

Introduction to Quakers and Friends Ways

Session 5 - The Meeting Community – Business Meetings

Introduction

The following quotation, 3.39 from Canadian Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, by Rufus Jones (1921) provides some insight into our Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business:

3.39. The meeting for business — Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly, with many other supplementary varieties — always opened in silence and closed in silence. It was a deeply religious occasion, impressive in its solemnity...It was a set custom that nothing should be done which could not be done in unity, i.e. with the solid body of the meeting in favour of it. In most cases, as the consideration of the problem proceeded, there would develop a spirit of submission, conciliation and mutual understanding. Some Friend with a reconciling mind would hit upon an inclusive proposal which would bind together the good features of both divergent propositions and draw all present into harmony with his large plan. Then would follow a chorus of responses: "I approve"; "I unite"; "I like that." The very fact that no action would be taken until unity was reached necessitated the cultivation of enlargement of outlook. Instead of blocking action, it encouraged the widening of the scope of action. It trained Friends to seize upon a higher unifying principle that would meet and satisfy the various partial and one-sided attitudes. The Quaker custom of "gathering the sense" was grounded in the religious life. If the religious life ran dry, the method became weak.

Agenda (Lesson Plan)

1. Worship (10 minutes).
2. 'With heart and mind prepared' - (20 minutes)
 - a. How would you describe the state of your 'heart and mind', as you come to this Meeting for Learning?
 - b. What reflections have you from our earlier sessions?
3. Meeting for Worship for Business – the Experience (60 minutes)
 - a. Using one of more of the situations described on page 4, conduct a Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business. If there is a situation within your Meeting or learning group that might be suitable, consider using that situation for discernment.
4. Reflect on the learning (Use whichever questions you think will be helpful): (20 minutes)
 - a. How would you briefly describe your experience of the Meeting for Worship for Business?
 - b. What supported the process?
 - c. What might have blocked it?
 - d. What did you understand to be the sense of the Meeting?
 - e. How did you experience the role of the Clerk? Of the other participants?
 - f. What are you taking away from this session?
5. Closing Worship (10 minutes)

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Selections from Faith and Practice, Canadian Yearly Meeting

3.40. *Born in a time of political and philosophical stress and turmoil, a legitimate child of spiritual self-searching and public protest, our Society has always had a genius for turning stress and turmoil into creative tension. Strongly held opposing views tied together by trust and love are truly creative. As the process of loving outreach dissolves the areas of brittle antagonism, legitimate differences are recognized as a stimulus and broadening influence.*
—Hugh Campbell-Brown, 1970

3.44. *It should be obvious that all need not feel equally happy about the decision the Clerk finally, after getting the "sense of the meeting," has set down in the meeting as passed...Something that might be called participative humility in the assembled members is certainly required in the Quaker decision-making process for it to be able to operate effectively. In this process, whose decision I have been willing to accept, I am brought to realize that the matter has been carefully and patiently considered. I have been involved throughout the process and have had a chance at different stages in it of making my point of view known to the group and having it seriously considered and weighed. Even if the decision that the group feels drawn to accept may go against what I initially proposed, I know that my contribution has helped to sift the issue, perhaps to temper it, and in the course of the process, I may have come to see it somewhat differently... I am a seasoned Friend, I no longer oppose the decision. I give it my nihil obstat and I emerge from the meeting not as a member of a minority who feels outflanked and rejected but rather as one who has been through the process of the decision and is willing to abide by it even though my accent would not have put it in this form.* —Douglas V. Steere, 1988

3.45. *The purpose of our Meetings for Worship for Business is precisely this: we meet not to make decisions, but to build a community of witness: what have we found corporately? The sense of the meeting is not unanimity. 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 clearly was ready to go, but it clearly was not. But my concurring with the sense of the meeting meant that I accepted my faith community where it was, for it is only in affirming clearly where we are that we can add more on.* —Jan Hoffman, 1988

3.46. *One of the largest obstacles to C[anadian] Y[early] M[eeeting] moving toward our vision arises out of a fear of conflict. This is a common fear among Friends, and I am sure many of you share it with me. The conflict may be one of language or of belief. We do not want to disturb — we do not want to be difficult — we do not want to hurt — and so we do not share our differences of thought, word or experience in the open, loving way which would help all of us to grow. Instead we remain silent. Is there some way we can work together on this?* —Betty Polster, 1988

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References for those who wish further resources:

Canadian Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice – Chapter 3 - The Meeting Community, pp 70 – 81. The Lowe-Martin Group – 2011

[Organization and Procedure, Section 2 - General Procedures for Meeting for Business. Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends – 2012.](#)

David Stanfield - *Handbook For The Presiding Clerk* - North Carolina Yearly Meeting (F) 1989

Will Watson - *Before Business Begins-Notes For Recording Clerks* - New England Yearly Meeting 1996

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Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business

Choose someone to act as Clerk, and someone to act as Recording Clerk. Before beginning, briefly describe the process to participants. Encourage them to listen – to the item/query, to each other, to consider how Spirit might speak through each of them. Encourage them to listen in the context of the testimonies and the question, “How do we be faithful?” Settle in to silence. After a few minutes (5 – 10, or what seems right), the clerk offers the first item. (NOTE: If there is a potential for items relating to these Q101 sessions for learning, one of these might provide a realistic experience of Corporate Discernment.). The Recording Clerk and the Presiding Clerk together will listen for the sense of the Meeting and draft a minute.

Item 1 - Child Care

In your small Meeting, two new families with young children have begun attending. Everyone has agreed to attend the next Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business so the Meeting can consider how to meet the needs of the children, their parents, and the Meeting as a whole.

Item 2 (Ministry and Counsel) Vocal Ministry and Meeting for Worship

A number of Friends have expressed concerns that some of the vocal ministry given in meetings over the past few months has focused either on personal issues with significant emotional content or on specific causes for which Friends are advocating. What might M & C do to address this?

Item 3 – Timing of Meeting for Worship

Our Meeting/Worship Group has been meeting weekly on Sundays at 11:00 for a number of years. Some Friends have asked that the Meeting consider changing the Meeting Time to 10:00 so they could have a longer afternoon available for family and personal time. What do Friends want to do?