disagreed, knowing it was the sense of the meeting. I have wept, wishing the meeting could go further than it was ready to go, but clearly it was not ready to do so.

When I am disappointed with a sense of the meeting, I try not to give much attention to why we didn’t do more, but to focus on openness to the next step, based on the experience that will follow carrying out the clarity we did reach. I also try and listen to the love within me that accepts people in my faith community for what they are, and pray that God will use and transform us all. Let me also say how much I appreciate the further light we get from each other along the way from monthly meetings to quarterly meetings to Yearly Meeting—we learn and are challenged by concerns beyond our local community of faith.

As I see it, there is only one necessary query: Is the Spirit present? Is new experience teaching me that it is present in places I have previously thought it couldn’t be? If so, maybe I need to change.

Jan Hoffman 1988

3.10 After due consideration has been given to all points of view expressed in the meeting, it is the duty of the clerk to weigh carefully the various expressions and to state what he or she believes to be the sense of the meeting, not alone according to numbers but also according to the recognized experience and spiritual insight of the members. This matter of weighing the individual utterances in arriving at the sense of the meeting is quite fundamental to the Quaker method. Several Friends may quite sincerely speak in one direction, and then one Friend may express an insight which carries weight and conviction in the meeting in a different sense. This one acceptable communication may outweigh in significance several more superficial ones.

George A. Selleck 1986

3.11 We reminded ourselves of the traditional practice of minutes of exercise—which we also called “process minutes”—to affirm where the meeting is at a given moment when there is as yet no clarity to act. These minutes simply state the various perceptions in the meeting on a given matter at that moment, and can be helpful in building a sense of the meeting. Often if we can clearly affirm where we are, it frees us to perceive new light. We heard that reading such minutes in North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) gives a clear sense of the steps in growth toward unity in opposition to slavery.

We contrasted these minutes of exercise with minutes which polarize. If a minute is proposed to the meeting by a committee with the implication that the acceptance of the minute is the goal, then Friends are seen as either “for” or “against” the minute.

This polarization does not contribute to the sense of unity in seeking God’s will which is essential to our business process. A minute of exercise might state the proposed minute, but then describe fully the range of responses to it in neutral terms, waiting for the Spirit of God to open a way forward from there. We need to remember that we are always resting in the unity of God and are held there despite our differences on a given question.

Friends Consultation on Worship 1989

3.12 *An ad hoc Web Committee brought a minute on electronic decision-making to the New England Yearly Meeting Permanent Board concluding with a paragraph “urging Friends to consider decisions reached via electronic communication to be provisional until the body has gathered and affirmed their decision.” Here is a minute of exercise on the matter.*

While we affirm the essential value of face-to-face meetings in discerning God’s will in Quaker business, and hold serious reservations about the use of electronic decision-making as a routine practice, we were unable to reach unity on a proscriptive policy at this time, as Friends continue to wrestle with the use and misuse of new technologies.

We are called to be agents of the spirit and should aspire to allow the spirit its fullest functioning. Toward that end we desire to achieve unity. Finding the tools that work best in achieving unity should be our concern. We are at a point of evolving clarity and are not ready to accept absolute statements. This is a creative time of exploring how our core faith and our evolving experience of technology come together in a place of greatest integrity.

New England Yearly Meeting Permanent Board 2004

3.13 As we close these sessions I would like to reflect a minute on what took place here all week and especially last night. What we said was that we did not find unity, which is not exactly right. We did not find clarity to change our policy on tax withholding. But there was a deep unity, which I suspect had something to do with the spiritual faithfulness of many Friends... . Those who had come into the meeting sure that they could not support the proposal found a willingness to stand aside. And then, instead of accepting that gracious offer, those who had come in fervently hoping we could move forward were led to let go of that, unwilling to move while any were reluctant, willing to wait [for] God’s guidance and God’s timing.

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends 1992,

Advices from John Woolman

Words in bold are advices articulated by Michael Birkel in his article “Some Advice from John Woolman on Meeting for Business” in the January 1995 issue of Friends Journal. The text in bold is copyrighted by Friends Publishing Corporation and has been reprinted with permission. To subscribe: www.friendsjournal.org.

*For some of the advices, Michael included actual quotations from Woolman. The Faith and Practice Revision Committee has added quotations for advices where he did not do so. All quotations are from *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, 1971 (edited by J. Moulton).*

Know whereof you speak, and speak from the center rather than from preconceived notions.

I had occasion to consider that it is a weighty thing to speak much in large meetings for business. First, except our minds are rightly prepared and we clearly understand the case we speak to, instead of forwarding, we hinder business and make more labor for those on whom the burden of the work is laid. (p. 95)

Speak with economy, attending more to the matter at hand than to yourself as speaker.

If selfish views or a partial spirit have any room in our minds, we are unfit for the Lord’s work. If we have a clear prospect of the business and proper weight on our minds to speak, it behooves us to avoid useless apologies and repetitions. (p. 95)

Imagine how it feels to others.

Where people are gathered from afar, and adjourning a meeting of business attended with great difficulty, it behooves us all to be cautious how they detain a meeting, especially when they have sat six or seven hours and a good way to ride home. In three hundred minutes are five hours, and he that improperly detains three hundred people one minute, besides other evils that attend it, does an injury like that of imprisoning one man five hours without cause. (p. 95)

Don’t pretend the conflict isn’t there.

To see the failings of our friends, and think hard of them, without opening that which we ought to open, and still carry the face of friendship—this tends to undermine the foundation of true unity. (p. 112)

Value real community.

[T]hrough the strength of that love which is stronger than death, tenderness of heart was often felt amongst us. (p. 102)

Keep your eye single to righteousness, not self-image or self-righteousness.

I heard that the case was coming to our Yearly Meeting, which brought a weighty exercise upon me, and under a sense of my own infirmities and the great danger I felt of turning aside from perfect purity, my mind was often drawn to retire alone and put up my prayers to the Lord that he would be graciously pleased to strengthen me, that setting aside all views of self-interest and the friendship of this world, I might stand fully resigned to his holy will. (pp. 91–92)

Strive to reach the pure witness in others.

And though we meet with opposition from another spirit, yet as there is a dwelling in meekness, feeling our spirits subject and moving only in the gentle, peaceable wisdom, the inward reward of quietness will be greater than our difficulties. Where the pure life is kept to and meetings of discipline are held in the authority of it, we find by experience that they are comfortable and tend to the health of the body. (p. 68)

Humility and charity work best.

If such who were at times under sufferings on account of some scruples of conscience kept low and humble and in their conduct manifested a spirit of true charity, it would be more likely to reach the witness in others, and be of more service in the church, than if their sufferings were attended with a contrary spirit and conduct. (p. 98)

Righteousness and love are inseparable.

And in the heat of zeal, I once made reply to what an ancient Friend said, which when I sat down I saw that my words were not enough seasoned with charity, and after this I spake no more on the subject. ...

And then after some close exercise and hearty repentance for that I had not attended closely to the safe guide, I stood up, and, reciting the passage, acquainted Friends that though I dare not go from what I had said as to the matter, yet I was uneasy with the manner of my speaking, as believing milder language would have been better. (pp. 110–111)

ASSUMPTIONS of our Quaker Business Process: varied thoughts

Marion Athearn

An Introduction to “Quaker Process”

Many people who find their way to Friends already know that we don't make decisions or resolve differences by voting, but because we don't often talk about the spiritual grounding of our decision-making process people may spend years in the Society of Friends and still not understand what we mean when we talk about “Quaker process”. We often hear Friends' process described as “consensus”. Consensus is a secular process, not a spiritual one, and may be what Quaker process becomes when the spiritual underpinnings are removed or ignored.

Central to Quaker process is the understanding that our task is not so much to figure out what to do as to understand what the Spirit is asking of us as a corporate body. When we come to business meeting, committee meetings, or smaller meetings of individuals with this perspective, the focus shifts away from outcomes and towards community. Our task is to seek together, the same way we seek in meeting for worship, the experience of God in our midst.

Just as meeting for worship requires focus and discipline, so does Quaker process. It requires us to leave our opinions at the door and enter with a spirit of openness and willingness for transformation. It requires us to reflect carefully before we speak so that we speak from our spiritual center rather than our intellect or emotion. It requires us to listen lovingly and openly, and speak truthfully, even when we are afraid our truth will fall on unsympathetic ears. It requires us to be patient and trust the Spirit.

Sometimes we say that Quaker process gives us the “gift of time”. It may be that what we are being asked to do is labor together in love, rather than decide on a particular course of action. While we may come to a particular decision quickly or slowly, when we labor together faithfully we build the trust and integrity so necessary for a healthy spiritual community. (September 2006)

Arthur Larabee

Basic Assumptions of the Friends Meeting for Business:

- There is a spiritual energy in the world.
- We can access this spiritual energy to guide us in the conduct of human affairs.
- There is a difference between being guided as an individual and being guided as a group. It is possible to give over our individual desires in order to discover together how this energy can breath spiritual vitality into our community.
- When we choose to do this, life is more satisfying for both the individual and the group. There is more love, more joy and more peace. There is less fear, less separation and less violence.

Comments:

For many Friends, the name of this spiritual energy is the Spirit, or God. It is not necessary, however, to use these names in order to welcome this energy into our lives. If other names are right for you, use them.

*Friends believe that when we open ourselves to the Spirit it will lead us into a place of unity among us. **Sense of the meeting** is a shared awareness of a place to which the Spirit has led us. It may or may not contain within it a decision.*

Friends have developed distinctive practices to support a sense of the meeting method of decision-making. These methods are dynamic, however, they are not etched in stone. Whatever helps us to be open to the guidance of the Spirit in the conduct of our business is appropriate in a

Friends meeting. It is the intention we hold to understand how God is leading us that matters, not the form we use. At times laughter, song or movement will help Spirit move through us.

Sense of the meeting / discernment	Consensus
A spiritual method	A secular method
Involving a spiritual process	Involving a rational process
Expecting a Spirit-led decision	Producing a general agreement
The authority is the Spirit as discerned by the group in a spirit of worship	The authority is the group
“How are we led?”	“What can we agree to?”

Dangers for the Clerk

The most significant danger for clerks is that they will have feelings about the matter under consideration, or the direction in which the meeting is going. In this case, clerks must ask themselves whether or not their feelings are getting in the way of an ability to perceive the sense of the meeting. The meeting may be moving in a direction very different from the clerk’s own preference. If this happens, the clerk must “step aside,” and ask the meeting to choose another clerk for the time being.

Dangers for the Meeting

- A clerk who has a point of view and is unable or unwilling to set it aside.
- A clerk who does not recognize s/he has a point of view and that it is getting in the way of discerning a sense of the meeting.
- A clerk who is unable to hear what is being said, verbally or non-verbally.
- Members of the meeting who come with their minds made up.
- Members of the meeting who are not willing to see issues through the eyes of others.
- An atmosphere that is not conducive to a spiritual process of openness and mutual respect.

from the Summary Report of the *Friends Consultation on Discernment* (1985)

No agenda item has a life of its own. If there is no one present who cares about it, it is not worth our holy time.

. . . There were **questions** raised in the course of these days together **as to whether we sometimes have to sacrifice unity with each other for unity with God and how we discern that**. Do we sometimes push a decision through which splits a community? It was felt that it is essential to seek in prayer for submission to God's guidance, and if all do this, this will bring unity. It was also stressed that a sense of the meeting is more readily achieved in a group which has shared deeply and become a community. . . . Yet we must not water down discernment by giving a little bit to everybody. How important is it in discerning that we stay together as a community? (emphasis Jan Hoffman)

Questions and Topics for Further Exploration

How do we discern whether the will of God for me at this moment is to be found “in my deepest desire” or “in that which crosses my own will”?

How do we discern when we are in the place where no further guidance is to be received and our calling is to live out what we do know, making choices on that basis; or, on the other hand,

when we are in the place where we should not act, not choose, but wait patiently for the guidance to come? In brief: How do we discern when to “live it out” and when to “wait it out”?

John Smith, in *Friends Understanding of the Word of God* (Ohio Yearly Meeting)

The clerk records what has been distilled concerning the particular topic in a minute. Minutes have several functions. They should represent gathered distilled truth. They should record the extent to which the meeting has been able to come to unity on the subject. Not to have full unity is not a failure. It is better to record the extent of the unity achieved and to leave the rest to God's right timing, allowing for further action at a later date.

If there is remaining disunity, the minute should gather the points of disagreement for the record. Again, this should not be considered a failure, but rather a statement of the understanding of the gathered meeting at that time.

Understanding that Impasse is Not Failure – Jackie Stillwell

Friends' decision-making process has the potential for impasse, with corresponding frustration, not unlike any other group decision-making process. If impasse and frustration are present it does not necessarily mean that the meeting has failed. Rather, it may mean that more work needs to be done. There may be important issues to be addressed and worked through.

In the face of change or a difficult decision, time for emotional processing may be needed, time to grieve (or let go of) what has been and be open to new insights. Naming the issues can help the group move through them more readily. Be careful not to confuse human “stuck-ness” with inability to hear where the Spirit is leading.

Minutes of Exercise – Madge Seaver in *Friends Bulletin*, April, 1985

A minute is the last in a series of steps. The first is to be competently informed. While all facts do not need to be in, relevant information should be known. Next is an exercise of the Spirit, a sense of responsibility, of accountability, an affirmative answer to the question: is this a concern for us to pursue at this time? The third step is to record a decision about appropriate action such as letters, a delegation, or formation of an ad hoc committee to bring in a recommendation at a later meeting. **We sometimes think of these decisions as the sole content of a minute, but a minute is above all true to the real state of the Meeting without evasion or embroidery. Therefore, the minute must on occasion record uneasiness, a lack of unity, a wish that a way forward be taken but uncertainty as to what such a way should be. There may even be a resolution to change our lives in hope that clearness may be reached by such a change. This is when a minute of exercise is called for, a recording of the true spirit of our hearts and minds.** [boldface was in original text]

Bill Taber

1. What do we do when we don't agree?
 - be silent
 - appoint a committee
 - postpone the matter, sometimes forever
2. Three ways to disagree
 - do not say anything, if the matter is not that important
 - let the group know you don't agree
 - express your strong disagreement, have it minuted, but do not stand in the way

Some words on corporate discernment

prepared by Jan Hoffman

All Truth is a shadow except the last, except the utmost; yet every Truth is true in its kind. It is substance in its own place, though it be but a shadow in another place (for it is but a reflection from an intenser substance); and the shadow is a true shadow, as the substance is a true substance.

