

## Quaker Decision Making

### Greg Hinshaw, 2024

#### **What is a Friends' meeting for business?**

1. Quaker method in the Orthodox tradition is predicated on the idea that those in unity in Jesus Christ can respond to the collective leading of the Holy Spirit and the discerning abilities of those gathered to determine God's will for the group.
2. A Quaker meeting for business is, first and foremost, a meeting for worship.

#### **Qualities needed in a clerk (taken from David Stanfield):**

1. Spiritual awareness
2. Faith in the Quaker decision-making process
3. Knowledge of Quaker testimonies and history
4. Awareness of Quaker activities beyond the local community
5. Experience in group dynamics
6. Constructive attitudes
7. Mastery of detail and follow through
8. Desire to serve

#### **For the Clerk: Before the meeting:**

1. Read/review the actions of the previous meeting, including the minutes, if available.
2. Review the minutes of the corresponding meeting the previous year.
3. Avoid surprises – notify the congregation/meeting beforehand if controversial items are to be considered
4. Prepare an agenda, at least for your use. Divide the agenda into minutes, reports, old business, and new business.
5. Spend time in prayer and reading of Scripture before the meeting.

#### **For the Clerk: During the meeting:**

1. Use an opening minute and include devotions/worship time.
2. Remind those gathered of the goals and purposes of the process: to seek God's will for the group. Read from *Faith and Practice* if necessary. Establish ground rules for how to share.
3. Give unhurried and sympathetic consideration to suggestions. Refrain from taking a position or attempting to overly influence discussion.
4. When reaching a decision, listen to and watch everyone in the meeting. Non-verbal cues often help the clerk to discern the leadings of the group.
5. Formulate a minute and restate the minute or proposal for the group before asking for approval.

#### **Tips for Being an Effective Participant**

1. Spend time in prayer and reading of Scripture before the meeting for business.
2. Attend with regularity or defer to those who do.
3. Attend and participate in a spirit of worship.
4. Listen first and speak only when prompted to do so by the Holy Spirit.
5. Listen to the leadings of others with discernment. How is God speaking through them?
6. Know "Faith and Practice" and follow it.
7. Deference to "weighty Friends" is to be expected, though the Holy Spirit may speak through others.
8. Support the decision reached by the meeting.
9. Only use "standing aside" or "disapproval" in extreme circumstances.

#### **The Role of the Pastor**

1. Friends had no paid pastors before 1875, though most meetings had resident ministers.
2. In most places, pastors serve *ex-officio* on the Ministry and Oversight (or similar body) and should regularly attend and participate in the monthly meetings.

3. Pastors and their spouses should, generally, not serve as clerks.
4. Pastors should serve both as shepherds and co-laborers with the congregation
5. The Ministry and Oversight, as elders, have the primary responsibility for supporting and guiding the pastor.
6. Generally, long pastorates are signs of healthy arrangements.

**When things don't go as expected:**

1. If there is no unity, can the decision be postponed? Postpone a decision, if necessary and possible.
2. Appoint a committee to study an issue and bring a recommendation; it's easier than resolving the details on the floor of a meeting.
3. If possible, incorporate suggestions from various perspectives into the final proposal.
4. It is permissible to give greater weight to the leadings of weighty Friends. It is also permissible to call upon them for advice, if needed
5. Ultimately, the clerk discerns what constitutes approval. The clerk should rarely determine that something is approved without strong unity to move forward.
6. Remember, the whole group is seeking God's leading, under the direction of the Holy Spirit. The job of the presiding clerk is to discern God's leading in this way.

**Quaker business practice can be the most effective or least effective way to do business depending upon the skill of the clerk and the surrender of the membership to the leading of the Holy Spirit.**

**Addition Resources:**

Doncaster, L. Hugh. *Quaker Organisation and Business Meetings* (London: Friends Home Service, 1958).

Hickey, Damon D., "Unforeseen Joy," *Serving a Friends Meeting as a Recording Clerk* (Greensboro: North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1987).

Hinshaw, Gregory P., *Quaker Decision Making and Clerking: A Brief Handbook for Orthodox Friends in the Pastoral Tradition* (Muncie, IN: Indiana Yearly Meeting, 2017).

Hinshaw, Seth B., *Friendly Procedures in Local Meetings* (Greensboro, NC: North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1978).

Morley, Barry. *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging the Sense of the Meeting* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1993).

Sharman, Cecil W., *Servant of the Meeting: Quaker Business Meetings and Their Clerks* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1983).

Stanfield, David O., *A Handbook for the Presiding Clerk* (Greensboro: North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1989).