

Finding Spirit-Led Unity: The Clerk's Role

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My life is richer for the many friends who have taught, eldered and supported my work in clerking assignments. As clerk of the Executive Committee of the American Friends Service Committee in the southeast region, clerk of the personnel committee of Friends General Conference and as clerk of the Atlanta Friends Meeting and several of its committees, I have been tested and learned to serve with joy and confidence.

Mary Ann Downey
Atlanta Monthly Meeting

CLERKING WITH JOY AND CONFIDENCE

OBJECTIVES:

- To clarify the role of the clerk using Quaker process
- To assess gifts and barriers clerks experience
- To practice key skills for clerks
- To identify resources for dealing with dissent and conflict.

AGENDA

- Interviews for experience and expectations
- Discussion of consensus and sense of the meeting
- Identification of clerk's role and key skills
- Finding themes, recording minutes in small groups
- Clerking a Meeting, and getting feedback in a fishbowl
- How to deal with conflict.
- Brainstorm for a take out plan

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THE PURPOSE OF OUR MEETINGS FOR BUSINESS

The Quaker meeting for business is expected to serve at least three purposes:

1. to provide the occasion for group worship out of which participating members may have an experience of spiritual guidance;
2. to provide the setting for group decision-making under the leading of the Spirit;
3. to provide the opportunity for exchanging information about the Meeting's activities; the activities of other Friends Meetings and organizations and; for responding to issues laid upon members as religious concerns.

A Handbook for the Presiding Clerk

David O. Stanfield,
North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends

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.

Friends Consultation on Worship

Richmond Indiana, December 1989

Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all with the measure of light which is pure and holy may be guided, and so in the light walking and abiding these, may be fulfilled in the spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

Postscript to an Epistle from Meeting of Elders

Balby, Yorkshire, 1656

SENSE OF THE MEETING AND CONSENSUS

CONSENSUS – a secular method, involving a rational process and producing general agreement. The authority is the group.

SENSE OF THE MEETING – a religious method, involving a spiritual process and producing a spirit led decision. The authority is the Spirit as discerned by the group

Clerking Workshop, Pendle Hill

Arthur Larrabee, March, 1992

By rejecting the absolute authority both of a hierarchical church and a Bible that has said the last word, Friends have from the beginning faced themselves with a problem: how do we decide whether an individual has rightly discerned the guidance of God? To this our solution is still that of submitting to the corporate inspiration given to a worshipping group of our fellow believers. That will, however only continue to be a valid solution so long as Friends in such a group share a meaningful belief in God's readiness to guide us, and in our inherent capacity to be guided. In this lies the essential difference between secular authority of group consensus and the Quaker affirmation that the final and accessible authority is God.

Gifts and Ministries: A discussion paper on eldership.

Alastair Heron, Quaker Home Service, 1987

Consensus is a process in which adjustments and compromises are made for the purpose of reaching a decision that all of us can accept. It brings us to an intellectually satisfactory conclusion. But sense of the meeting reaches beyond that. It is a process that cares for the whole person and the whole corporate body. Individuals may talk about the sense of the meeting, but until one experiences it as an inward process, it cannot be fully understood.

According to Quaker method, decisions are reached not by voting nor gathering the majority opinion, but by gathering the sense of the meeting.

Sense of the meeting is a gift. It came to the Quakers through their commitment to continuing revelation. They discovered that the Light which had come to teach people could lead them to revealed corporate decisions. The Quakers cherished the gift. They handed it down as a spiritual heirloom from generation to generation. Partly because of its rarity, sense of the meeting is a gift of enormous worth, more valuable, perhaps than any other Quaker gift or practice.

Beyond Consensus: Salvaging a Sense of the Meeting

Barry Morley, Pendle Hill Pamphlet #307

MEETING FOR WORSHIP FOR BUSINESS GUIDELINES

We are open to the guidance of the Spirit throughout this Meeting and in our lives.

We look for and affirm the Spirit in ourselves and others.

We refrain from put-downs of ourselves or others.

When in doubt, we will assume a compliment.

This is the place to address conflicts – not to avoid them. We will deal with each other in ways that are truthful without laying blame or otherwise hurting others.

We will speak only once to an issue unless we have new information to offer or need clarity.

