

**Draft Minutes**  
**Bellingham Friends Meeting**  
**Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business**  
**February 8, 2015**

**Present:** Susan Richardson (Clerk), Lorina Hall, Sharon Trent, Virginia Herrick, Dusty Andersen, Carole Teshima, Larry Thompson, Joanne Cowan, Mary Ann Percy, Judy Hopkinson (recording clerk)

**2015.02.1** Ministry and Counsel Report (Attached)

**2015.02.1.1** Action item: **Friends agreed to move meeting for worship with attention to business to March 15 in order to allow Jay Thatcher and Katherine Spinner to give a second hour on children's programming on March 8th**

**2015.02.1.2** Action item: **The meeting accepted for seasoning the request to take the marriage of Wendy Beach and Don Goldstein under its care.** They will be married under the care of the meeting on April 11. Friends who are interested in participating in the planning committee are encouraged to contact M&C.

2015.02.1.3 M&C is exploring the appropriate procedure for signing a wedding document when the Clerk is not present at the wedding.

2015.02.1.3 Additional topics for second hours were suggested by two friends.

2015.02.1.4 The draft of the State of Society report was discussed. Several Friends spoke appreciatively about what a great job Don did with this initial draft. One Friend offered a re-draft which changed the past perfect tense to past tense, both to make it more active and also to streamline. Virginia offered to take the edited version and winnow enough words to bring the report to one page, or as close as possible.

**2015.02.2** **The meeting minutes its thanks to Don Goldstein for his excellent work to date on the State of Society Report.**

**2015.02.3. Nominating Committee:** **Friends accepted for seasoning the nomination of Nan Macy as the FGC sponsored attender for 2015.**

**2015.02.4** **Minutes for January 2015 were approved as edited.**

**2015. 02.5 Proposal for guidelines for decision making.** Friends asked that discussion continue so that all Friends have ample time to review the document. Two Friends expressed a desire to have a threshing session or discussion regarding Quaker process and decision making. Friends agreed to allow way to open on this issue in light of the fact that the next Quakerism: Experience It! deals with discernment and Quaker process. Friends also noted that we should examine the relevance of the new Faith and Practice to see whether some of this writing might be incorporated. One Friend noted that whatever happened in the past, we are continually led to approach each moment with an open heart to determine the right actions for this time and this place.

Meeting closed with silent worship.

## Ministry & Counsel Report

Bellingham Friends Meeting for Worship for Business, Feb. 8, 2015

1. Advices and Queries, Faith and Practice, NPYM, p. 41:

Is the vocal ministry exercised under the leading of the Holy Spirit without prearrangement, and in the simplicity and sincerity of truth? As we listen, or as we speak, are we guided by the Inward Light and sensitive to one another's needs? Are we careful not to speak at undue length or beyond our Light?

2. M&C State of Committee Report. (Information.)
3. Second Hours: (Action) M&C asks Friends to approve changing the date of our Meeting for Worship for Business next month to March 15, in order to accommodate Jay and Katherine's travel schedule for this area. (March 8 is the only Sunday they can be here.)

Feb. 15 – Experiencing Meeting for Worship - worship sharing facilitated by Virginia

Feb. 22 – QEI—Mary Ann; - Gospel Order (Susan in March and Allen in April, )

March 1 – potluck and Baby Welcoming (!!\*\*\*!!) for Akeeva Roe Manzo

March 8 – Children's Programming with Jay Thatcher and Katherine Spinner (? – see above)

March 15 – MfWfB (? – see above)

March 22 – QEI - Susan - The Testimonies

March 29 – singing second hour (?)

3. Marriage of Don Goldstein and Wendy Beach. (Action.) Ministry and Counsel gladly asks Friends to take under the care of the Meeting the marriage of Don and Wendy. A clearness for marriage committee comprised of Susan Richardson, Mimi Freshley and Rob Stoops has met with Don and Wendy and found them to be clear to move forward with their plan to be married in the care of the Meeting on April 11.

4. M&C's next meeting will be Tuesday, March 3 at 7 p.m. Please contact a member of M&C before then if you have any concerns to bring to the committee.

## ***Ministry and Counsel – State of the Committee Report 2014***

Below are some of the concerns that Ministry and Counsel committee has given prayer, time, attention, and discernment to in 2014:

### *Members & Attenders*

This time last year, we were initiating work on the Gustavson's transfer of membership from their Maine Meeting. That was completed during the year – and then, of course, in August, they unexpectedly moved back to Maine!