Isaac Penington (1653)

In our meetings for worship, meetings for worship with attention to business, and meetings for worship in committee, we are seeking Truth: the truth present in the gathered community of faith. Our primary purpose is not to “make decisions,” but to affirm the truth of our particular community of faith in a way which builds up that community. Further, as Will Watson says in our New England Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice* (page 117), “Friends [are]. . . searching for Truth **and** for an understanding of our own relationships to it.” (emphasis mine)

We hope for harmony as well, “a harmony that is not the absence of conflicting themes or the elimination of differences, but the absolute incorporation of the voice of each individual into the whole.” (Katherine Paterson, *Horn Book*, Jan/Feb 1991) This does not mean unanimity of thought, but unity in Spirit, acknowledgment of the organic elements that make up our corporate truth at this moment.

Unity is defined in this way by Mid-America Yearly Meeting in its *Faith and Practice* (page 81): “Unity is the willingness of everyone present to make decisions faithful to God’s leading while maintaining sensitivity to everyone’s understanding of God’s will. Although some persons may not fully agree with a proposed course of action, they are willing to accept the decision of the group.”

The danger in Society doth not lie so much in that some few may have a differing apprehension in some things from the general sense, as it doth in this, namely, when such that do so differ so suffer themselves to be led out of the bond of charity, and shall labour to impose their private sense upon the rest of their brethren, and to be offended and angry if it be not received. This is the seed of sedition and strife, that hath grown up in too many to their hurt.

-- Stephen Crisp, *Works* (1694), p. 352

We sometimes speak of our process as “experiments with Truth.” This means we are not afraid to state the truth we see at a given time nor are we afraid to test it in the future. If the truth we stated some years ago is challenged, we need not defend it, but be open to testing it. If it is still valid, it will stand on its own strength. If it is not, we trust that in testing it (“experimenting”), we will be led to further truth we had been unable to see at that moment in our past. We need to remember, as Penington indicates, that the truth we perceive now is both “true substance” and “true shadow.” When we affirm the truth we see now (substance), we open ourselves to seeing the further truth of which it is a shadow.

Our process is grounded in **faith**: faith in our Guide
faith in continuing revelation
faith that we can be guided as a group

Disciplines which help us to be rightly guided (both old monastic and Quaker)

1. **silence** “For a Word to be spoken, there must be silence. Before, and after.”
-- Ursula Le Guin, *A Wizard of Earthsea*
2. **humility** from the Latin *humus* = fertile ground
Jesus washing his disciple’s feet as an example
3. **obedience** from the Latin *ob audire* = to listen all the way through
4. **patience** “We came to know a place to stand in and *what to wait in.*”
– Francis Howgill (1672)

For there is still a vision for the appointed time. . .
If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.
– Habakkuk 2:3

5. **discernment** “The spiritual discerning came into me, by which I did discern my own thoughts, groans, and sighs, and what it was that did *veil* me and what it was that did *open* me.”
– George Fox (17th century)
6. **faithfulness** “There is no safe dallying with Truth. It is easy to profess and make a show of truth, but hard to come into it.”
– Isaac Penington (17th century)

Bill Taber speaks of an altered state of consciousness which we may reach in our meetings which he calls the Mind of Christ:

Spiritual discernment seems to flourish best from this contemplative, reflective, non-linear state of mind, which is a wide, non-judgmental, almost non-attached but very alert attentiveness. Being in the mind of Christ, however, does not mean being ‘spaced out’, for the analytic faculties are not suppressed; they are cushioned by a more vast mind which takes all things into account. Indeed, our analytical faculties are at least as sharp, if not sharper, in the Mind of Christ than they are at other times; the difference is that here we know that we are not just our surface mind, as we Westerners tend to assume, and the difference is that this surface mind is no longer the master, but the tool, of the more integrated person we become in the Mind of Christ.

– Bill Taber in report of *1985 Friends Consultation on Discernment*, p. 37

Meeting for Worship for the purpose of business

Topic #7 Interest Group 2

Friends Consultation on Worship

Richmond, Indiana December 7-10, 1989

Our belief in the immanence of God leads us to act out our faith in all of our lives, including our meetings for business. We all carry personal responsibility for this part of our corporate life of faith.

In our meetings for business we seek the will of God, which is not divided. So there is a unity in God, and it is our own imperfections that make it difficult for us to perceive this unity sometimes.

The purpose of our meetings for business is to build up the community of faith through seeking God's will for us as a community. We are here to worship and not to get through an agenda. The meeting for business is over when the worship is over. We wondered if people dribble out at the end of our meetings for business because they came to get business done, so when it's clear we won't get it finished, they feel free to leave. Perhaps we need to release the remaining agenda if the worship is over.

We reminded ourselves that we are seeking unity in our meetings for business, not unanimity; a sense of the meeting, not consensus. Discomfort with some action that the Meeting as a whole seems ready to take is part of the sense of the meeting. One person may not necessarily stand in the way of a decision; because a person states that they stand in the way does not make it so. Further discernment is necessary to feel whether the objection has enough spiritual weight to make the meeting feel that waiting for further light is necessary. If so, a decision at that point would not be in right order and the matter will be laid over; if not, the sense of the meeting will be to proceed with one person uncomfortable with that action.

In any case, the discomfort of one or two persons with a decision is part of the "sense of the meeting." Since the purpose of meetings for business is to build community, everyone present needs to be included in the sense of the meeting.

We reminded ourselves of the traditional practice of minutes of exercise – which we also called "process minutes" – to affirm where the meeting is at a given moment when there is as yet no clarity to act. These minutes simply state the various perceptions in the meeting on a given matter at that moment, and can be helpful in building a sense of the meeting. Often if we can clearly affirm where we are, it frees us to perceive new light. We heard that reading such minutes in North Carolina Conservative Meeting gives a clear sense of the steps in growth toward unity in opposition to slavery.

We contrasted these minutes of exercise with minutes which polarize. If a minute is proposed to the meeting by a committee with the implication that the acceptance of the minute is the goal, then Friends are seen as either "for" or "against" the minute. This polarization does not contribute to the sense of unity in seeking God's will which is

essential to our business process. A minute of exercise might state the proposed minute, but then describe fully the range of responses to it in neutral terms, waiting for the Spirit of God to open a way forward from there. We need to remember that we are always resting in the unity of God and are held there despite our differences on a given question.

We affirmed that the sense of the meeting reflects those gathered to worship together seeking God's will in the matters brought before them. It is in the *gathered* meeting where the Spirit of God can lead us into truth. There can be no “proxie votes,” no call to the clerk stating discomfort with a proposed minute and implying that this objection by phone can prevent the meeting from acting. What we expect in our meetings for business is that we will be transformed by the power of God into a unity we did not perceive before the meeting. We wondered if those who are not willing to come into that Presence which speaks to the gathered meeting are also not willing to be transformed. People who are not present to experience the power of God at work bringing Friends into new truth cannot be part of a sense of that meeting. Our capacity and willingness to be transformed is part of the wisdom of laying over a matter on which Friends cannot find unity in a given meeting, for sometimes transformation will occur in willing hearts in the intervening month.

We differed on whether only members of the Society can be part of the sense of the meeting.

We agreed that the meeting needs to be punctuated by worship, especially between agenda items. This can happen when minutes are written immediately after each item and approved then.

We affirmed the importance of the clerk, not as a person, but as a function. The function of the clerk is to embody the meeting both as it seeks unity and when it reaches a sense of the meeting. This is why it is important to have persons who wish to speak recognized by the clerk – not because the clerk is the “head,” but as a reminder that the person wishing to speak is speaking to the *meeting*, not to an individual. Sometimes people who speak unrecognized by the clerk will even turn their body toward the person to whom they are responding, thus breaking even the physical sense of a meeting gathered with a center. So recognition by the clerk encourages the speaker to stand and speak to “the meeting” by addressing remarks to the clerk's table and not to a person in the body of the meeting.

Recognition by the clerk also gives the clerk the opportunity to pace the meeting with worship and to allow the time necessary for both the clerk and the meeting to absorb what one person has said before another person speaks.

We also affirmed how important a person with a gift for clerking can be to the right ordering of business and sense of holding business in the context of worship.

Finally, we affirmed the beauty of our business process when rightly conducted. It is yet another spiritual discipline which can build up our community of faith by leading us deeper into communion with that unity which is in God.

Spiritual Responsibility in the Meeting for Business

By Patricia Loring

Hartford Monthly meeting

In working toward a decision, Friends are urged to recall that there are important differences between their process and the one known in the secular world as “reaching consensus”. So many of us sit on secular committees which have as outward resemblance to those of Friends, that it becomes very easy to transfer their methods, attitudes and goals to Friends’ committees. Friends have been so competent at running the business of the world that they have always been at risk of eroding their life as Friends by assimilate-to the secular values of efficiency decisiveness, effectiveness, and dispatch.

When Friends make a decision, they are not seeking a consensus of their membership. They are seeking the will of God in a particular matter. They have found the most reliable guide to that will to be the sense of the meeting. The sense of the meeting may be different from consensus because the sense of the meeting can arise only out of a membership which has in fact given itself over to seeking the will of God and has prepared itself spiritually for the search. It may be that some present have not yet come to that condition of seeking. It may be that some have come seeking that their own will be done - sometimes for excellent reasons. It may be that they come with a leading from God which is quite true for themselves but not a leading for the meeting as a whole.

It is easy and tempting for Friends to fall into secular customs in the conduct of business: each one simply seeking, working, manipulating for one’s own point of view attempting to control the outcome to the advantage of the position with which one has arrived. Unfortunately these methods tend to obscure the sense of the meeting rather than clarify it. The sense of the meeting is better arrived at when each person present relinquishes control, to endeavor to see himself and others not merely with the mind’s eye but with the eye of faith; to discern not only his own leading but the leadings of others; to keep in mind that at any moment the most improbable person may be the prophet of God; to discern how the leading of the meeting may be different from the quiet genuine leading of the individual.

The individual may be lead to go to point “A”, but may have to go there without the support of the meeting or with only its warm wishes. The individual may be led to call the meeting to go to point “A”, so that in fact it will get to point “B” rather than to point “C”. The individual may be mistaken altogether in his leading to go to point “A”. It may be only a good or interesting or poor idea. Or it may be that the individual has a leading which is valid not only for himself but is a true calling for the whole meeting or society to go to point “A”, with varying amounts and kinds of support from individuals within the meeting. Ultimately the responsibility for discernment rests with the clerk. This is the one who must not only intellectually sift what is going on but more importantly - must discern the spiritual dimension of the interaction. Yet it has been said with truth that the clerk can best clerk the meeting only when everyone present is also clerking. That is, everyone present must be practicing spiritual discernment to be best of his capacity while recognizing that the clerk has been chosen for a special gift of discernment.

The necessary discernment of leadings can only be done after the manner of Friends from the deep centering that can arise in an atmosphere of worship. That is why we begin our meetings with a time for recollection of ourselves and for worship. That is why it is important to pause between speakers to recollect and re-center ourselves to listen and to speak in the Light rather than in passions or the intellect: to remember that we are engaged together in a search for the will of God rather than in discussion argument or persuasion. Information and reason are to serve that higher purpose rather than to be ends in themselves. The process also requires of the members tremendous openness, sensitivity and tenderness to one another.

One reason that Friends conduct of business is so slow is that it takes time to sift ourselves and the matter at hand for ego, self-will, sincere mistakes, matters of individual conscience, and for reasons which may be excellent intellectually but not necessarily for God's will. In a meeting which is seeking at the deepest level, there must be time and opportunity for all these matters to rise to the surface, to be examined in the Light, and to settle again to a deeper level of quiet. These must be time not only for those whose interest and concern for the matter has impelled them to go deeply into it, but for those whose inward processes and Row of words are moving at a slower pace - and perhaps at a deeper level as well. There must be time for change to take place inwardly - not just in the head but in the heart and gut - as members search the matter and are searched by it. For no one can come with sincerity to a Friends' gathering for business with a mind unalterably set. To do so would leave no room for the Spirit to move, for Way to open, for discernment to take place. Friends' spiritual process is demanding; and it's difficult to keep it sorted out from the secular models with which we spend so much of our lives. Yet the process is sufficiently precious to make it worth laboring to keep sight of its spiritual basis while we are in the midst of it. Otherwise it may become a set of empty forms used in a secular manner.

One important effect of staying within the Spirit from which the process is derived is that it can keep use in unity even while our opinions diverge. Remaining aware that we are jointly engaged in the enterprise of discerning together the will of God for the meeting, rather than trying to advance or defeat a particular project, we can be held together in holy communion as members of the meeting and of the Society. We can only be divided if we put our partisanship ahead of the unity order and love within the meeting.

During one of my stays at Pendle Hill, the clerk announced at Meeting for Business that we had an unusually long and troublesome agenda, promising to keep us at it until well into the night. The only thing to do, she said, was to alter the time of our opening worship. We would simply have to take more time in worship than usual. And we did. After a few minutes, there were some restless rustlings; but we went on for surely no less than twenty minutes - long enough for the restless impatience to "get on with it" to fall away as we began to come to our center individually and as a group. I have rarely attended a meeting for business conducted with more peace, order, love and even dispatch. From the place of quiet we had come to, many of the difficulties fell away as matters were discerned in a new Light.