We will assume that other's contributions are meant positively as we listen for the truth within them and respect everyone's sharing.

We will take responsibility for doing what is necessary to move the meeting forward.

We seek resolution of conflicts and to heal the hurt which may arise. We seek to empower everyone through the process.

We will wait to be recognized by the clerk before speaking.

We will not take ourselves too seriously and we will have fun.

Approved Atlanta Friends Meeting
February 1996

DESIRABLE ATTRIBUTES OF A GOOD CLERK

The following are characteristics and skills that make someone especially good as a clerk in Quaker process.

- ◆ Integrity
- ◆ Observational skill
- ◆ Integrative ability
- ◆ Courage
- ◆ Reverence for both the process and the participants
- ◆ Ability to love people for their differences.
- ◆ Belief in the process by which these differences can sometimes blend into agreements or separated out from persons so that opponents can be friends.
- ◆ A keen sense of humor
- ◆ Awareness of cultural patterns and the ways in which those patterns influence power dynamics and information sharing.

ROLE OF THE CLERK

Keep the Spirit Present
Remind the group to seek a solution that is best for the group.
Serve group rather than pushing personal viewpoint.

Before the Meeting

Gather necessary resources (information, materials, experts) and circulate (e.g., via email)
Construct the agenda, talking privately with individuals and groups.

In the Meeting

Promote relatively equal opportunities to speak. Identify who will speak next.

Ask questions that help draw out a speaker's meaning.

Encourage others to express contrasting viewpoints.

Keep group on topic and task; consult with group members about moving the discussion on.

Call for silent pauses, as needed, to restore the group to its purpose.

Redirect attention to ideas and information that were previously disregarded by the group.

Ask if enough alternatives have been developed, or if criteria for solving the problem has been met.

Express group feeling or thoughts name a conflict, relieve tension, describe group reactions.

Summarize the discussion.

Propose a trial "minute."

Ask for Unresolved Concerns.

Revise "Minute" as necessary

When concerns have been addressed, ask for approval.

Announce Approved "Minute."

APPROACHES FOR GOOD ORDER

- ◆ Insisting that persons not speak unless recognized by the clerk.
- ◆ The clerk not recognizing people who have spoken previously on the matter, no matter how well qualified they are, or how urgent seems their message, until others, perhaps more reticent, have had their chance.
- ◆ Establishing a guideline that no one may speak twice until everyone who desires to shall have spoken once.
- ◆ Stopping the meeting, and asking for silence, or prayer, or some other form of worship.
- ◆ Calling for a stretch break.
- ◆ Reminding the Meeting that “we are a meeting for worship for business, and that if we are to discern God’s will for us in this particular matter, it is necessary for us to proceed out of worship.
- ◆ The clerk being willing to interrupt a speaker who has:
 - ◆ Gone on too long;
 - ◆ Is repetitious;
 - ◆ Is not addressing the issue at hand;
 - ◆ Is running his or her own agenda;
 - ◆ Is abusive of others;
 - ◆ Is not respectful that the meeting is a Meeting for Worship for Business.

What the Clerk might say as he or she attempts to interrupt someone would be, essentially:
“Thank you for what you have said; we have heard your message; allow me to interrupt you so that others may be heard.”

Clerking Workshop, Pendle Hill
Arthur Larabee, March, 1992

FRAMING ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

- ◆ Presentation of the issue or proposal
 - ◆ Clearly defines what the meeting needs to decide
 - ◆ Presents all options considered and reasons for recommendation.
- ◆ The meeting turns to general consideration
 - ◆ Individuals ask questions
 - ◆ Request clarification
 - ◆ Express initial concerns
 - ◆ Tentative expressions of sentiment for or against
- ◆ Deeper sharing of concerns
 - ◆ Openness by all to understand what's being said on all sides
 - ◆ Holding in abeyance one's own particular views
 - ◆ Desire by all to discern
 - ◆ Efforts are made by all to find the decision
 - ◆ Taking into account all concerns
 - ◆ Each person's truth combined yields a larger truth
- ◆ Clerk moves to closure by testing out the sense of the meeting.
 - ◆ Group approves or modifies
 - ◆ More sharing of concerns
 - ◆ More tests to discern the leading of the Spirit