Also in January 2014, we were finishing up the process of transferring Marty Walton's membership TO her Meeting in Maine.

Bellingham Friends lost two beloved elders in 2014. Tom Hall, a committed peacemaker and brilliant, kind physician, passed on August 21. Howard Harris, a lifelong Friend and an inspirational peacemaker and teacher of Anthropology, died November 8. Our Meeting was privileged to help the families in organizing memorial services for both Friends. They are profoundly missed.

Several members of our worshiping community lost close family members this year, and one family had a child with a serious illness. We held these families in the Light and strove to offer whatever support we could.

Our Meeting was blessed by the birth of a new attender: Akeeva Manzo was born to Stephanie and Tim Manzo on September 12. Planning is under way for a Baby Welcoming on March 1.

### *Programs*

We invited Nan Macy to facilitate a second hour on Mindfulness from her Buddhist practice and with assistance from leaders in her group. We were enriched by the depth of this tradition and the potential for increasing our faithfulness to Friends testimonies of Simplicity, Integrity and Sustainability which resonate with the Buddhist way.

Ministry and Counsel organized two Friendly Lunches, which were enjoyed by long-time attenders as well as newcomers to Meeting.

We initiated a series of second hour programs, *Quakerism: Experience It!* Based on the curriculum developed by Elaine Craudereuff and adapted by Steve Smith.

### *Worship and Ministry*

Ministry and Counsel developed a sheet of guidelines to demystify Vocal Ministry, which will be put on flyers and posters.

Responding to some Friends concern about our worship being disrupted by many latecomers, M&C

## **Bellingham Friends Meeting State of Society Report for 2014 – First Draft**

Bellingham Friends Meeting has experienced a deepening sense of community during the last year, as manifested in vocal ministry, actions to support justice in the wider community, wider and fuller participation in extra events such as our Second Hours and annual retreat, mutual support in times of loss, and (last but not least) increased attendance.

Our social actions in 2014 were numerous, including sponsorship (along with other like-minded organizations) of public presentation of two short plays concerning prison and electoral reform, respectively; support for proactive inspection of rental housing in Bellingham; gathering funds for and maintaining awareness of the work of the Friends New Underground Railroad, a project of Olympia Friends Meeting; transfer of our own funds to avoid investment in companies that extract and market fossil fuels; and raising funds each month to support a worthy organization that helps to realize our values for communities, both local and farther away.

Perhaps more importantly, our focus has shifted so that we are attempting to enable all Friends to recognize and honor their leadings. This is reflected in our new Social and Environmental Concerns Committee description and in the Second Hours it has sponsored on recognizing and following leadings. Simultaneously, we have supported each other in such leadings and have increased our awareness of opportunities that might speak to them. Friends are appreciative of this emphasis on centering our social action within the context of our spiritual callings, and it appears that more Friends are making commitments to individual leadings. Donations to our “Concern of the Month” have increased as well.

Our two oldest active members, Tom Hall and Howard Harris, both passed away during the latter half of 2014. These losses, combined with the death of Doris Ferm in 2013, have left us feeling a renewed sense of mutual support and a keen awareness of the need to carry on their legacies of leadership in fighting for social justice and supporting one another’s spiritual journeys. We have also found numerous opportunities to support family members of these departed Friends and other close relatives who have died or been gravely ill.

Despite--perhaps even partly because of--our recent losses, we feel a renewed sense of energy toward the goal of finding our own meetinghouse. Several of us attended the meetinghouse-warming in Port Townsend during November and were inspired by the way that the transition there has excited new life for that Meeting.

Several of our relatively new attenders have stepped up to make significant contributions to the life of the Meeting through both committee work and performing chores that facilitate our weekly worship and Second Hour programs. We are hopeful that several of these Friends are becoming ready to request formal membership so that all can recognize what is already a committed relationship with our community. An infant was born recently to two such new attenders, and his presence at meeting for worship on several occasions has increased our feeling of being blessed.

A number of activities in 2014 increased our contact and cross-pollination with other organizations that share many of our values, including Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship, Restorative Community Coalition, League of Women Voters, Center for Spiritual Living, Bellingham Human Rights Film Festival, Death Café, and the Alternatives to Violence Project. We look forward to continuing and deepening these associations.

