

The Quaker Meeting for Business: Discerning the Leadings of the Spirit for Our Community

- I. Quaker business process is a religious exercise and spiritual practice and can only be fully understood in that context. It assumes that:
 - A. “In any given matter there is a what that is in harmony with God’s plan.” (Tom Brown, “When Friends Attend to Business”) That is, that there is a Truth or right course that we can reach toward.
 - B. Friends gathered with openness to the leadings of the Spirit can approach that right course.
 - C. Every individual present has the capacity to receive the guidance of the Spirit and, by sharing that guidance, can shed light on the matter at hand and lead the meeting closer to discerning its proper path.

Below are some thoughts on faithful participation in meeting for business:

II. Before meeting for business

- A. Cultivate the practice of prayer and discernment in your life.
- B. Do your homework.
 - 1. Read the materials given out in preparation for the meeting, note any questions or concerns.
 - 2. Carefully prepare any matters you are to present to the meeting.

III. As the meeting gathers

- A. Settle into quiet, center yourself. Remind yourself that the meeting is under the care of the Spirit.
- B. Cultivate an attitude of love, trust, and humility. Rest in openness and faithfulness. Release any preconceptions about what outcomes you want to see and release any fear or anger that you bring regarding the business or regarding other Friends.
- C. Hold the meeting in the Light. Lift up the clerk, those charged with presenting the business, and all present that they may be led by the Spirit.

IV. As an agenda item is presented

- A. Hold the person making the presentation in the light.
- B. Listen with the same attitude of openness that you would bring to messages in the meeting for worship. What can I learn here? Where is the Spirit leading?
- C. Ask appropriate questions. Don’t assume that others understand something you don’t understand or that your question would be foolish.
- D. Have no predisposition to speak or not to speak
 - 1. Seek the guidance of the Spirit as to whether you are led to speak.
 - 2. If led to speak, give your perspective to the meeting lovingly—not in opposition to previous points, but adding a point of view that has not been offered.
 - 3. Don’t withhold your light. Trust the prompting of the Spirit in your heart even if, perhaps especially if, you are led to offer a perspective that is contrary to the direction in which the meeting is moving.
 - 4. Then rest back. Your point now belongs to the meeting. You don’t have to defend or maintain it.
 - 5. Be teachable. Be open to new understanding and a new sense of what might be rightly ordered.

V. As the clerk seeks the sense of the meeting:

- A. If the clerk has stated the sense well, and you are in harmony with the sense of the meeting you need not say anything, except perhaps, "I approve" or "I agree."
- B. If the clerk has not caught the sense of the meeting as you perceive it and if it is important to do so, offer your clarification to the meeting.
- C. If the clerk has correctly stated the sense of the meeting but you do not feel in harmony with it:
 1. Seek the guidance of the Spirit
 2. You may be led to trust the sense of the meeting and let it proceed---even if you would feel easier with a different course of action.
 3. If you are led to do so, offer your concern to the meeting. The meeting probably will discuss the matter further to incorporate your concern into the direction the meeting is taking. And the clerk will once again test the sense of the meeting.
 4. If the modified sense of the meeting is one you are in harmony with, return to V, A., above.
 5. If at this point you still feel out of harmony with the sense of the meeting, you have a weighty responsibility for discernment. Is the matter important enough to delay the meeting's action? Are you hung up on some preconceived idea of how the business should proceed? Are you really being called by the Spirit to protect the meeting from a serious error?
 - a. You may be released by the Spirit to let the meeting proceed, trusting that the Spirit will correct the course of the meeting in due time if need be.
 - b. You may be called upon once again to call the meeting's attention to your concern and have it recorded in the minutes, but to stand aside and allow the meeting to proceed.
 - c. You may be called to convey to the meeting that you have a deep spiritual conviction that it is heading off on a wrong path. This is a grave responsibility and should be undertaken only with the clearest sense of guidance and deep humility. This is sometimes called "standing in the way" though no one can really stand in the way of the meeting's discernment. The meeting should pause to take your deep concern to heart; it may, then, continue the discussion or hold it over to a future meeting while seeking a path to unity; it may, however, ultimately become clear to proceed despite your reservations.

VI. After the meeting has come to its best sense of the movement of the Spirit and the decision has been made, all Friends (even those who had misgivings) should put their trust in the Spirit, support the decision, and do their part in implementing it and making it successful.

At all times remember that you are among F/friends, doing the work of the Spirit with the Spirit's guidance. Enter into the process with trust, good humor, and affection.