TIPS FOR COMMITTEE PRESENTING PROPOSALS

- ◆ Remember it's not your job to make a decision but to recommend an option after the consideration of many.
- ◆ Educate the meeting on the options not recommended and the process that led to the conclusion you did recommend.
- ◆ If a committee short-circuits its process by not considering all the options or coming to consensus itself, it shows up in the discussion in confusion in the general meeting.
- ◆ Don't use, we'll take it to the whole group and let them decide as a fall back to coming to consensus among yourselves.
- ◆ Read the committee report to the meeting and have handouts to help everyone understand, and to cut down on the number of questions people need to ask for clarity.
- ◆ There is usually a presumption in favor of a committee recommendation.
- ◆ If the issue is a weighty one, it's often best to propose it at one meeting, have a general discussion, but save the deeper sharing for the next meeting so people have had the time to consider the facts and their own views.

Arthur Larrabee's Clerking Workshop
Friends General Conference, July 1992

CONDUCT OF THE MEETING USE OF SILENCE

The author has seen a call to “silence” or “silent worship” used helpfully and also used poorly. Many times the call for silence in the meeting for business has seemed manipulative, poorly used and oppressive. When used poorly, a call for silent worship has been a knee-jerk reaction to some disturbance in the meeting. It has been a call out of fear and anxiety. It has been a call to “quickly put behind us this awful thing which has happened.” It has sometimes been a way of trying to “blanket” the unhappy preceding event so as somehow to blot it out of our minds.

A call to silent worship or prayer can be helpful, if not out of fear or anxiety; if it is not knee-jerk; if it is not intended to blanket our human upset.

The clerk might call for silence or silent worship because the clerk needed to have some quiet space in which to discern what should be the next step. The English have a quaint way of saying this, especially in connection with the writing of minutes: “Would Friends uphold the desk in silent worship while...”

Another use of silent worship would be to help the meeting “settle;” to help the meeting regain its center; to help the meeting return to that state of worship in which truth can be found.

I have heard Jan Hoffman, former clerk of New England Yearly Meeting, talk about asking for silence “without ministry.” She really meant silent worship. I believe the thinking was that if this were not made speakers would continue the old arguments under the cover of “unprogrammed worship.”

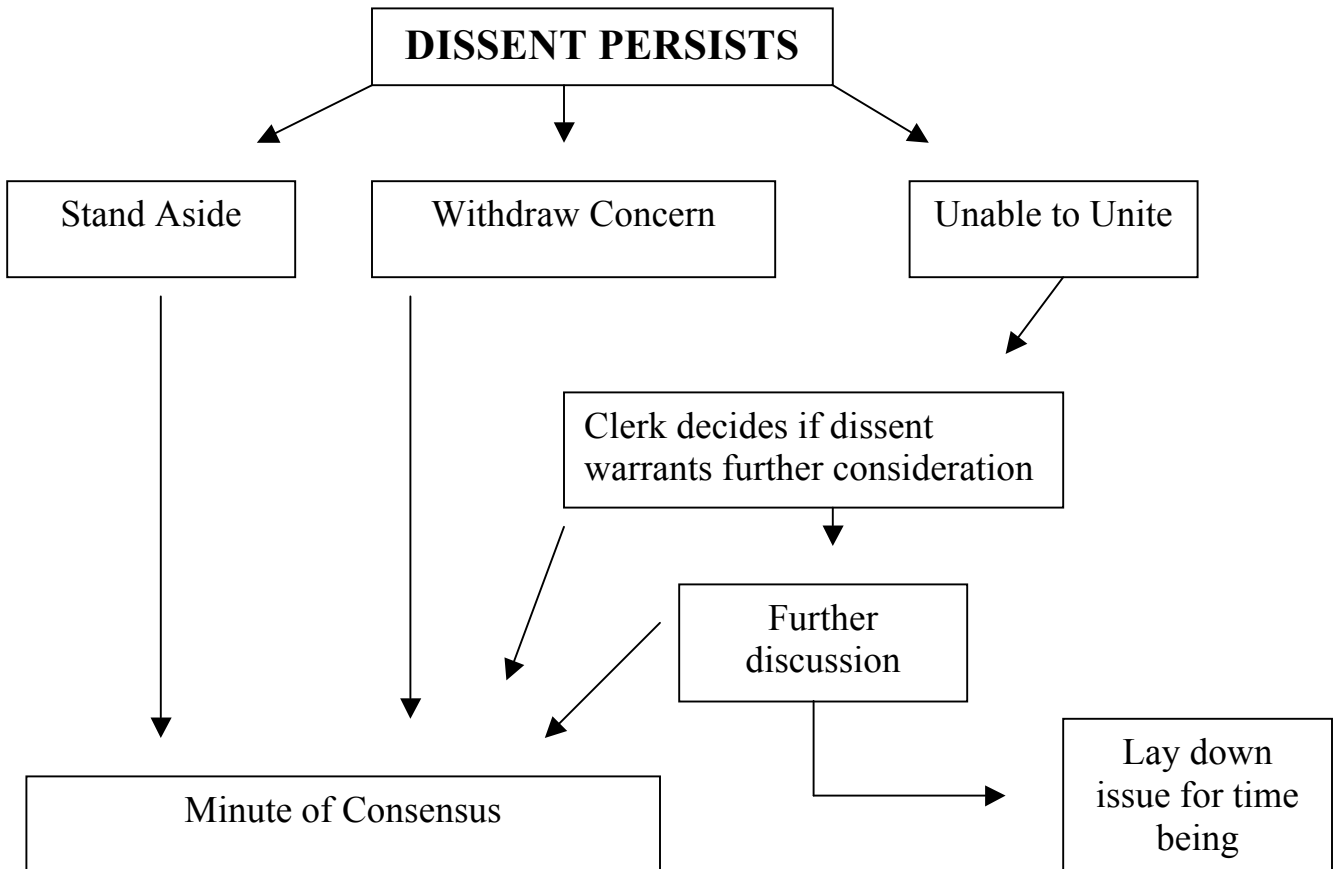
Clerking Workshop, Pendle Hill
Arthur Larrabee, March 1992