Even as our relationships with the wider community have deepened, so has the vocal ministry offered during meetings for worship and for business. Not only have there been more messages, but those offered appear to be coming from a more spiritual and centered place. The same tendency was also evident during our enriching annual Meeting Retreat in November, on the theme of “Building Connections”. In connection with deepening our experience of vocal ministry, the Ministry and Counsel Committee recently developed a sheet of guidelines to provide Friendly guidance for all, both newcomers and experienced attenders.

A recent increase in our average attendance has been noted, with the mean number of adults attending weekly going from about 20 in 2013 to almost 24.5 in 2014. We are still at a low ebb with regard to children, but those who do attend occasionally are (except for the infant mentioned above) now older and more able to engage in meaningful dialog with us and each other about values and relationships.

We recently began a new series of adult education programs using the curriculum “Quakerism – Experience It!” developed by Elaine Craudereuff and adapted by Steven Smith. This curriculum draws on a wide variety of readings and encourages contemplation and dialog on the full range of ideas pertinent to Quakerism, both historical and contemporary.

Our connection with other Quaker bodies continues. We again sponsored a Friend attending the Friends General Conference Gathering for the first time and assisted others in attending North Pacific Yearly Meeting’s Annual Session. We also continue to have oversight of Lopez Island Preparative Meeting and have enjoyed intervisitations with Lopez Friends. Among our participants there are Friends active in the governance of American Friends Service Committee, Friends General Conference, Quaker Earthcare Witness, and Western Friend magazine.

Bellingham Friends look forward to 2015 and following years with renewed hope, enthusiasm, and love for our Beloved Community even as we continue to deal as best we can with the need for our own meeting space and the perennial challenge of finding enough willing and able hands to do all the work that the Spirit leads us to.

# Proposal for Bellingham Monthly Meeting's decision-making process

1/11/15

Bellingham Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends of Truth recognizes that our monthly Meeting For Worship For Business is central to the spiritual connectedness and functioning of our Monthly Meeting. To avoid confusion and discordance about the decision-making process used by Bellingham Friends Monthly Meeting we offer the following guidelines.

If a Friend has a grievance or concern about the Meeting, we agree to allow that Friend to bring the concern to Meeting. Such a concern can be brought either to a committee meeting or directly to Meeting For Worship For Business. We agree that Bellingham Friends Meeting committee meetings are open and anyone not on the committee may attend. If there is business of a confidential nature to be discussed by the committee, the guest may be asked to leave while those matters are discussed. It might be best if the Friend contact the committee before they meet to let them know there is a concern.

If a concern is brought to a committee, Friends can expect it to be put on the agenda of the committee meeting whether the Friend with a concern can attend or not. If they cannot attend a committee meeting, they can submit the concern in writing. The Friend who brought it to the committee can expect to be informed if the matter was put on the agenda of a committee meeting and was heard and/or discussed. If the committee decides to lay down the concern, the Friend can expect to be informed of that decision. If the concern is not put on the agenda or discussed, the Friend with the concern can expect to be informed of that. A committee member may contact the Friend to discuss the issue, but the Friend with a concern can expect committee business will be conducted in a way that allows all persons on the committee to be "in the loop" of such discussions. If the committee makes a decision, all committee members can be expected to know about the decision, and to be in agreement with it.

Any final resolution of a concern will come out of Meeting For Worship For Business. The committees may make a suggestion for resolution, but do not have final authority for decisions. If the matter is of an urgent nature, there are avenues for expedition such as holding a called meeting. If the issue is not urgent, a Friend can request that the matter be allowed to season until the next business meeting. If the issue concerns changing a policy, until a decision is made to change it, the previous policy will remain in effect.

If a Friend, friend or committee is working in the society-at-large on an issue, and wants to use the name of Bellingham Friends Meeting, we can expect to be informed of such work and representation in advance at a Meeting For Worship For Business. We also can expect to have an opportunity to hear a report about their work. If BFMM supports an organization that is not part of the Religious Society of Friends of Truth with a financial donation or by giving an endorsement in our name, we can expect such support to be approved at a MFWFB, and minuted.

If a Friend has a leading to stand in the way of a decision, they may do so if it is discerned they are acting in the spirit of furthering the will of God or Love. We strive to recognize that the Spirit, or Light, or Love works in a manner of continuing revelation. We encourage each other to be open to revelation and change. We strive to work in unity with each other and the Spirit.