Excerpts compiled by *Western Friend* (2016)

From:

Quaker Practice and Business Meeting

Rebecca Henderson, 2013

We are the inheritors of a particular way of making group decisions. This way needs to be practiced, over and over, to be learned and understood. One cannot learn it simply by reading or observation; one learns through experience, trial, and error. It is a spiritual practice, based upon our experience of the Divine, called by many names. . . [This practice] it is not the same a consensus. It is incumbent upon those of us who call ourselves Quakers to learn the difference and to illuminate and share our practices with each other and make them available to the culture of our times.

. . . We assume that when we gather for Worship, and for Worship with Attention to Business, that our sense of the Divine will lead us to work with each other patiently and lovingly to find the best path to take. . . We seek to know what the Spirit would have the group do. When this Sense of the Meeting is experienced, there is a feeling of “aha, yes, that’s the best way,” which flows through the whole group. . . there is a very strong sense that the decision is appropriate. Some individuals may hesitate to agree whole-heartedly, but they may still see that this would be the best action for the Meeting to take and let the Meeting go forward. . . Our practice is not just a matter of detail drudge work, it is a time when we can experience the Divine working among us. This keeps us coming back to work together.

From:

Corporate Discernment in Meetings for Business

New England Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, 2011

At times, individuals may feel uncomfortable with an action the rest of the body appears ready to approve. It is important that these concerns are heard and carefully considered. Expediency, time constraints, and impatience to move on are frequent stumbling blocks to deep and careful discernment of God’s will. The clerk may find it useful to call Friends into silent worship to calm heightened emotions and seek divine guidance for a way forward. Faithfulness to the truth given, no matter how inconvenient or incomplete, is essential for the spiritual health of the meeting.

It is the clerk’s task to support the body in discerning where it is being led and whether additional time is needed to clarify the group’s understanding of divine guidance. Passionate devotion to a cause can lead Friends to speak from their own desires rather than from a deeper place of shared spiritual discernment. It is a tender and difficult balance to listen with love to all concerns, while recognizing that the body may be led in a direction with which some individuals are not comfortable. Friends who have strong reservations about the action the group seems ready to take should examine their motivations to

Excerpts compiled by *Western Friend* (2016)

determine if the Spirit is calling on them to speak, or if stubbornness or personal preference is motivating their discomfort.

Sometimes after this examination and patient listening to the meeting, a Friend may express misgivings about an action the body seems ready to approve. The clerk must be open to the meeting's readiness to act and to any Friend's sense of discomfort with that action. The group may need to remain undecided for a while longer, holding the possibility that a previously unrealized way may open. It is also possible that the Friend will express willingness to "stand aside" from the proposed action, recognizing that the meeting has reached unity. The act of "standing aside" is an expression of community with the meeting as it seeks God's will in the matter. It is an acknowledgement that the action being taken is how the meeting is led at this time. What we seek is not unanimity, but unity in the Spirit, which is able to encompass discomfort with the approved action. The clerk may then propose a minute expressing the sense of the meeting. Once a concern is heard, it is no longer carried only by the individual who raised it. It now rests in the community and the name of an individual standing aside is not recorded. The concern may be recorded in the minutes and is part of the sense of the meeting.

On rare occasions, after spiritual searching to ascertain that personal feelings are not blocking divine guidance, a Friend may be unable either to unite with or to stand aside from the decision the body is ready to make. The person with the conviction presents his or her concerns, gives the reasons, and asks the group not to proceed. The meeting must discern whether the objection has enough spiritual weight to require waiting for further light. The phrase "standing in the way" has been used to describe this request not to proceed, but an *individual* never has the power to prevent the meeting from acting. A *concern*, however, may have enough weight to cause the meeting either to hold the matter over for further discernment or to abandon the action entirely.

It is important that all members of the meeting proceed with the understanding that everyone is acting with sincerity and based on their understanding of the leadings of the spirit. An inability to find a common understanding of God's will can create a rift in the meeting community. In such cases, all members of the meeting must work to repair the wounds of this break – reaching out to others in love, seeking to rebuild trust, one with another.

From:

Moving from Passive Aggression to Using Conflict as a Transformational Tool

Jonathan Vogel-Borne, 2011

Much of the wider culture, and especially our Quaker culture, is conflict averse. Anger is violence, and violence is wrong. In order to avoid discord at any cost, many of us have refined the use of passive aggressive behavior to a fine art. We conceal our real feelings of disagreement over decisions or our disapproval of someone else's actions and seek ways to

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undermine that decision or person through procrastination, carrying out tasks half-heartedly, and/or setting up situations where that decision or person is bound to fail.

... So what does healthy conflict look like? In Matthew 18, Jesus gives us a simple personal model for addressing conflict – you have a problem with someone, go to that person directly. If unsatisfied, bring a couple of elders to listen to the both of you. If still unsatisfied, bring the concern to the gathered meeting/church community. How many times should we forgive one another? Jesus answers seventy times seven times!

On another level, the extreme polarization of our public discourse – around controversial social issues, in our political system, and among the range of religious expressions – is evidence that our world has lost sight of our “common unity,” our “community.” We have become a society fragmented into smaller and smaller circles, surrounding ourselves with only like-minded people. Even the internet colludes. Google’s search engine is designed to tag each individual user, carefully watching our search result choices, and then continually refining those results so that we are only seeing what we want to see and only hearing what we want to hear. Scary!

So how do we counter this culture of polarization? Let’s start with the basic concept that we need to engage with people with whom we disagree. It’s not only a good idea; I believe it is essential for the salvation of souls, even our planet. To unleash the spiritual power of our meeting/church communities, we need to nurture a culture where conflict, even painful conflict, is seen as an important tool for change, not just something to be avoided. We cannot allow unresolved discord to fester. We need to reach out beyond our comfort zones. We need to let our truest feelings be known. We need to engage in dialog across differences at deeper and more direct levels. And in community, we will inevitably hurt one another. When we do, we need to openly confess our transgressions, genuinely forgive one another, and truly live into our common life as a people reconciled to each other and to God.

From:

When Friends Attend to Business

Thomas S. Brown, 1975

(cited in *Beyond Majority Rule* by Michael J. Sheeran, 1996)

For the right holding of Meetings, it is important for Clerks to have the known business meticulously prepared in advance of the session. Matters carried over from previous sessions should be noted and the persons who have been asked to take some action or to make a report should be reminded of the service expected. Members who wish to bring concerns before the Meeting should be urged to inform the Clerk in advance, and to have all possible relevant material in hand and to make their remarks brief and their recommendations clear. If any member feels moved to rise in the Meeting to raise a major new concern, he should ask himself whether this matter might not better wait to receive the preliminary sifting of other Friends.

From:

Christian Discipline, or Certain Good and Wholesome Orders, for the Well Governing of My Family

William Penn, 1751

[On] those days which are appointed to meet publicly to worship God upon, none on any pretense (being in health, and not unavoidably engaged to the contrary) [should] neglect going to such meetings; -- but that they constantly and timely attend and frequent the same as becometh a family fearing the Lord, and that is zealous for his living Truth.

... a watch [should be] kept over every mind, so as that it may not err from the counsel of God, and the weighty government of his holy truth, in whatsoever it is exercised about; lest darkness and deadness come over it, and the evil one enter, to sow all manner of evil seeds, as strife, envy, evil watchings, levity, pride, and such like; the latter end if such is worse than their beginning.

... [None should] call each other bad names, not give themselves to wrath or railing; but if any thing of distance should happen, let none sleep upon it, nor the sun go down upon his or her wrath; but confess to each other, and seek peace and pursue it for it is well pleasing to God.

From:

A Testimony from the brethren who met in London . . . to faithful Friends and Elders in the counties

Richard Farnsworth et al., 1666

We do advise and counsel, that such as are made overseers of the flock of God by the Holy Spirit, and do watch for the good of the church, (meeting together in their respective places, to set and keep the affairs of it in good order,) to beware of admitting or encouraging such as are of weak and of little faith, to take such trust upon them for by hearing things disputed that, are doubtful, such may be hurt themselves, and hurt the Truth ; not being grown into a good understanding to judge of things. Therefore we exhort that you, who have received a true sense of things, be diligent in the Lord's business, and keep your meetings as to Him; that all may be kept pure and clean, according to that of God which is just and equal. We also advise that not any be admitted to order public business of the church, but such as are felt in a measure of the universal Spirit of Truth, which seeks the destruction of none, but the general good of all, and especially of those that love it, who are of the household of faith.

Excerpts compiled by *Western Friend* (2016)

From:

The Works of George Fox, Epistle 186

George Fox, 1659

Ye that are turned to the light, and gathered into it, meet together, and keep your meetings, that ye may feel and see the life of God among you, and know that in one another.

From:

The Works of George Fox, Epistle 313

George Fox, 1674

So Friends are not to meet like a company of people about town . . . but to wait upon the Lord, and feeling his power and spirit to lead them, and order them to his glory, that so whatsoever they may do, they may do it to the praise and glory of God, and in unity in the faith and in the spirit and in fellowship in the order of the gospel.

From:

The Works of George Fox, Epistle 383

George Fox, 1683

In all matters of business or difference or controversies, treat one another in such things kindly and gently, and be not fierce or heady and high minded; for that spirit will bring men and women to be lovers of themselves and to be despisers of others and [despisers of] that which is good, [a high-minded spirit] leads nature out of its course and . . . at last comes to be without natural affections . . .

GLOSSARY (excerpts)

from *Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God's Way Forward in Decision Making*
Lon Fendall, Jan Wood, & Bruce Bishop. Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2007.

Clearness: Early Quakers had “meetings for clearness”; some still follow this practice today. On one level, the meaning of clearness is the same as clarity, but there is a richer meaning that indicates the absence of any hindrance to discernment, inwardly or outwardly. Individually and in groups, we come to clearness by the patient process of discernment of the Holy Spirit’s leading.

Clerk, Clerking: All sorts of words are used for those who lead groups and are in charge of decision-making meetings—e.g., *president*, *chair*, and *moderator*. We have taken the term *clerk* from the traditional Quaker word for the presiding officer. As expressed in this book, the leadership of the clerk is a spiritual exercise, a very different process from serving as chairman.

Consensus: This term means a process of coming to agreement in a group about an issue, usually by discussing, listening, and shaping an acceptable agreement. We have chosen not to use the term, preferring the stronger spiritual content of the word *discernment*. We are convinced that consensus is not an adequate process for groups of Christian believers, whose great challenge and opportunity is to discern God’s leading.

Gathered Meeting: This is a term that was used among early Quakers. It means more than a group of people meeting together for worship or business. The *gathering* term refers to a keen consciousness of being gathered into the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is acknowledging that the Holy Spirit has moved in the meeting and thus the decisions arrived at aren’t subject to political pressure from people not gathered (participating).

Listening Meeting: The purpose of a listening meeting is to listen carefully to the members of the group and to the Holy Spirit speaking through them. Some have called this a *threshing meeting*, referring to the threshing process from biblical times, in which grain was separated from chaff. It is made clear that no decision is to be made at the meeting. Members are invited to speak about their thoughts, feelings, fears, desires, and hopes without needing to defend the validity of these expressions.

Listen Under: This refers to seeking to discern what is “under” the words, emotions, and conflicts that others are expressing. The assumption is that under these things is to be found God’s voice, ready to be uncovered and understood. It also means that one can listen to the heart and intent of another person rather than be limited by the language used.

Minute: Most organized groups that have business meetings designate a secretary to record the minutes of the discussion and action. The singular word *minute* is not normally used, but some Quakers speak of a minute as the individual statement capturing the discussion and the action that follows the discernment process.

Prayer of *Examen*: The “prayer of *examen*” mentioned in chapter 2 was originally developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola (see Tad Dunne, *Spiritual Exercises for Today: A Contemporary Presentation of the Classic Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991). Many spiritual leaders have refined the practice since Loyola first put it into words. The prayer of examen is an exercise in which we reflect on the past and ask Christ to walk with us through our memories and to first identify the “consolations”—the times when we were drawn closer to God. Then we are to identify and reflect on our “desolations”—the times we felt distant from God. Often we find consoling aspects to our experiences of desolation.

Sense of the Meeting: Quakers sometimes use this term in preference to *consensus*, indicating the understanding that emerges from waiting on God for leading. In its appropriate context, it recognizes that people have been meeting with God, not just with each other. A deeper level of spirituality is involved than the term *consensus* can indicate.

Standing Aside: Although sometimes misused as a way of trying to block action, at its best standing aside is a position taken by someone not yet in unity with the proposed action of the group. Standing aside acknowledges one’s own misgivings about the action, but invites the group to proceed in the direction they are being led.

Unable to Unite: This is an option to be used carefully when a person feels very strongly that the group is in error in its proposed action and does not feel clear about standing aside. The person with this conviction presents his or her concern, gives the reasons, and asks that the group not move forward on this action. If the group feels led to continue forward in spite of the objections expressed, the one unable to unite may ask that his or her position be noted in the meeting minutes. In this situation, the dissenting individual has been unable to trust the discernment of the group. This broken trust causes a rift—a wound that must be healed before the dissenting individual will once again be spiritually and emotionally free to participate in group discernment.

Way Forward: This term points to the central process of discerning a position around which the group can unite and proceed in faithfulness. Important ingredients of this process are clarity about being led by God and coming to unity about that leading.

Weightiness: Spiritual maturity and experience provide particular strength to the voice of some people. This might be a general quality of wisdom that applies to most issues and may also apply to particular issues in which a weighty person has unusually helpful experience and sensitivity.