CONDUCT OF THE MEETING MINUTE OF EXERCISE

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 have heard that reading such minutes in North Carolina Conservative Meeting gave a clear sense of the steps in growth toward unity in opposition to slavery.”

ALTERNATIVE ACTION FOR DISSENTERS

- ◆ I will withdraw my concern if I am in partial disagreement but believe that it is better for the group to take this action than to take none.
- ◆ If I am willing to let the decision stand even through I do not agree with it, I can
 - State my disagreement and then say I'll stand aside.
 - Record my disagreement (requesting that the basis for this disagreement be noted in the minute) and then stand aside to let the decision stand.
- ◆ If I believe that coming to no decision is better for the group as a whole than coming to this one, I will explain why I am in such disagreement and state that I cannot unite with the decision. I understand that I have an obligation to propose an alternative solution. If I cannot, the Process Champion has the authority to determine if the group will move ahead without my agreement.



GROUP ACTIONS TO DEAL WITH CONFLICT

- ◆ Appoint a small group representing all interests to consider the options more carefully and make a recommendation to the whole group.
- ◆ Try to modify or amend the decision under consideration to meet the objection. Get to the why rather than the what so that the underlying need can be met.
- ◆ Find an interim solution until the matter can be considered more fully.
- ◆ Break into small groups and go through the steps of the problem solving process:
 - ◆ Define problem in terms of needs and interests
 - ◆ Brainstorm options
 - ◆ Evaluate options
 - ◆ Find a range of options to meet all needs and interests to recommend
- ◆ Break into small groups during the meeting to create amendments or new proposals, and return to the larger group to discuss.
- ◆ Test the level of disagreement by taking a straw vote to determine the extent of disagreement. You might ask: Who likes the proposal? Who can live with it? Who is uncomfortable?
- ◆ Set time limits on people speaking in the meeting to allow all voices to be heard. Limit second time speaking until everyone has spoken once.
- ◆ Silence. Take time to pause before moving on. Ask speakers to leave silence between statements to allow each person to be heard.
- ◆ Stacking. Those wishing to speak must raise their hands and the facilitator calls on people in order of those raising their hands.
- ◆ If you know the meeting will be energetic, consider appointing a time keeper, process watcher, and a vibes watcher (noting emotional tone.)
- ◆ Ask those objecting if they can find a way to withdraw their objection.
- ◆ Hold the matter over to a later meeting.
- ◆ Write a minute of exercise or process minute, stating where the group is and what the concerns are.
- ◆ Hold a threshing session, a meeting to define the issues and the points of view

