

## Quaker Processes for Meeting for Business

This essay contains the thoughts of the Worship and Ministry Committee. We do not present it as the final word about Quaker processes during Meeting for Business. We hope it can be a starting point that other committees and the Meeting can use to correct, amend and enhance.

In Meeting for Worship with Attention to the Business of the Meeting we make decisions about what is the right thing to do as we are guided by the Light. Meeting for Business ideally is held in an atmosphere of trust and tenderness that is conducive to listening for the leadings of the Truth.

The Clerk of the Meeting "sits at the head of the Meeting". The Clerk must see that business is conducted in an orderly fashion and that time is allowed for everyone to express his or her views, but without wandering too far from the subject under discussion. A Clerk must be sensitive to individual feelings and know when it is wise to introduce a period of silence (as may any attender so request) into the Meeting, particularly if it becomes evident that more heat than Light is being generated by the discussion. Most important, the Clerk must be able to articulate the developing "sense of the Meeting" and formulate it into a clearly worded decision.

Quakers do not vote. Nor do Meetings use consensus. Friends seek to be in unity that we are doing as the Spirit leads us. This does not mean that there must be unanimity. The "sense of the Meeting" can be "sensed" when the Meeting corporately believes it has found the right path and now is the time to make that decision.

A common misconception about Quaker business process is that a decision can never go forward if one person decides to "stand in the way". Inactive members, new attenders and non-Friends trying to imitate Quaker process often interpret our principle of unity to mean that each individual has veto power over any decision of the community. Nothing could be further from the truth.

"Standing in the way" is not a right which inheres in paper membership or attendance at meeting for business. A person cannot "stand in the way" of the meeting. Rather, the meeting allows truth, even the truth of a single

person, to stand in its way. The meeting takes this action, not the individual. The meeting does this for the same reasons that it seeks and waits for unity. We acknowledge that the Friend may have light which the rest of us don't yet see; we wait in love for the Friend to see our light. We are willing to remain teachable in the trust that the dissenting Friend is also teachable. A Friend may "stand aside" when the Friend does not want the Meeting to consider delaying a decision because of his or her objections.

We raise our hands to signify to the Clerk that we would like to speak. After being recognized by the Clerk it can help others hear if we stand rather than remain seated.

When Friends speak to an issue during Business Meeting it should be done forthrightly but tenderly with concern for others who may think or have spoken differently. Normally only speak once to an issue as we seek the right resolution. This doesn't apply when reporting facts or seeking clarification of information. The goal of once-speaking is to avoid repetition and to allow all attenders to participate as we trust the Spirit to guide us.

Allow for a pause between speakers to enable everyone to reflect on what has been said and hold it in the Light. Meeting for Business is not a debate but a Meeting for Worship during which we engage in loving listening. Sometimes Friends may stand in silence to denote objection to aggressive behavior.

When a committee is asked to research an issue and then report back to the Meeting afterward, members should not second guess and reanalyze what the committee has already done. This is not to say that there is to be a rubber stamp but that the committee should be trusted to have done its work properly. To deserve this trust it is essential that the committee's report be full enough to demonstrate that everything necessary was considered and why a recommendation, if there is one, is thought to be appropriate.

Approval for expenditures resides with the Meeting for Business. When committees or individuals are granted permission to spend money it should be clear what the limits and purposes are.

Meeting for Worship with Attention to the Business of the Meeting is an exercise in trust. We trust the Light to lead us. We trust each other to individually seek those leadings as we strive to make right decisions. In these Meetings we hope to strengthen and deepen our spiritual community as we act in the world community.