Meetings for Business: Advices for Clerks

Arthur Larabee and Jacqueline Stillwell

The Role of the Clerk

The clerk's role is not a passive one. The job is more than merely recognizing speakers until the discussion is over. The clerk is helpful to the meeting by being active, not as a participant in the substance of the meeting, but as a facilitator and recorder of the spiritual truth of the community.

The clerk helps to focus the discussion; keeps it on track; articulates interim conclusions during the course of a discussion; senses the underlying currents of the meeting and helps to articulate them; gives the meeting a sense of form and direction.

The clerk plays a large role in maintaining the worshipful character of the meeting. Leadership from the clerk encourages the corporate discipline that makes it easier for the meeting to sense and respond to the Spirit.

Absent leadership from the clerk, fear and ego may take over and these energies create barriers to the Spirit.

Work toward a spiritually safe environment.

- Insist that people be recognized before speaking.
- Ask people to address you, or the meeting as a whole, and not each other.
- Interrupt if two or more people get into a dialogue with just themselves.
- Slow things down by deliberately being slow to recognize the next speaker.
- Ask the meeting to "settle," inviting time for reflection.
- Interrupt people who burden the meeting by repeating what has already been said, by speaking at too great a length, or who use a tone and language that is hurtful to other.
- Intercede on behalf of the group in order to create a climate of safety.
- Call for a period of worship if needed to bring the meeting back to a centered place.
- Help to bring out the full range of views on a particular matter, but keep in mind that it is not a purpose of the meeting to hear everything that could be said on a matter. Help people to say what may be difficult for them to say. Invite "minority" views before they are overwhelmed by the many.
- Help people who speak to stay focused on the matter at hand. Identify matters that belong elsewhere on the agenda, or in a different meeting.
- Speak the difficult truths for the group. In any group, some things may not be said to avoid conflict or because they are too painful. If they belong in the group's deliberations, the clerk has a responsibility to speak them, or ask someone else to do this.
- Remain neutral. Refrain from speaking your personal thoughts. If you must speak on a topic, be clear with the group that you are speaking as an individual and not as the clerk. Ask for a temporary clerk for an agenda item if you are not able to remain neutral.

Create Safety by Interrupting

It is useful to think through in advance how to interrupt people, if this should be needed. Language that asks permission is useful:

- "May I make a suggestion ...?"
- "May I interrupt you ...?"
- "Would you be willing for me to ...?"
- "May I have your permission to ...?"

As difficult as it is to do, it is absolutely necessary for the safety and well-being of the meeting for the clerk to interrupt people who are burdening the meeting. The clerk is the only one who can do it. The meeting expects the clerk to do it. It's hard, but do it.

Language:

Use inclusive language. "A proposal has been made, how are we/Friends led?"

Be aware of your body language. Consider – sit when the focus is with the body of the meeting, stand to bring the attention to the clerk.

Prior to the Meeting:

- a. Draft an agenda. For each item define: who will present the item, estimate time, is this a report/discussion/decision? Is the homework prepared?
- b. Research any anticipated procedures or needed information. (reference Faith and Practice)
- c. Check-in with committee clerks. Ask for written reports – know who will be reporting about what, and if any action/decision items will be presented.
- d. Meet with recording clerk to review the agenda and prepare for the meeting. Consider what minutes you anticipate being written.
- e. A week before the meeting, remind members about the time/date for the meeting and about major agenda items or homework that needs attention.
- f. Check-in one-on-one with friends who you anticipate may have difficulty with an agenda item, process, or another individual.

Clerking the Meeting:

- a. Ensure the room is set up for all to hear and see one another. Set up a table for the clerks.
- b. Do whatever is necessary and helpful to create a spiritually centered space.
- c. Begin promptly. Ask for help as needed so the responsibility for the meeting rests with everyone and not just you. Be open to the movement of Spirit.
- d. Begin with a period of settling worship. May read a query into the worship.
- e. Review the agenda and ask for its approval. As you introduce each agenda item be clear if it is a report, discussion, or is this body needing to make a decision. Be clear about who will be making the decision and how much time is allotted for each item.
- f. Ask for an agreed upon end time for the meeting.
- g. Support the recording clerk during the meeting by holding worshipful space while s/he writes each minute. Pause to review the minutes as you progress through the meeting, taking care to approve wording on decision items.
- h. Summarize periodically, helping to build a sense of the meeting. Check with the group each time you do this to make sure your summary is accurate.
- i. Listen carefully to what is said, both with words and otherwise, so that you will be able to gather a sense of the meeting.
- j. Discern when the group has come to a sense of the meeting. State your perception of the sense of the meeting, and ask the group if your statement is accurate. It is the group that is the final authority and not you. Don't hesitate to suggest a sense of the meeting early on if you feel one is present.
- k. Sense the unity, or not, of the group and ask the group to confirm it.
- l. Before the end of the meeting, summarize what may be the unfinished business, and make a plan for how it will be handled. Assign homework.
- m. End the meeting on time (or ask for approval to extend it) with a brief period of open worship.

After the meeting:

Review the minutes for accuracy/grammar/dots & commas with the recording clerk, and do any required follow-up with individuals or tasks.

George Bliss: advice to clerks

Try a sense of the meeting early and often, trust that the Spirit might work quickly sometimes. If you have unity, the meeting can move on, and if you don't have unity, Friends will tell you. Just because there is a potential for controversy, it doesn't need to develop. After stating sense of the meeting early, wait for sufficient time to see if there are objections. Don't railroad. If there is deep-seated objection, it will come out and a deeper discussion can take place, though the clerk should be sensitive to those who might not agree, even though they do not speak out.

Do not state all sides of the issue when stating the sense of the meeting. Just state what the sense is; if you state it in the form of discussion, you will get more discussion.

There are many kinds of clerks with different gifts. Clerks should try to be themselves, not imitate another good clerk.

Bill Taber: Reasons why meeting should not go beyond 2 hours

- group loses its mental acuity
- some people won't come back
- people start to leave physically

Jan Hoffman

Discernment of God's will should be used only on substantive matters: matters essentially neutral to the spiritual life (like the time of meeting) do not require disciplined discernment.

Don't say, "This is a divisive issue" or "Let us hear both sides." Most issues are complex and there are many "sides," not just two. Just because we differ on a question does not mean we are "divided." We can be in unity in the Spirit. As the 1985 Consultation on Discernment asks, "How do we discern whether we sometimes have to sacrifice unity with each other for unity with God?" In the process of receiving new light, God's will may very well be for us to be in disunity, struggling to find a new unity.

Depersonalize the clerk: not "I would like us to move on," but "Given that we have other matters to consider, are Friends content to move on?" Not "It is helpful to me to have this recommendation written," but "It is helpful to all of us as we seek unity to have this written recommendation...."

Some feel the practice of the clerk recognizing a string of people with raised hands ("You first, then you, then you...") affirms those persons and lets them know the clerk is aware of them so they can better listen to the speaker. For me, this does not affirm the sense that everyone in a meeting for business tries to be attuned to where the Spirit is leading, so that we do not need "personal recognition" to function. Also it does not seem to affirm the faith that Friends may change as a result of listening to others and perceiving the movement of the Spirit. I remember hearing a Young Friends clerk say, "Please put your hand down as an indication to me that you are listening to the speaker."

It could be that a given speaker says what a person who had a hand raised and was not recognized at that moment would have said. In that case, the second person would not raise her/his hand after the speaker finished. They might possibly say, "That Friend speaks my mind." Or it could be that a sense of the meeting is clear to the clerk long before everyone present has spoken to the question. I remember the advice of George Bliss about clerking: "Try a sense of the meeting early and often. If you have unity, you can move on to other matters, and if you don't have unity, Friends will tell you!" So from both the clerk and the body of the meeting, after a given contribution, there needs to be a testing to see what that contribution has done to the "ecosystem" of the meeting – to see if more words are necessary at all, or if different words need to be spoken.

Basically, I feel the clerk needs to give people a chance to change their minds about whether to speak or not, and people need to be ready to change their minds about needing to speak.

Advice for Clerks

Mariellen O. Gilpin

Friends Journal, February 1, 2009

Here are my thoughts for a new clerk. You'll have your own way of doing things, and they'll be wonderful ways, but I thought perhaps you'd like to see in one place my own ideas about how to clerk effectively.

Praying for the meeting. However egalitarian Quakers may think they are, they tend to look to their clerk for spiritual leadership. The best advice I can give is to pray for the meeting, daily, in whatever way you are guided to do. I pray for everybody by name, and it works for me, sometimes in amazing ways, sometimes in perfectly ordinary ones. Whenever a visitor comes, I add their name to the prayer list, whether or not I ever see them again. Thus I seldom forget a name. Recently a woman appeared in worship. It was her second visit, after a six-month gap. I shook her hand and called her by name. She was amazed—and she came again, a couple weeks later. That's one of the ordinary ways praying for Friends by name is helpful.

Keep pen and paper handy during prayer. So often in the midst of prayer for meeting, I'm given a task to do. I write it down, and move on with my prayers.

Praying for the quality of our worship— every day, not just on Sunday mornings. Sometimes this means that I speak in worship; sometimes it means others speak. Also, sometimes we have a totally silent meeting, but I will have a sense afterward that it has been a very good meeting for everyone present. Another Friend and I meet about an hour before worship in order to hold the meeting in prayer. I don't find it hard work to pray for the meeting during worship, because I always go away feeling I've been blessed just as much as those I've been praying for. It is not a selfless act, in other words, to pray for the meeting. I have been advised to include myself in the prayers for meeting, and judging by the effects on me, the meeting is indeed being blessed.

I have found that being clerk seems to increase the number of times I speak in worship. That may be peculiar to me, but I suggest you be open to the possibility you'll be used in the spoken ministry more often than you're used to.

In business meetings, keeping discussions moving. Meetings for business that are allowed to bog down in discussion are going to lose members. Have some standard moves to bring things to a timely conclusion. For instance, state early in the discussion what you think is the growing sense of the meeting. If you state where you think the group is headed, it helps keep discussion moving. You may have to state the sense of the meeting several times as the discussion develops, but you will have helped the group stay on track. If it's clear there's not going to be an agreement that day, postpone the issue and move on to the rest of the agenda, asking an appropriate committee to discern the issue further and make a recommendation later.

Creating agendas. Ask committees to send you their minutes a day or two before business meeting: it reduces the level of discernment needed on the floor of business meeting, because you already know what business needs to have priority. Put the business items that will take

lots of energy first on the agenda, while Friends are fresh. Put the treasurer's report dead last, when Friends are ready for the meeting to be done. They are less likely to question minutiae in the treasurer's report and drive everybody else crazy.

Appreciating. As you read the committee reports, spend time and prayer being appreciative—draft minutes of thanks often for special efforts Friends have made.

Giving committees homework. Encourage committees to draft minutes they want the meeting to consider. In this electronic age, it's a simple matter to copy a draft minute directly into your agenda as you prepare it. Friends work more efficiently and stay on task better if they have the exact wording in front of them. Detailed agendas help Friends stay focused—and make the job of the recording clerk much easier. Drafting a proposed minute in committee means less time and effort in business meeting deciding the exact word choice—it won't, and shouldn't, stop Friends from thinking carefully about word choices, but having something down on paper helps to keep the discussion moving.

Dealing with controversy. Controversial matters may need their own business session, or several special sessions. Friends are more tolerant of two two-hour meetings than one four-hour meeting—and the decisions reached will be more durable. A shorter meeting helps to keep Friends' tempers from fraying. Consult with an appropriate committee (in my meeting, Ministry and Oversight) about how to conduct a session about a controversy. Lack of careful planning may open the door for wrangling and miscommunication. Before you begin a difficult discussion, remind Friends of good practice:

- Friends should not compose what they want to say in rebuttal while another Friend is speaking. Focus on listening deeply to the speaker, not on the rebuttal.
- Leave a short silence between speakers, so Friends can reflect on each speaker's words.
- Friends who agree with an earlier speaker should not reiterate a point, but simply say, "That Friend speaks my mind."
- Encourage silent Friends to speak to an issue. The light of each Friend should be cherished by every other Friend present.
- Do not speak unnecessarily. In the words of John Woolman: *It behooves all to be cautious how they detain a Meeting. . . . In 300 minutes are five hours, and he that improperly detains 300 people one minute, besides other evils that attend it, does an injury like that of imprisoning one man five hours without cause.*

Having strong opinions of your own. I strongly recommend against it. Bring your concerns up in the appropriate committee and let the committee stir your ideas into the pot along with their own to come up with their own recommendations. For the clerk to have a strong opinion makes it harder for the meeting to find that Third Way—to let the Spirit create a unique new alternative that is better for everyone present.

Dealing with complainers. Listen, but don't fix. Don't feel you need to make the problem go away yourself, however sensible you think your solution might be. You don't have a complete understanding from listening to one person's view, or even both points of view. This is a matter for the wisdom of others. Fixing is not the role of clerk. Fixing is a good way to divide a meeting

into sides, for and against. Fixing is a good way to reinforce a Friend for playing If Daddy Won't Say Yes, Ask Mommy. Instead, make it clear to complainers that they should talk to, rather than about, the person giving them a problem.

Remind both yourself and the complainer of Matthew 18:15-17:

If your brother commits a sin, go and take the matter up with him, strictly between yourselves, and if he listens to you, you have won your brother over. If he will not listen, take one or two others with you, so that all facts may be duly established on the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, report the matter to the congregation; and if he will not listen even to the congregation, you must then treat him as a pagan or tax-gatherer.

The complainer can be encouraged to ask for a clearness committee to help resolve a disagreement.

Following up. Make sure someone has taken responsibility for implementing any decision reached. Each month, review business meeting minutes for the past two or three months to find what balls have been dropped. A gentle reminder to the person responsible will usually help get the ball back in action.

Friends can waste a lot of time in business meeting not volunteering for a task. Ask the appropriate committee to discern who to ask and then announce who has agreed to do the work. Don't let the business meeting bog down waiting for someone else to implement a decision.