HOW MEMBERS CAN SUPPORT THE CLERK AND FIND THE SENSE OF THE MEETING

The following are some ways you can help the clerk guide the discussion effectively:

- ◆ Use a frame of silence and reflection to keep a spirit of worship. Provide pauses between speakers to allow thoughts to settle.
- ◆ Speak to the group – not only to the clerk or another individual.
- ◆ Ask for clarification or for more information from a speaker when it is needed.
- ◆ When you find yourself resisting a position voiced by another person, ask, “Why would a reasonable person say that?”
- ◆ Try to identify the need, interest, or concern that is the foundation of a position or demand of another.
- ◆ Avoid devaluing an idea or position simply because of the motivations that you attribute to the person or because of your dislike for the person who spoke.
- ◆ Reflect on your comments before you speak: Is it important for the group to hear them? If it is not, then don’t speak. If it is, then speak.
- ◆ When you speak do so briefly and to the point. Speak only once on a topic until others have been heard.
- ◆ Rather than repeating a statement or position already voiced by someone else, consider saying “X (person’s name), has spoken my mind.”
- ◆ Provide accurate data to help the group get greater clarity about the problem or proposed solutions.
- ◆ Respect the guidance of the clerk.
- ◆ Speak up if you have unresolved concerns and the clerk has proposed a minute.
- ◆ Speak up if you think the proposed minute doesn’t adequately capture the group’s thinking.

Opening instructions for the Clerk to encourage more inclusive participation

My role as the clerk is to draw together the threads of the discussion and articulate the sense of that discussion – where we have agreement and where there are threads that remain to be considered. I will check in with the group to verify, modify this description of where we are. When we can, we will produce a written minute of our agreements. If we cannot achieve that unity this afternoon, we can develop a clear statement of where we are and agree on the next steps to reach unity.

It is important that we all remember that we are here to explore this common issue and to discern a way forward. People have different perspectives to bring to bear on the problem and we need to hear from all perspectives. As we are working towards a decision, please consider the good of the group and its purpose. Let us keep this at the center of our efforts.

As the clerk I will be neutral about the issues and solutions and discussion of them. I will be directive with the process of the discussion to be sure we are following Quaker practice.

I also want to suggest some ways you can help this process along.

- ◆ Ask yourself: what do I know that will help us address our common problem or issue?
- ◆ Speak when I recognize you and make an effort to leave a small space of silence around each speaker's words.
- ◆ Speak to the group as a whole, not to an individual or previous speaker.
- ◆ I will try to call on everyone who wants to speak on a given issue once before recognizing a request to speak again. We want to make sure even the most reticent have the opportunity to be heard.
- ◆ Be as succinct as possible and focus on offering new insights or information.
- ◆ When we've heard several speakers, I will summarize. Please work with me to make sure I have captured the essence of what has been said, including places where common threads are emerging and places where there are differences.

CHECKLIST FOR BUILDING UNITY

- ◆ ___ Stay focused on the good of the group and not just on my own preferences.
- ◆ ___ Accept that disagreement can be normal and useful.
- ◆ ___ Listen actively and accurately.
- ◆ ___ Try to understand why a concern or idea matters to a particular person.
- ◆ ___ Use body language and facial expressions that show I am listening and consider others to be reasonable people.
- ◆ ___ Avoid negative feelings (anger, frustration, or criticism) toward an individual.
- ◆ ___ Treat differences in ideas and strategies respectfully.
- ◆ ___ Ask for recognition to speak only after the person speaking has finished.
- ◆ ___ Leave silence between speakers.
- ◆ ___ Put forth information in a well-organized, well-reasoned way.
- ◆ ___ Speak only once to a topic until other members have spoken.
- ◆ ___ Address the group rather than a specific person so that there is no debate between individuals.
- ◆ ___ Respectfully ask others for their ideas or opinions, facts or other information to back up their ideas.
- ◆ ___ Express ideas or opinions other than those that have already been heard.
- ◆ ___ Offer praise or appreciation for ideas expressed by others.
- ◆ ___ Recognize particular expertise of others.
- ◆ ___ Build on other ideas or comments to propose a conclusion or new direction
- ◆ ___ Summarize the discussion, including points of agreement and difference.
- ◆ ___ Withdraw earlier statements of concern when new information or insights suggest a better way forward.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND PHRASES USED IN THE QUAKER BUSINESS PROCESS

Approve – Vocal expression in support of an action. This may be as simple as saying, “I approve” although it might carry some qualifier. One or more individuals in a business meeting must give some indication of approval before the clerk will indicate that the item has been approved.