The person who volunteers for a task is not always the right person for the job—for instance, the person who volunteers to cook but doesn't bother to read the recipe beforehand, so that dinner is two hours late. Or the person who doesn't really have a commitment to the job of writing a procedures manual—who may actually be opposed to having one—should not be allowed to volunteer. Don't allow the business meeting to get itself into the situation of asking for volunteers. Again, refer the choice of who should do the work to the appropriate committee. You'll like the results a lot better. You might even get dinner on time.

Doing the work of the committees. Don't do this. Remind them if need be, but leave the work to them. If they need more than a reminder, ask to attend the next committee meeting. Show your interest in their work, but don't volunteer. You have enough to do already as clerk. Leave committee work to committee members. The meeting will be the stronger for having committees that take responsibility and carry it out. Appreciate their work publicly and often, but don't do the work yourself. Consider that you're training less experienced Quakers to someday take the role of clerk in their turn. Letting them do the work their way is part of their training in Quaker leadership.

Collaborating. Quaker leadership is collaborative, not authoritarian. Your role as clerk is to inspire and sometimes to suggest and propose—but encourage others to contribute their ideas and make the dream their own. Name concerns, focus the meeting's attention and energy, listen carefully as the sense of the meeting develops—and then step back. If you find yourself taking ownership of an idea, you're stepping outside the clerk's role.

Dealing with brand-new concerns. Have a time at the end of business meeting when Friends can bring up new concerns. Do not discuss new concerns at business meeting; instead, assign the concern to a committee and have the committee season it and make recommendations to business meeting. When committees are allowed to do their work appropriately, Friends don't end up dealing with half-baked ideas on the floor of business meeting. If it's a good idea, it'll get better in committee as other Friends contribute their ideas. If it's a bad idea, it'll die in committee rather than taking up business meeting time and energy.

Listening. The last bit of advice I can offer on clerking is this: Listen. Listen in worship, listen in business meeting, listen to conveners of committees, listen to individual Friends who just need a friendly ear. You don't have to fix things, but you do need to know the state of the meeting—and that's done by listening. Sometimes you'll be clear that something needs to be shared with a committee, or a gentle word needs to be put in someone's ear. Mostly, though, just listen, acknowledge the pain you'll hear, and wait for divine guidance.

I love the job of clerking the meeting. I love the collaborative style of leadership Friends ways make possible, and I love the way the Spirit moves in business meeting. I also love the way God makes available to the meeting the spiritual gifts the meeting needs at a particular time. The Spirit has chosen you to be clerk, and if you pray for meeting and listen deeply, yours will be the gifts the meeting needs.

Preparing an Agenda, by Aimee Elsbree, Claremont Meeting

The presiding clerk is charged with coordinating the business of the meeting and becomes a clearness committee of one. And so begins preparation for unity. Certainly the spirit of worship is primary to act corporately in unity, but this does not preclude some perfectly rational steps.

- I. Remind meeting that there will be a meeting for business and items should be brought to the clerk.
 - A. Bring attention to special items.
 - B. Send some items directly to a committee.

- II. Find proportion in mundane detail.
 - A. Review standard timely items (e.d. budget, State of Society report, membership or marriage) that require regular attention, and put them on the agenda. One can have an annual calendar to schedule some. Consider pacing items requiring more than one hearing before approval.
 - B. Keep up on matters that should be coming before the meeting.
 1. Nudge those responsible if they haven't contacted you as clerk.
 2. Write notes to save time and give a concrete reminder.

- III. Be sure an item is ready to come before the meeting.
 - A. What background information is needed? Shall clerk add Quaker or meeting history?
 - B. If the subject is returning, have past questions been studied?
 - C. Has there been sufficient discussion with others in the meetings?
 - D. Is a threshing meeting needed first?
 - E. Who will be responsible if the matter is approved?
 - F. What will it cost? Which fund(s) can be used?
 - G. Who will prepare presentation? Bring materials? Present?

- IV. Remember the matter is before the *meeting*, not a committee. Consider what points meeting should cover in the discussion in order to gain a right sense of the meeting and make notes (some of part III fits).

- V. Draft foreseeable minutes of approval/ decision.
 - A. Membership is an obvious example.
 - B. Such preparation will have acquainted a clerk well with varieties of meeting experience, making it possible to draft a minute (double-spaced), which may be edited to convey the sense of the meeting. Allowing blanks for specific information can offset omission of important detail and provide reference for the future.

- VI. Clear how much time will be needed by each person presenting an item for business. Estimate the fair number of minutes an item should require before carrying it over to another meeting.

A well-prepared agenda allows directness, simplicity of procedure, and prepares for a sense of the meeting by enabling openness to the Spirit for discernment of the will of God.

1997 New England Yearly Meeting Festival of Clerks Thoughts on Recording Clerking

Eden Grace
November 22, 1997

Tips on being a Recording-Clerk-friendly Clerk

1. Share the agenda with the Recording Clerk ahead of time, if possible, and discuss any items which you expect to be particularly substantive. If you have advance copies of any committee reports, handouts, etc, give those to the Recording Clerk. Often the Recording Clerk can get a head start on composing certain minutes, and will find it beneficial to understand something of the substantive issues before the meeting begins.
2. Structure the business meeting such that minutes are read back and approved during that session. This can either be done after each item, or in clumps. This is the best way to assure that the Recording Clerk has gathered a true sense of the meeting, and indeed that the meeting has actually come to unity.
3. Leave time for the Recording Clerk to compose the minute. Hold the meeting in worship while the Recording Clerk works. Do not ask for announcements, conduct quick items of business, or allow a stretch break.
4. Check in with your Recording Clerk continually throughout the meeting. Think of it like looking in your rear view mirror. Especially as you reach the end of an item, check to see if the Recording Clerk needs time to finish writing before you move on.
5. Don't be afraid to conference with the Recording Clerk. The two of you, as a team, are the clerks of the meeting, and the Recording Clerk can often be useful in helping you discern the sense of the meeting, and in suggesting ways to proceed.'
6. When testing the sense of the meeting, speak in a manner which can be written down word-for-word.
7. During the meeting, make sure the Recording Clerk gets copies of all handouts and committee reports. Before leaving at the end of the meeting, make sure the Recording Clerk has everything he/she needs in order to finalize the minutes, including any documents to be attached.
8. Review the minutes with the Recording Clerk promptly after the meeting, while memories are fresh. The Clerk and Recording Clerk are free to edit the minutes for grammar and the like, even when they have been approved by the meeting. At the next meeting, when printed copies of the minutes are available, ask for corrections, and approve the whole set of minutes as corrected.

Tips on techniques for Recording Clerks

On writing and reading back minutes during the meeting:

I am a strong believer in composing and reading back the minutes during the meeting, rather than waiting until the next meeting. Very often the process of hearing the minute on a just-completed action can bring to light that the meeting was not yet in unity, or alternatively it can deepen the sense of unity and commitment to the decision taken. Recording Clerks might feel overwhelmed at the idea of exposing their work to scrutiny as they go along. Clerks might worry that reading the minutes will take up too much time in the meeting. It has been my experience, however, that the consideration of the minutes becomes a time of particular blessing in the meeting, as Friends reflect on the unity reached, and as the Recording Clerk is upheld with prayer for his/her work. Some practical suggestions I would make include:

- Don't be reluctant to ask the Clerk for time if you need it.
- Compose routine minutes ahead of time, if possible. This gives you a breather during the meeting.
- You don't need to read back minutes which are utterly straightforward (i.e. opening, closing, roll call, etc.)
- Speak slowly, clearly and with a loud voice.
- Don't be surprised if your minute seems to stir up new confusion or discussion. Hearing a minute can sometimes make the meeting aware that it wasn't in unity after all.
- Don't get into a position of defending a minute once you've read it back. Keep an open heart to changes which are suggested.
- Be willing to read an almost-finished minute and ask the meeting for help, if you are feeling stuck.
- In very prolonged and complex items, I tend to focus on writing down the substance of each message as it is spoken. Most of this material will not become part of the final minute, but this note-taking relieves me of the need to keep it all in my head, and helps me listen attentively to each speaker over a long period of time. If the meeting comes to unity at the end of the discussion, I make sure to minute the unity clearly and read it back for approval, but I ask the meeting's indulgence to compose the preliminary paragraphs after the meeting.
- Factual details which are not available during the meeting (exact money amounts, dates and minute numbers of previous actions, etc.) can be filled in after the meeting and needn't hold up the process of approving the substance of the minute during the meeting.

Elements of a good, clear minute:

Not every minute requires all these elements, but this is a checklist to keep in mind:

- pertinent background information
- citations of past action, including date and minute number
- salient points of the discussion which help explain the rationale for the decision taken (but not a summary of the whole discussion or a narrative of how the meeting reached its decision). Do not use names when summarizing the discussion, unless a Friend requests to be minuted as holding a certain opinion.
- the decision in clear language
- who is responsible for following up or taking next steps, and when a further report is expected back to the meeting.

On language and style:

- Use familiar, formulaic "Quakerese" language rather than trying to phrase things in new and creative ways.
- Avoid adverbs when expressing unity or clearness. To say that a couple was found "abundantly clear" for marriage implies a hierarchy of clearness that undermines our commitment to seek God's will in all matters.
- My personal style is often to phrase a minute with more reference to God than was necessarily present in the discussion. I find this helps deepen the unity reached, and serves as a subtle reminder to Friends of the faith basis of our business.
- Some meetings retain use of traditional Quaker dating language (First Day, Fifth Month), and others have given it up. The important thing is to be consistent with the usage of your meeting.

Tidy minute-taking for historical purposes:

As you write the minutes, imagine two groups of people looking over your shoulder: historians/archivists/genealogists decades into the future; and the meeting in future session needing understand its past action. Here are some technical suggestions for making your minutes history-friendly:

- Date each set of minutes.
- Clearly identify the body which is meeting, and the names of the Clerk and Recording Clerk.
- If practical, include a list of those who attended.
- Number each minute. (The best numbering system, in my opinion, is to start in January with minute 97-1 and continue through December with minute 97-xx. This means that every minute of the meeting has a unique number, and future reference and indexing becomes easier.)
- Title each item in such a way that the title is brief and easy to spot visually.
- When using names, use full first and last name, not nicknames.
- Each page should have a header or footer with the name of the meeting, date and page number.
- The closing minute of a meeting should indicate when the next meeting will be held. If a meeting is canceled or the date is changed for some reason, the opening minute of the next meeting should mention that fact, so that someone trying to track a sequence of meeting minutes will not wonder if they are missing the minutes of a particular date.
- Send minutes to the Yearly Meeting Archives once a year. They will provide acid-free paper to meetings upon request. (Refer to the brand-new Guide to the Archives, available from the YM Office, for more information on what records to send to the Archives.)
- Take responsibility for the meeting's permanent record of minutes. Organize it if you find it in disarray. Be prompt about putting your minutes into the record. (In some cases the meeting's Statistical Recorder has responsibility for the permanent records. If this is true in your meeting and it is functioning well, terrific. If you find no one is taking care of the records, consider it your role to do so.)
- Communicate regularly with the meeting's Recorder to make sure actions on memberships and marriages are correctly noted in the statistical records of the meeting.

On attachments:

I am of the opinion that attachments are dangerous things. I realize this is not a universally-held opinion, and some middle ground is probably called for. In reading past minutes of the meeting, I have seen too many instances in which the attachments are no longer attached to the permanent record. A minute which reads "Ministry and Counsel Committee presented the attached proposal for changing our First Day morning schedule. After discussion, Friends approved the proposal with gratitude for the Committee's work." is most unhelpful if the proposal is no longer attached. My personal guideline is as follows: Certainly anything which is approved by the meeting belongs in the body of the minutes, not as an attachment. Things which will be attached should be summarized in the minutes. Whenever I attach a document I assume it will go missing at some point, and I write the minute so that the action taken by the meeting is clear without needing the attachment. Here are some technical points on attachments:

- Be sure to note in the body of the minute that something relevant is attached.
- At the end of the minutes include a list of the attachments.'
- Make sure each attachment is dated and identifies the committee which submitted it.
- In the top corner of each attached page, give the date of the meeting, the page number of the attachment in the whole packet of the minutes, and the minute number to which it relates.

Ask for help:

- Don't be afraid to ask the meeting for clarification if you are confused, lost, or not following the discussion. Often if you are confused, so are others, and a pause for clarification will be helpful to the meeting as a whole.
- Don't be afraid to ask the clerk for time.
- Offer your help to the Clerk if you feel that reading what you have written would be useful at any point.
- Remember always to put yourself in the hands of God and anchor your recording process in prayer for guidance. Devise means for reminding yourself of your dependence on God throughout the meeting. I've seen Recording Clerks who pencil in a short prayer or Scripture verse at the top of each sheet of notepaper.

from *New England Yearly Meeting Interim Faith and Practice 2014*

Appendix 1D.

Preparation of Monthly Meeting Minutes: Some Useful Practices

Expeditious preparation of useful minutes can be aided in many ways. Some suggestions follow.

1. The recording and presiding clerks may study the agenda together in advance of the meeting.
2. An effective minute usually consists of three sections: a) reasons for the matter before the meeting; b) decision approved; c) who is responsible for carrying out the decision, including how it is to be financed.
3. A minute may be drafted in advance for on-site editing as discussion of the matter takes place (for example, membership, marriage, matters having clear alternatives).
4. Oral committee reports should be supplemented by a written version and should include draft copies of action minutes.
5. Assign topical identification to sections of minutes and let the minutes of action be serially numbered (e.g., 2011-2-1¹ Minute on Anti-Muslim violence). Both organizing factors facilitate reference in the future.
6. Use care in distributing and filing copies of the minutes to ensure that those given a responsibility in a meeting have a written copy of the decision.
7. To the extent possible, make minutes themselves complete, interpretable without reliance upon attachments (which often go astray).
8. Some monthly meetings approve all the minutes of a meeting at that meeting, and read them at the next meeting for information only. In other meetings, the recording clerk takes notes and prepares minutes later, except for minutes of action whose wording is approved at the time. Those minutes are read for correction and approval at the next monthly meeting.

Text based on the 2001 Pacific YM Faith and Practice

¹ February (26) 2011, Minute 1

Making Presentations at the Meeting for Business

Presenting a committee report at a monthly meeting for business can be an intimidating task for new Friends and old. The following thoughts may serve to make the process more understandable and less stressful.

In meeting for business, Friends are seeking to discover and to implement the will of God. Aware that they meet in the presence of God, Friends try to conduct their business reverently, in the wisdom and peaceable spirit of Jesus. Insofar as a divine-human meeting takes place, there is order, unity, and power. (p. 114, *Faith and Practice of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends*)

Why do committees make presentations at meetings for business?

There are some very small Friends meetings that have no separate standing committees. All the major concerns are discussed at the monthly meeting for business. The meeting for business becomes, in effect, all the committee meetings, one after another.

When membership reaches a certain size, the monthly meeting will often assign members and attenders to committees, and have those committees season issues before bringing them to the meeting for business. In this case, the bulk of the discussion takes place at the committee meeting, rather than at the meeting for business.

Three kinds of committee presentations

Presentations to the meeting for business usually follow one of three different formats. The first is a review by the committee of the work they have done. In this case, the committee is not looking for any approvals, but is merely giving the meeting a summary of their activities. They might report, for instance, that a wedding was accomplished according to the good order of Friends, or that a certain amount of money was raised for an endowment fund. Even though approval of the report is not being sought, it is important that the Clerk and Recording Clerk receive a written copy of the report, so they are not distracted from the meeting for business by a need to take notes on the committee's presentation.

Another type of presentation occurs when a committee has a concern that they wish to bring to the attention of the meeting for business. The committee may not know how best to deal with the concern, but hopes that more Light may be brought to it by presenting it to the meeting for business. The Clerk can allow a time to consider the issue, and then the meeting can assign the concern to an ad-hoc or standing committee for further seasoning.

A third type of presentation is the offering of a proposed minute for approval by the meeting. The committee may come with their proposed minute written out, or may come with an oral proposal, which the Clerks will then compose into the proposed

minute. The committee must be in unity with the proposed minute before it is presented to the meeting for business. Such a proposed minute might be a statement of the meeting's leadings, an intention to spend some of the meeting's money, or a commitment by the meeting to undertake some good works in the community.

Requesting time in the meeting for business agenda

When a committee seeks to make a presentation at a meeting for business, a representative should inform the Clerk of this fact well before the date of the meeting for business. The Clerk spends much time creating an orderly flow of items for the meeting for business. Last-minute additions to the schedule can result in a disjointed agenda.

The Clerk will want to know if the presentation is a simple report, a concern or a proposed minute being offered for approval. If a proposed minute will be offered, the Clerk will ascertain that the committee is in unity with the proposed minute, and that the committee has spent sufficient time seasoning the issue. The person chosen by the committee to present a proposed minute should submit a copy of it to the Clerk, preferably some days before the meeting for business, but in all cases before the committee's presentation.

Making the presentation

Any member of a committee can make a presentation to the meeting for business. It is often helpful for committees to have a training session for meeting for business presentations so that all members of the committee can feel comfortable with the process. The Clerk, and some of the more "seasoned" members of the meeting, are good sources of information on how to make presentations. When a committee is bringing a proposed minute or a concern to the meeting for business, it is very important that most, if not all, of the committee be present to provide support for the presenter and to provide background information for the matter at hand.

Once the prepared part of the presentation has been made, the presenter should either sit down and settle back into worship, or, at the direction of the Clerk, remain standing to answer questions about the presentation. In the case where discussion follows a committee presentation, and where it seems appropriate to minute the sense of the meeting, it is the responsibility of the Clerk and Recording Clerk, rather than the committee presenter, to formulate that minute.

Responding to a presentation

Those Friends who wish to respond to a presentation should raise their hands, or say, "Clerk please?" to alert the Clerk that they wish to make a contribution. Friends should refrain from speaking without recognition by the Clerk, except to make short statements like "that Friend speaks my mind." The Clerk will recognize each person in turn, according to his/her sense of the meeting.

Once recognized, Friends should speak directly to the Clerk, rather than to the presenter, the previous speaker, or the entire meeting. Dialogue between individuals is never appropriate, and tends to destroy the worshipful spirit and deliberate pace that are so important to the well-functioning meeting for business. Friends waiting to be recognized by the Clerk should lower their hands while someone else is speaking, and should listen with an open heart to the ministry of other Friends. There are times when the Clerk may ask if those still wishing to respond could put aside their remarks in the interests of moving forward.

Remarks made from the floor of the meeting for business should be made in a spirit of worship. It is often more helpful to reflect upon the broader issues raised by the matter at hand, rather than the subtle nuances of the committee's presentation. Prolonged discussions on minutiae are rarely helpful. It is often a wise course for the meeting for business to write a minute describing the sense of the meeting, and allow a committee to implement the minute. The committee can then come back to the meeting for business later with a report on their implementation.

Approval of Items

If an item of business needs the approval of the meeting, and the Clerk senses unity on the matter, s/he will read a proposed minute and ask for approval. It is the tradition of Friends to note their approval by saying "Approve" or "I approve" rather than "Approved."

If a Friend does not feel led to approve a proposed minute, s/he should alert the Clerk immediately, and when recognized, express his/her uneasiness with the minute. The Clerk may then suggest an alternative minute around which the meeting might find unity, return the item to a committee for more seasoning, or postpone further consideration of the matter until a future meeting for business.

Summary: do's and don'ts

For presenters:

DO...

- bring a written copy of any presentation you are going to make
- request time on the agenda as far in advance as possible

DON'T...

- present an item of business with only one member of the committee present
- remain standing after you have finished presenting your item (unless directed to do so by the Clerk)

For others:

DO...

- wait to be recognized by the clerk
- speak to the Clerk
- listen with an open heart
- be willing to put aside remarks in the interest of moving forward
- be willing to trust a committee to carry an item forward
- express approval of a minute by saying "Approve" or "I approve"

DON'T...

- worry too much about minutiae

There are additional sources of information for Friends who wish to learn more about the conduct of the meeting for business. Reading the applicable sections of *Faith and Practice of the New England Yearly Meeting* and consulting with members of the Worship and Ministry Committee are two ways to start.

Prepared by Beacon Hill Friends Meeting, Ministry and Counsel Committee, October 1994

Committee Clerk Responsibilities - *Jacqueline Stillwell*

- Convene the committee regularly.
- Clerk the meetings (or arrange for someone else to do this).
- Consult with presiding clerk if you have a question. S/he serves ex-officio on all committees.
- Set goals annually.
- Review your committee description annually and set goals that reflect your responsibilities and the needs of the meeting. Revise goals during year as necessary.
- Prepare for your committee meeting:
 - Develop the agenda before the meeting.
 - Review your timeline of tasks. Are you on track with goals? Have you done your homework?
 - Prior to the meeting, review agenda and expectations for the meeting with the recording clerk.
 - Remind members of meeting the week before; send minutes.
 - If possible and needed, remind people of homework they accepted at last meeting. (It can be useful to highlight items that are action items and need work between meetings.)
- Clerking committee meetings:
 - Begin promptly
 - Use settling silence to relax your body of tensions, clear your mind of other concerns, calm your emotions, connect with why you have accepted this responsibility, and prepare to listen and focus well.
 - Read the agenda and ask for approval. Review timeline of task/goals.
 - Ask for agreed upon end time of meeting.
 - Plan how to use time on agenda items, being careful not to leave large items to end.
 - Be sure all present have had a chance to share their truth. Elicit opinions from all members, especially if they are quiet
 - End with a brief period of appreciation and worship.
- Prepare for business meeting:
 - Consult with the presiding clerk about what agenda items you have for business meeting. Alert the presiding clerk to issues that require action.
 - If you are coming with a recommendation, bring a pre-written 'trial' minute.
 - Prepare your committee report (which will be attached to the official minutes).
 - Give an overview of your work and your goals and what progress you have made toward those goals.
 - Include research on items which require action.
 - Include a written recommendation in the report.
 - Send the report to the presiding clerk prior to the meeting, and to committee members to read before the business meeting.

Recording Clerk of Committee Responsibilities

- Take minutes of each meeting. If decisions are made, read the decision minute back for approval before the end of the meeting.
- Send the draft minutes to the clerk for editing as needed.
- Correct the minutes of the meeting if necessary, and send to presiding clerk, in addition to committee members.

Committee Member Responsibilities

- Attend committee meetings faithfully.
- Volunteer to do work between meetings. And do it!
- Check in with your committee clerk with any findings/questions.

WELCOME TO MEETING FOR BUSINESS

Some Words on Its Spiritual Disciplines

We begin meeting for business by gathering for worship, centering down, asking for spiritual guidance and feeling the unity of our purpose together.

In any matter of business we seek God's will for us, acknowledging that no one person will have the whole picture. Friends are urged to listen attentively, with an open mind and heart so they may speak in the Light rather than from passion or intellect. Meeting for business is meant to be an exploration, not a debate.

In this mutual exploration, there are disciplines that help us. Friends wishing to speak raise their hand. *When the clerk recognizes them* they rise, and, when ready, speak their mind. If the Clerk asks for silence, all Friends return to worship seeking understanding and openness; in this silence one speaks only if led.

As some clarity emerges the Clerk will try to discern a "sense of the meeting" which represents the Light we corporately share on the matter at this point in time. This will be reflected in a minute that the Clerk will state and then ask, "Do Friends approve?" Those who approve so signify and those who do not make their reservations known. If there is general approval, the Clerk will acknowledge this. The Recording Clerk may be asked to read back the minute at this point.

If there are reservations, the Clerk may recognize Friends who wish to share their reservations or the Clerk may try modifying the minute. If two or three persons are still uncomfortable with a course of action, the Clerk may suggest that the Meeting is ready to proceed, though some remain uncomfortable. The Meeting will confirm this perception or say that the reservations stated seem strong enough (in a spiritual sense) to prevent action at this time. A sense of the meeting need not be unanimous approval. If, after several tries, there is no sense of the meeting, the question may be referred to committee or carried over to a future meeting for business.

Over time, our cumulative decisions shape and define us as a spiritual community. Your regular and worshipful participation will deepen the process and strengthen our unity in the Spirit.

Alan Eccleston, Clerk of Mt Toby Meeting 6/88
[intended as orientation for first-time attenders at meeting for business]

Frequently asked Questions about the individual's part in group discernment

excerpts from *Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God's Way Forward in Decision Making*,
Lon Fendall, Jan Wood, & Bruce Bishop. Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2007.

1. How do we deal with fear in the discernment process? We know that “perfect love drives out fear,” as the apostle John put it (I John 4: 18). But the problem is that our love is not always perfect. Our humanness takes over and we become fearful of the consequences of decisions.

Fear can actually be a helpful emotion to keep us from embracing foolish proposals. A number of Christian organizations have lost large amounts of money by placing their trust in dishonest individuals who offered lavish returns from shaky investment schemes. Their leaders needed to exercise more skepticism and greater fear that something too good to be true may be neither good nor true.

Disabling fear of the unknown, however, is the kind that kept the Hebrews wandering in the desert for 40 years. They felt afraid of the enemy's armies and they forgot God's many assurances that God would protect them and bring them safely to their destination.

Christian organizations face the unknown many times. It may be a change of leadership, a funding shortfall, or a change in circumstances that requires a different strategy of ministry. As individuals participating in the discernment process, we must name the group's fears and point to the many promises in Scripture, such as: “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

2. How does anger affect group discernment? Some people have an internal thermostat that goes up rapidly and visibly when they get angry. Their neck and face become red and in extreme cases the whole body begins shaking. Those around them have to find a way to defuse the situation or simply let the person vent before the discussion can proceed.

Most of us aren't afflicted with such a short fuse. But if we were honest, we would admit that others do and say things that make us angry. Anger can be a helpful emotion. It signals that something isn't what you wanted or needed.

Anger needs to be acknowledged and listened to. It holds important information. But once its message has been delivered, we are wise to release the angry feelings that brought the issue to our attention. If we hold and give fuel to the angry feelings, those feelings cloud our judgment, stand in the way of our hearing what others are saying, and prevent us from understanding the validity of others' feelings. As we are taught in James 1: 19-20, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”

The apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Corinth that he felt afraid when he came to visit them. He feared that he would find them engaging in “quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder” (2 Corinthians 12:20).

Our first responsibility in the group discernment process is to seek the Lord's help in refraining from outbursts of anger. For some this is very difficult because they feel passionate

about certain issues. Others rarely become angry in a discussion, but even those people can lose their composure in certain situations—a process similar to the effect of a catalyst in a chemical reaction.

It is also our responsibility in discernment meetings to pray for those swept up in anger and to find ways to affirm the concern they feel and to translate angry words into more constructive thoughts. This is a great favor to people who let their anger get them off track. It allows the valid thoughts behind the feelings to claim their rightful place in the discourse.

On one occasion, some participants in a church business meeting found themselves unable to channel their emotions constructively. It appeared to one person that the group was headed in an inappropriate direction, and that person gathered up his things and hurried out of the room, slamming the door behind him. The clerk tried to keep the focus on discerning God's leading, but the unconstructive behavior made it difficult. We must not let our passion for a particular outcome get in the way of listening to God and to those speaking God's truth.

6. Is it always necessary to express our opposition to a proposal? There are times when one may feel led to say nothing, even when one does not support a proposed action. It may be that the wisdom of the group's action will become more apparent in the future. At other times an individual concludes that his or her misgivings are matters of preference rather than conviction.