Approved – Note in the minutes of the meeting that an item was approved.

Clerk – The individual who has been appointed to make the agenda for the meeting, call for action on each item of the agenda, is responsible for preparing a minute indicating the action on an item, make a judgement on whether or not the group approves the minute and is responsible for the minutes of the meeting.

Consensus – Consensus is the least common denominator on which the group will agree on an item when there are a range of views on the item. This may be the starting point for moving to a “sense of the meeting.”

Disapproval – The process of disapproving of a proposed minute on an item. One person disapproving of a minute does not necessarily make the minute disapproved. Each expression of disapproval must be taken very seriously. It is not an automatic veto but it is an alert to move slowly. See: clerk, standing aside and standing in the way.

Disapprove – The vocal expression of not agreeing with a minute on an item. A suggestion may be made as to how a minute might be changed to receive approval by the speaker.

Disapproved – A note in the minutes that the proposed action on an item was not approved.

Gathered group – A condition where it is obvious to all in attendance that the group has found a high common spiritual ground on a difficult issue through a spiritual experience.

Lay-over – An action to reconsider an item at a future business meeting.

Leading – A spiritual understanding by an individual on an issue usually not known to others.

Meeting (noun) – A local corporate group of Friends worshipping on a regular basis, usually recognized by a regional group of meetings.

Meeting for Business – It is the time for planning and managing the many aspects of a monthly meeting. Often referred to as a “Meeting for Worship with a concern for business.”

Minute (noun) – The statement (usually written) of the actions on an agenda item. This can be proposed or final.

Minute (verb) – The action of writing a statement on the action on an agenda item.

Minutes – The collection of minutes, perhaps a summary of the discussion of each item and other issues brought to the meeting for business. These are often read and approved before the meeting is terminated, particularly for Quarterly and Yearly Meetings.

Monthly Meeting – The organized group of seekers who have been “approved” by a regional group of the Religious Society of Friends. It is called a Monthly Meeting because it meets (usually) once a month to conduct business.

Quaker Business Process – The entire process of conducting and carrying out Quaker Business. This includes activities of many individuals, the corporate worship group, the meeting for business and carrying out the decisions made in the meeting for business.

Quarterly Meeting – An organized group of Monthly Meetings that have been “approved” by a larger group of Meetings of the Religious Society of Friends. It is called a Quarterly Meeting since it (usually) meets once quarterly to conduct business.

Query – A question about a Friends testimony to be contemplated by Friends, often read during the period of expectant waiting at the start of a meeting for business.

Reading Clerk – Clerk who reads memorial minutes and other messages to the meeting, usually restricted to Yearly Meetings.

Recording Clerk – Clerk who records the minutes, discussions and actions.

Sense of the Meeting – The process of seeking divine guidance, the Inner Light, in the spirit of worship for an action on an item before the meeting for business. This is finding the highest level of spiritual insight into the item where the previously conceived opinions on an item may be altered by the leadings of the gathered group.

Standing Aside – The action of an individual may take when the individual disapproves of a given minute but does not want to hold the meeting from moving forward.

Standing in the way – The action an individual may take when the individual disapproves of a given minute and feels strongly enough to hold the meeting from moving forward.

Yearly Meeting – An organized group of Quarterly Meetings of the Religious Society of Friends that holds a meeting for business at least once a year.

Compiled by George N. Webb

EXCERPTS ON UNITY FROM YEARLY MEETING DISCIPLINES

Britain Yearly Meeting

Friends find unity in the depth of silence, when the worshippers are truly gathered and deeply centered on the things of the spirit. We struggle with differences in our meetings for church affairs and here, too, as we consider what action we are called to take over issues that confront us, we know the experience of unity in conviction and purpose. It is a unity which is not found in optional attitudes but in discovering the place in which we can stand together.