Being led not to express one's opposition in the meeting rules out the option of later expressing this opposition and questioning the appropriateness of the group's action. Too many times discussions take place in the parking lot after decisions are made. This kind of second-guessing of decisions harms the group.

7. What if a person feels led to express his or her opposition to an action that is about to be taken? Sometimes an individual senses the need to express a deep hesitation about a planned action. In a voting situation, this wouldn't be necessary because voting "no" provides that opportunity. Quakers have a practice called "standing aside," allowing a person to state his or her concerns and even strong opposition to a course of action that seems to be moving toward approval. The clerk must then determine if more time is needed to discern God's leading. But the clerk must also consider if the person standing aside is doing so because of attentiveness to God's voice or because of stubbornness or personal issues that stand in the way of hearing God's voice.

Before taking the extreme step of standing aside, an individual should examine his or her own discernment process to see if the actions are a response to God's voice or are a result of unhelpful motives. In group discourse not focused on discerning God's leading, it is difficult to back away from strongly expressed positions. Debate is a form of verbal combat and no debater likes to lose. In challenging cases, the opponent of the proposed action continues to say the same things over and over again. In the worst cases, there is a hint or an open threat that the person will leave the group if that person does not get his or her way. This is a sign of dysfunction in the group and should prompt its members to pray for the healing of the individual's spirit and the spirit of the group.

Spirit-Led Decision-making: Arriving at the Sense of the Meeting

*A Description of
Quaker Business Practice
with Queries for Deepening
Our Understanding and Experience*

By Mark Ehrke

Twin Cities Friends Meeting

What is “sense of the meeting”?

Sense of the meeting is the term used to describe the outcome of deliberations in the Quaker decision-making process. Sense of the meeting is not unlike consensus, in that decisions made are ones which are agreeable to all who are present. Quakers, however, recognize that Spirit is part of the “all who are present.” Quaker decision-making is therefore more than a consensus of the thoughts and feelings of the persons involved in the deliberations, for it invites the presence of the Divine into the deliberations. It is divinely guided decision-making.

Our terminology for the decision-making process reflects as well our belief in the presence of the Divine, for we refer to “being led to a sense of the meeting” or “arriving at a decision” rather than saying “we decided.” It is not “we” making decisions. It is the Spirit leading us.

How do Quakers arrive at the sense of the meeting?

Quaker decision-making is respectful of each person, a process that provides a means for coming to decisions by which the Light, as it shines through each participant, is respected. Decisions made are ones that, for no participant, are inconsistent with that person’s understanding of the will of the Spirit. The essence of the Quaker decision-making process is the letting go of one’s own agenda, and opening up to the direction of the Spirit. What distinguishes the Quaker decision-making process is the intentional inviting of the Holy Spirit into the process. This is the primary means by which consensus is made possible in Quakerism; this is the means by which consensus is made simple. Unless there is a letting go of the individual ego, the process is no more than a power play with each person or group vying for their position to be the one adopted. And if individuals hold to their own positions, the process becomes a matter of finding the lowest common denominator of opinion, rather than one of being open channels for the movement of the Spirit in the community.

But if participants are open to the Spirit and do invite the Spirit into the process, unity is possible in situations in which unity seems most unlikely. Or a solution or outcome unfolds that no one previously considered. When this has happened it has sometimes been referred to as a Third Way opening. In the same fashion, when the movement of the Spirit is abundantly present in a Meeting for Business, it is referred to as a Gathered Meeting.

In the process of arriving at a sense of the meeting, we are **not** seeking unity of opinion, but rather unity of the understanding of the Direction and Will of the Spirit in the matter under consideration.

How do we let in the way of the Spirit? What are common misconceptions about Quaker decision-making ?

The most common misconception is in thinking that we are searching for a solution that satisfies each participant. This is correct only to the degree that all participants are open channels for the Direction of the Spirit. What we are attempting to do is **not** to find a solution that satisfies each person's desires or fears, but a solution that is consistent with each person's discernment of the Will and Direction of the Spirit. Too often we let our own egos or fears get in the way of the process. What this can result in is arriving at a decision which reflects the lowest common denominator of opinion.

Too often we act out of fear. If I find myself in opposition to the direction a decision is moving, it is important for me to look at the reasons for my opposition, and ask myself whether my opposition is based on my discernment of the Will of the Spirit, or if it grows out of my own personal fears. If I find that I am afraid of some outcome, it is important that I name and own those fears, and prayerfully ask for personal guidance in confronting them, or share my fears with others in the community who can spiritually nurture me and from whom I can ask for assistance in working through them. Too often, we do not own our own fears, but rather put the burden on the person or issue we fear, a rough corollary to the attitude of "blaming the victim."

Participants sometimes bring to the process ways of behaving that are not spiritually grounded, and that, although familiar from other meetings we take part in the outside world, are not appropriate to "being led" to a sense of the meeting.

What is required of me in terms of disciplines?

Quaker business practice requires a discipline of **spiritual preparation**. Do I prepare myself for committee meetings, group discussions, Meeting for Business, etc., in the same manner that I prepare myself for my own meditation, or for participating in Meeting for Worship? i.e., Do I invite the Spirit through prayer, or other spiritual communication, to guide me and the group, in the decision-making process? Do I ask the Spirit to help me set aside my own agenda and be open to Its Will? Do I ask the Spirit to help me see what path It would have the group take? Do I ask for help that a Way may open, that the group had not seen previously? Do I ask for prayer support from others who are not present at the particular deliberation? Do I worship while others speak? Do I hold the meeting in the Light? Do I hold the clerk of the meeting in the Light?

Quaker business practice requires a discipline of **listening** to the voice of the Spirit, as it speaks to each of us. Each person needs to cultivate her or his own ways of spiritual listening. How does the Spirit speak to me through the Silence? Does it speak through my emotions, through my rational mind, through my senses, through other avenues? What does it feel like for me when the Spirit speaks to me? The most effective way to learn about the power of the Spirit moving in the process is through direct experience.

Quaker business practice requires a discipline of **surrender**. Am I willing to truly listen to the Spirit and follow where It takes the group, regardless of the practical sense it makes? In what ways does the Spirit ask me to be practical? To not be practical? Am I willing to stand aside if though I personally oppose a decision, I can find no spiritual grounding or support for my positions? Am I truly open to continuing revelation?

Quaker business practice requires a discipline of **trusting**. Do I trust that the Spirit has guided the decision-making process which has brought the group to the current position, and do I respect the decisions that have already been made, and upon which we build? If I am in a meeting and I am not in a spiritually centered place, do I stand aside, offering to others what spiritual support I can, trusting that the Spirit will move through those present who are spiritually grounded? Do I trust that once a point has been made by another in the meeting, I need not also make the same point? Do I act when and in the manner in which the Spirit calls me to act?

Quaker business practice requires a discipline of **personal restraint**. Is my speaking in a meeting a response to a call from the Spirit to speak? Do I limit my comments to those that are relevant to the discussion at hand?

Quaker business practice requires a discipline of **focus**. Do I pay attention to what is going on in a meeting, speaking only when appropriate, and holding others in the Light when they speak?

Quaker business practice requires a discipline of **right use of time**. Are we good stewards of time? For example, do we allow sufficient time in our deliberations for the Spirit to move in the process? On the other hand, do we use our time in meetings in ways that are appropriate and respectful of other participants - and the Spirit? For example, do we prepare ourselves spiritually and test our leadings in advance of meetings, so we rightly use the time we give to our deliberations?

In Quaker business practice, what is the role of the clerk?

The role of the clerk is to be a clear spiritual channel, to assist the Spirit as It reveals Itself in the meeting. A clerk has a primary function of being a

kindled heart who promotes the Spirit of Worship in the Meeting. A clerk is called upon to step aside from personal involvement as much as possible, and to focus on the energies present. A clerk needs to listen in a grounded way both to the earthly participants and to the Holy Spirit. A clerk is called upon to deepen his or her understanding of the Quaker decision-making process and to free him- or herself of expectations of any particular outcome.

What is the role of the other participants in a meeting?

How can I assist the Spirit in the process of arriving at a sense of the meeting?

Prior to the deliberation, I need to prepare myself by coming to the best understanding I individually can of how the matter can be resolved, but once we as a group start deliberating, I must do my best to **let go** of my own opinions in the matter. I need to **surrender myself to Spirit**, to say to the Spirit - in whatever way I thus communicate - that I am open to the path It would have us take. I have made my best effort to discern the most appropriate path, but now I need to let go of my will and ask the Spirit to lead us. Only if the Spirit moves me to do so, do I offer the group my understanding of the matter or a proposed solution, brought with me to the meeting.

Do I nurture my own spiritual life? The life of the community? I am called upon to be a **kindled heart**. The power of even a few individuals preparing themselves spiritually for a meeting and acting from a spiritually centered space is exponential, and assists others in manifesting the will of the Spirit in the meeting. In advance of a meeting, do I reflect on the meeting, and the decisions we shall make, and hold the meeting in the Light? Do I pray for an outcome that serves the highest possible purpose? Do I help educate others in my community about the spiritual nature of Quaker business practice, so that they may also prepare themselves spiritually - in ways that are appropriate to them? Do I hold a

meeting in the Light and pray for it, even when I cannot be present for its deliberation?

I have the obligation of **personal preparation**. Prior to any group deliberation, I need to prepare myself spiritually just as I would prepare myself for a Meeting for Worship. If I am in disunity with the direction my group appears to be moving, I have the obligation to share my concerns and test my leadings with others - in advance of the larger meeting - so that I may present my concerns from a spiritually grounded position, or - if my concerns are resolved - so that I may help others move in the direction the Spirit would have the group move.

What part does Love play in the process of being led to the sense of the meeting?

Cultivating a loving attitude is essential to inviting the Spirit into the process, for Love heals the hurts in our hearts which can interfere with our ability to be open to the movement of the Spirit. Do I cultivate a loving attitude toward the process and toward those involved in it? Do I endeavor to nurture a loving attitude toward those with whom I disagree? Do I ask for spiritual help when I am cannot move beyond hard feelings toward a person or a position?

In the course of our deliberations, people are sometimes hurt by things that other people say or do. Do I acknowledge to others when I have been hurt? Do I deal with my hurts in a straightforward, appropriate, loving manner? Am I forgiving of others? Do I ask for spiritual help in forgiving others? Do I cultivate a forgiving attitude? Do I invite spiritual help in healing the hurts of myself and others?

Love also acts to accelerate the process of arriving at a sense of the meeting. Do I express my love for others in my community? Am I appreciative of others' gifts to the process, particularly those which are of a different nature from mine? Do I endeavor to recognize others' gifts? Do I cultivate a loving

attitude toward myself and others?

Love is not only an essential part of the process, but also an important outcome. Am I mindful that a critical outcome of our decision-making process - perhaps more important than any other- is the nurturing of "The Beloved Community"? Do I ask that the Spirit lead us in ways that nurture "The Beloved Community"?

How do we deal with difficulties we encounter in our efforts to reach the sense of the Meeting?

What do we do when other persons have differing understandings of the Direction of the Spirit in a particular matter? What do we do when we get stuck in the process?

We test our leadings.

We labor together, always inviting the presence and actions of the Spirit in the process.

We find ways in smaller groups and in advance of larger meetings to test conflicting leadings.

We surrender our opinions, and ask for further revelation of the Spirit.

We labor with persons who are polarized by their positions. We pray with them and for them, and hold them in the Light.

We wait in the Silence.

We pray

We meditate.

We do what we can to open ourselves to the miracles surrounding us.

BEANTOWN MOLEHILL FRIENDS MEETING

Moments of Meeting for Business - April 1, 1984

Meeting for Business began at 1:00 P.M. with 25 Friends, 4 enemies, and 2 turtles present.

The Clerk read the following Query on emotional life:

"Do we strive to conceal our emotions at all times, dissembling if necessary to avoid unpleasant scenes, embarrassment and confrontation?"

...And a proposed Query from the Faith and Practice Revisitations Committee:

"Do you live lightly? Do you promote frivolity at every opportunity? Is your home a source of lightheartedness for all who live there and all who enter there?"

CALENDAR:

1.IV.84	Meeting for Business
1.IV.84 and 15.IV.84	Swinging
8.IV.84	Babble Study
10.IV.84	Child Procurement Committee meeting
18.IV.84	Frivolity & Social Graces Committee meeting
22.IV.84	Potluck
26.IV.84	Hospitality Committee meeting
30.IV.84	Meeting on Misery & Comiseration

1. Moments of last month's Business Meeting were approved heartily, though, when asked, Friends admitted that they had not read them.

2. Hospitality Committee report

The convener of the hospitality committee presented two agenda items:

(a) The addition of Irish Coffee to the Fellowship spread after Meeting was a great success. Friends commented that they had never experienced such warmth and humor during Fellowship as they had last week. Public displays of affection, sometimes sadly lacking among Friends, were greatly in evidence. It was noted, however, that the noise level was rather high, and Friends were asked to be a bit more circumspect in the future.

The Director of Beantown Molehill Friends House commented that the House had, in fact, received several phone calls from irate neighbors during the fellowship hour. Also noting that several items of clothing had been left behind and much coffee had been spilled on the floor, she re-iterated the request of the Hospitality committee to show a bit of Quakerly restraint during future Fellowship hours.

(b) The second item of business reflected much thought and discussion among members of the Hospitality Committee. It seems they have all been affected by the example of the Frivolity & Social Graces Committee and are particularly taken with their notion of Friends becoming "politicized". The convener of the Hospitality Committee wishes to present to Friends for consideration the notion of becoming "gourmetized". "Think of the possibilities for potluck!" he exclaimed. "With an expanded awareness of food, our relationship to it, and our responsibilities to each other, we can better serve our nutritional and aesthetic needs. Besides," he said, "everybody's tired of macaroni and cheese."

3. Quaker Outreach Committee report

There was no report from the Quaker Outreach Committee today. This came as a disappointment to Friends who had been eagerly awaiting the report from the subcommittee on UFO's. When last seen, all members of the committee were enroute to Fenway Park, where it seems they expected a close encounter of the third kind. The last words of the convener were said to have been the following: "George Fox said, 'Walk cheerfully over the earth, speaking to that of God in everyone.' Well, if he had only known what we know today, surely he would have been more inclusive. These folks have travelled a long way to see us, and well...we just think it's a great opportunity to hold them in the light."

After discussion and query, it became clear to Friends that none of the members of the Outreach Committee has been seen since their scheduled meeting last week. The matter was referred to the Meeting on Misery & Comiseration, which will look into it. ("Perhaps there's a way we can phone them," the Clerk said.)

4. Report of the Meeting on Misery and Comiseration

The Clerk of M&C presented three items for consideration.

(a) A member of Meeting whose conscience is especially tender has requested a Clearness Committee regarding her hairstyle. "At first I considered a Mowhawk," she said, "but that just didn't seem to fit with Friends' testimony on simplicity. Then I considered a permanent wave, but...are they really permanent? I want a hairstyle testimony that will really last." After lengthy discussion on the permanence of permanents and whether the Meeting could afford to underwrite a subscription to Vogue Magazine (for research purposes only), four Friends volunteered to act as committee members and work out the details later.

(b) Plans for the annual retreat are well well under way. This year's topic is "Spirituality and Pleasure: Do They Mix?" After much searching for an appropriate retreat site, reservations have been made at Fifi & Ramon's Hot Tub Farm in the Catskills. M&C members feel that an experiential format would be best, considering the theme, and are currently preparing several workshops designed to explore the issues. Friends are urged to contact Ira Mellow, convener of the planning committee, if they have ideas and comments.

(c) M&C was pleased to report on the application for membership of Spike, a German Shepherd of repute in local Friends circles.

Since this is the first time a non-human has ever applied for membership in the Society of Friends, M&C members were especially intrigued at the prospects for expanding the consciousness of Beantown Molehill Meeting, and indirectly, that of the entire Society. Spike's application has been under consideration for several months, both because of the complex issues at hand and the fact that Spike's interpreter had to commute from the Bronx Zoo.

Spike is one of the rare ones among us who have experienced the joys of true conversion. Formerly an attack dog employed by the Department of Defense, he was present at a non-violent, silent witness organized by Friends several years ago. In a statement jointly prepared by his interpreter, his attorney and himself, Spike says,

"It used to be I had a bone to pick with everybody. I was vicious, no doubt about it. But then, it must have been what you humans call grace or something....No matter how many Quakers I bit, they didn't bite back. Somehow that changed me. It got me thinking. I mean, what was I doing for the world, anyway?"

Spike is now training to be a crossing guard at a local elementary school. He is also active in organizing and attending peace witnesses in the New England area. In short, M&C found Spike's behavior exemplary and quite consistent with Friends' principles. They recommended that Beantown Molehill Meeting overcome the anthropocentric prejudice which has hitherto characterized the Society of Friends and accept him into membership.

After lengthy consideration, including discussion on whether Spike should be offered a regular or junior membership, Friends approved Spike's membership. A potluck, at which Friend Spike will be welcomed, is planned for the fourth Firstday of next month. Dog biscuits will be served.

5. Child Procurement Committee report

In the absence of Committee convener, Len Dusskids who, it is suspected, is presently in the custody of the Boston Police, the Clerk gave the report.

The Clerk reminded Friends that the Child Procurement Committee was formed to address the declining attendance of children at Meeting. She reported that Committee convener Len, feeling the weight of the

Committee's charge and, after many hours of prayer and search for a sincere leading, was moved to a witness on the Boston Common.

Len, filled with the joy of the Spirit, began playing some cooperative games with a group of children and soon a large group formed. Drawn by Len's magnetism, the children followed him in a line dance while singing "Lord of the Dance", and the group began moving away from the Common, eventually reaching the Meeting House. Several alarmed parents summoned the Police, who arrested Len.

The children, however, did not want to leave, and are currently upstairs in the parlor, happily eating apples and peanut butter, reading Obadiah books and learning the "George Fox" song. A lesson in creative conflict resolution is being planned in order to help them deal with their parents, who are not likely to want them to continue coming to Meeting.

Lastly, the Clerk asked for the Meeting's support for Len during his probable stay in prison on charges of kidnaping. Friends united in support of Len's actions, which have sown the seeds of an increase in our Meeting's ability to spread God's love and the Quaker message to children. Sign-up sheets for a prayer schedule and prison visitation will be posted.

6. Frivolity & Social Graces Committee report

F&SG brought two items for consideration:

(a) Erma Allwhite, convener, ferociously expressed her concern that Friends should not wear colored clothing but should wrap themselves in white bathsheets monogrammed with cross, crown, and Birkenstock sandals. After lengthy discussion of the desirability of pure white versus off-white or cream, Friends agreed to purchase bathsheets wholesale from Filene's basement. A special booth to raise funds for that purpose will be set up and special donations solicited from bystanders in order to expand this effort world-wide. This witness will take place at Park Street Station on Boston Common. Meeting members will silently and prayerfully petition with signs that explain the witness, entitled "BATHSHEETS FOR PEACE - WE'RE ALL THE SAME UNDERNEATH".

(b) The second item of business, long a divisive issue within the Meeting, was finally brought to resolution. As regular attenders know well, the zealous efforts of the F&SG Committee have resulted in a polarization within the Meeting. There are those among us who feel strongly that lasting social change comes about only through prayer, fasting, and the like; others among us are led to profess just as strongly that direct action alone effects justice. Roughly half the Meeting has set up a prayer schedule and has been praying and fasting around the clock; the other half have been working to the point of exhaustion on various projects around the city and the region. It is generally recognized that, unless something is done soon, the entire Meeting may collapse.

Prayerful consideration over many a Business Meeting has failed to resolve the dichotomy until the present Meeting, when it was proposed that we divide into two softball teams and settle the

issue over a series of games. T-shirts will be printed for each team ("Faith" vs. "Works") and several ground rules were proposed:

- (1) No chatter in the outfield;
- (2) No stealing bases;
- (3) Friends will run bases only when so moved;
- (4) Innings will be ended by consensus;
- (5) Each game will be ended by the Friend who has care of the game.

The first game is scheduled for May 6th on the Boston Common baseball diamond.

7. The Clerk was shocked to report that she had received a Summons from the Boston Municipal Court. Incredible as it may seem, Beantown Molehill Friends Meeting has been named in a civil suit by the City of Boston. On successive Sundays, city agents have taken readings outside the B-M Friends House and validated the fact that, between 11:00 and 12:00 A.M., the noise level is lower than 10 decibels. Represented by Municipal Counsel, Dewey Cheatham, the City charges that "too much quiet will ruin our reputation. The citizens of Boston will not tolerate it! Unless the City does something to stop this here and now, people will think that no noise is good noise!" In an accompanying letter, however, Attorney Cheatham states that the City Administration was very pleased with the noise level achieved last Sunday between 12:30 and 1:30 P.M. "This is a great improvement over other Sundays at that time. If this signals a trend," he writes, "the Administration may be willing to drop the charges."

Friend Tennessee O'Varnish came forward to offer legal advice to the Meeting, and was named convener of a committee to study the situation.

8. Friend Don A. Tye brought before the Monthly Meeting a request for a travelling minute for visitation within Salem Quarter. In an extraordinarily poignant presentation, Don laid before the Meeting his long-standing concern that, in their zeal for simplicity in dress, Friends have never given due consideration to the bow tie, an item of apparel long respected in other religious traditions.

In the spirit of ecumenism, Don feels called to bring the good news about the bow tie to other Friends in the area. He cited several reasons for his enthusiasm:

- (1) Spaghetti sauce is easier to clean off a shirt than a tie;
- (2) If you wear a bow tie, you have an excuse not to wear the tie tacks people give you;
- (3) You'll never catch a bow tie in a drawer if you lean over it;
- (4) You can escape the whims of fashion. A bow tie is never too long or thin, and is always out of fashion.

Friend Tye also named several venerable role models who have worn bow ties: Archibald Cox, Mel King, and Rufus Jones.

Beantown Molehill Friends noted the rarity of requests for travelling minutes in recent years. One Friend expressed her gratitude to Don A. Tye for bringing before the Meeting a concern so critical that all Friends were easily able to unite with it.

The Clerk was mandated to write a travelling minute introducing Don to Meetings within the Quarter. She reminded Friends of their responsibility to see that his service not be hampered by lack of funds or tie patterns and material samples. He was released with Friends' best wishes and several tape measures.

9. Meeting for Business ended at 2:57 P.M. with the spontaneous singing of "'Tis a Sin to Be Dimpled".

"Light lovingly the loving light within."

--Johann Fleece-person

**From Chapter 3 of the NEYM Interim Faith and Practice 2014
for clerking workshop at Burlington Meeting 10/29/2016**

Advices on Corporate Discernment

1. *Being orderly come together [you are] not to spend time with needless, unnecessary and fruitless discourses; but to proceed in the wisdom of God, not in the way of the world, as a worldly assembly of men, by hot contests, by seeking to outspoke and overreach one another in discourse as if it were controversy between party and party of men, or two sides violently striving for dominion, not deciding affairs by the greater vote. But in the wisdom, love and fellowship of God, in gravity, patience, meekness, in unity and concord, submitting one to another in lowliness of heart, and in the holy Spirit of truth and righteousness, all things [are] to be carried on; by hearing, and determining every matter coming before you in love, coolness, gentleness and dear unity. (Edward Burrough 1662)*
2. Remember that we are only able to act according to our present sense and judgment, in the faith that the light we are given is enough for our needs today. Let us be humble both with one another, and in anticipating that there may be more and different steps to take tomorrow.
3. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.
4. In searching together for the will of God in matters before the meeting, Friends are seeking the truth, so that all may join in its affirmation. We are not engaging in debate, or trying to win an argument. Know that working together as a community of spiritual seeking is often more important than simply getting things done.
5. On entering the meeting, avoid falling into conversation. Take your seat quietly, entering into a receptive silence. As the meeting moves forward, listen carefully to what others say, that you do not burden the meeting by repetition. Allow time for quiet reflection after each speaker so that their words may sink in and receive due consideration. Should you disagree with what has been said, show respect for those who have spoken by offering another viewpoint in a humble spirit.
6. Address the clerk rather than another individual and speak only to the matter under consideration. Do not attempt to speak for Friends who are absent as they are not present to sense the movement of the Spirit in the gathered group.
7. Hold the clerks and the whole group in prayer, especially when difficult matters are being considered.

Advices for Clerks

1. Prepare an agenda in advance to balance the flow of business in a thoughtful way, listing committees which are to report and actions or concerns calling for discernment.
2. Remember to keep in mind the relationship of each agenda item to the larger life of the meeting.
3. Announce difficult matters in time to allow Friends to come prepared.
4. Open the meeting with worship.
5. Recall that your role is as servant to the meeting rather than participant in discussion. Employ listening more than speaking.
6. Remind Friends to address the clerk when speaking, rather than responding directly to other speakers.
7. Remember that worship during the meeting can keep Friends gathered in the Spirit.
8. Allow time as needed between agenda items for the recording clerk to compose minutes.
9. Some Friends speak easily and often. Take care they do not prevent quieter, more hesitant Friends from participating.
10. Conclude with worship.

Advices for Recording Clerks

1. Pre-write standard minutes (opening and closing, committee reports, outstanding business, etc.) but remain open to the possibility that the Spirit will lead the meeting elsewhere.
2. Expect to compose substantive minutes to be read back to the meeting for approval at the time.
3. You may ask the clerk and the gathered body to hold you in prayer when working on a difficult minute; remember it is the meeting's minute, not your own.
4. Primarily minute actions and decisions. At times, additional context may be provided for clarity. "Less is more" is a good rule.
5. Minutes should reflect the sense of the meeting rather than a list of individual comments or perspectives.
6. If no decision is reached, a minute of exercise can capture where the meeting is in its discernment at that moment in time.
7. Names are not recorded unless the action pertains directly to specific person(s): marriage, traveling minutes, memorials, membership, etc.

Queries on Corporate Discernment

Although Queries may often be answered with a simple affirmative or negative, it is vital to ask corollary questions such as “why,” “how,” or “when.” A qualified answer arising from introspection is more meaningful and constructive than an uncritical “yes” or “no.” (North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative) 1983, p.33)

1. Do you seek the leadings of the Light in meeting for business as you do in worship?
2. How do you prepare your heart and mind for meeting for business?
3. Do you come prepared for the business at hand, having read relevant material or with committee reports ready for distribution?
4. Do you make an effort to maintain your awareness that God is with us as we work?
5. Do you proceed in a peaceable spirit with forbearance and warm affection for each other?
6. Do you trust that the Spirit has guided those involved with the process which has brought the group to its current place and do you respect the decisions that have already been made?
7. Do you attend to the clerk, speaking only when acknowledged and refraining from conversations back and forth across the room?
8. As a member of a spiritual community, do you acknowledge differences and seek to settle conflicts promptly in a manner free from resentment and all forms of inward violence?
9. Do you take care to consider, in a patient, loving and prayerful spirit, the perspective of those with whom you disagree?
10. Have you considered whether God’s will for you as an individual may differ from God’s will for the meeting?
11. When a decision is being reached with which you disagree, are you faithful to your responsibility to speak if led?
12. When the meeting comes to a decision, do you accept it as “our” decision rather than “theirs”?
13. Are we willing to recognize when we are in a place where we should not act, but rather to wait patiently for further guidance to come?