- Britain Yearly Meeting, 17

And a query:

Are your meetings for church affairs held in a spirit of worship and in dependence on the guidance of God? Remember that we do not seek a majority decision or even consensus. As we wait patiently for divine guidance our experience is that the right way will open and we shall be led into unity.

Britain Yearly Meeting, 1.02

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

Friends, meet together and know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was.

George Fox, *Epistles* (1698), 115.

The Religious Society of Friends believes that right and satisfactory decisions are more likely if there is understanding and consent on the part of the persons present. Therefore, the Society transacts business by united decision rather than by majority vote, striving to reach conclusions in a spirit of reasonableness and forbearance. The meeting for business, whether at the Monthly, Quarterly, or Yearly Meeting level, should be a meeting for worship centered upon specific problems.

-Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 124.

New England Yearly Meeting

The continuing search for unity is what makes the conduct of Friends' business so uniquely coherent and effective. Friends are not trying in the business meeting to find the broadest area of common acceptance in order to form a consensus, but are searching for the Truth and for an understanding of our own relationship to it. That understanding may include quite a range of views, each of which must be valued, if not finally accepted. It is our ability to pass through our particular views to the common center of our Spiritual lives that makes the Friends business method both difficult and rewarding, and ultimately sustaining.

William B. Watson, quotes in New England Yearly Meeting, 117

New York Yearly Meeting

We look with tender hearts, especially during meetings for worship with a concern for business, for one another's spiritual vision. Truths of the Spirit may come from any of us.

-New York Yearly Meeting, 19.

About the gifts of the Spirit, my friends, I want there to be no misunderstanding... There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord. There are varieties of activity, but all of them and in everyone the same God is active. In each of us the Spirit is seen to be at work for some useful purpose... But all these gifts are the activity of one and the same Spirit, distributing them to each individual at will. Christ is like a single body with its many limbs and organs, which, many as they are, together make up one body.

I Corinthians 12:1, 4-7, 11-12. *Revised English Bible*

In the transaction of business the same reverent waiting upon the Lord should prevail as in meeting for worship. Friends should give patient and sympathetic consideration to all proposals and expression of opinion. We reach decision through a sense of the meeting rather than by vote.

There should be a willingness to speak or be silent as led. Friends should rely on the power of the spirit of truth to seek and keep their speech simple and straightforward. If the meeting is to reach a group decision, participants need considerable personal discipline and an allowance for humble or tentative conclusions.

Such a method is not without tensions, but these can be creative if partisanship and self-interest are subordinated to the authority of God's Spirit. What may seem to be minority positions at first, if taken into account with humility and loving patience, often lead to completely unforeseen conclusions. Friends may differ in their judgement of the suitability of an action, some favoring caution, others wishing to move forward more

adventurously, but with perseverance a decision satisfactory to the entire group will be arrived at.

Although Friends' business procedure frequently requires more time and patience than voting, the results are generally more satisfactory to all concerned. One may not find it easy to give way to someone else or another point of view, but when the Spirit of God is moving in a meeting, Friends are awakened to a new revelation of truth.

-New York Yearly Meeting, 64-66.

Pacific Yearly Meeting

Different ways of understanding the divine life may occur among us. These differences should not be ignored for the sake of a superficial unity. They should be recognized and understood, so that a deeper and more vital unity can be reached. Convictions which might divide or disrupt a Meeting can, through God's grace, help to make it creative and strong.

As difficult problems arise, are we careful to meet them in a spirit of love and humility with minds open for creative solutions? Do we avoid the pressure of time, neither unnecessarily prolonging [n]or unduly curtailing full discussion?

Are we aware that we speak through inaction as well as action?

Are we prepared to let go of our individual desires and let the Holy Spirit lead us to unity?

Do we recognize that the search for unity may require us to accept with good grace a decision of the Meeting with which we are not entirely in agreement?

In what ways do we each take our responsibility in the service of the meeting?

Are younger Friends, new members and attenders given appropriate responsibility in the Meeting?

-North Pacific Yearly Meeting, 41-42.

Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association includes a wonderful quotation from Robert Barclay in the part of its discipline, "Testifying to the Life of the Spirit: The Meeting Community."

As many candles, lighted and put in one place, do greatly augment the light, and make it more to shine forth, so when many are gathered together in the same life there is more of the glory of God. (1678)

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