Bellingham Monthly Meeting offers the attached article on collective intelligence and Quaker practice by Leonard Joy for further clarity about our Meeting's decision-making process.

<http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-QuakerCI.html>  
The Co-Intelligence Institute CII home // CIPolitics home

### Collective Intelligence and Quaker Practice

The assumption is that God is present in the decision-making group and is equally accessible by every member of the group ("that of God in everyone", "the Inner Light"). The group seeks unity by seeking a decision ("sense of the meeting") which is consistent with the promptings of this Light. The unity is a unity of the heart as well as the head, and is not necessarily unanimity. Friends try to allow the Spirit to work among them and lead them to a wise decision. The group becomes wiser than the individual because it partakes of the wisdom of all its members, empowered by the Spirit.

-- Barbara Rose Caldwell <http://friendscouncil.org/web/Literature/LitontheWeb/DecisionMaking.html>

by Leonard Joy <[leonardjoy@igc.org](mailto:leonardjoy@igc.org)>

The ways in which society generally provides for collective discernment and decision making are ill designed to tap our collective intelligence and do much to explain our collective inability to discern and pursue the common good. The fact that adversarial debate is likely to fail to respect all needs and legitimate interests-and, at best, provides for compromise-is fairly readily grasped. Where not all voices are equally heard, the neglect of some concerns may be acute. And where there is no mutual caring between parts and whole there is pathology, even death.

But even when it is understood that inclusion, equal voice, and non-adversarial discourse is desirable, this understanding by itself proves inadequate to tapping the wisdom of the whole. Of recent years, considerable attention has been paid to the management of meetings and a number of different approaches to collective decision making are now available. These variously emphasize fostering creativity (brainstorming), educating the full range of participants' stories and perspectives, facilitation that captures and builds upon the various contributions, nurturing a culture of respectful, attentive listening, avoidance of negativity and fault finding, structuring a process from brainstorming to analysis to elimination, and so on. Thus, we have "open space," "world café," "appreciative inquiry," "integral public practice," "dialogue," "goldfish bowl," and a host of patented techniques and checklists for running effective meetings. Fetzer's report *Centered on the Edge*, which explores the essential conditions for tapping into collective wisdom, notably draws little on these. Neither does its conclusions suggest that any of them would be

found to meet all necessary conditions in which collective wisdom is arrived at. Indeed, the report could be read to suggest that these conditions still elude us.

Such a conclusion would, I believe, be unduly pessimistic. I have many experiences of sustained decision making in which, in my judgement, collective wisdom prevailed. I shall now examine the practice that supported this and consider whether its preconditions have general application. The practice in question is the Quaker practice of decision making. The fact that it is approached as "a meeting for worship for business," in particular, raises the question of its more general applicability. Let me anticipate and say that, approached as a meeting for discerning the common good, the practice stands up well in secular contexts.

The appended extracts from a Quaker Faith and Practice describe the practice. They also describe its mystical roots—the belief that "there is that of God in everyone," and that this can be experienced so that discourse can be "Spirit-led." This may be seen as, at best, an esoteric practice out of reach of, hardly to be seriously considered for adoption by, people generally. I would argue that it is too easy to be distracted by words and that the spirit of what Quakers do is eminently accessible to all. The challenge lies in leading those whose daily habit of mind and state of values development is not of the Quaker disposition and their habitual meeting behaviors not those that they need to manifest if they are to participate in the discernment of collective wisdom. Here the connection between individual and collective transformation, and the role of leadership, becomes apparent.

The essentials of Quaker practice, translated where necessary into secular terms, are as follows (no special order):

1. grounding of all participants in the desire for the common good
2. ensuring that all voices are heard and listened to
3. respect for all—both participants and those outside (but affected by) the decision making process
4. respect and caring for the agreed legitimate interests of all
5. maintaining community-loving relationship—as a primary concern
6. grounding of all participants in their own humanity and their experience of it during the meeting
7. sensitivity to interdependence—open systems thinking
8. speaking out of the silence (the state of being personally grounded)
9. addressing the clerk/facilitator not one another
10. speaking simply and not repeating what has already been offered
11. contributing personal perceptions and convictions—speaking one's own truth—without advocating that all should act on it
12. the commitment to air dissent
13. not using emotion to sway others while being authentic with the expression of feeling
14. distinguishing "threshing" meetings from meetings for decision making
15. preparing factual and analytical material for assimilation prior to meetings for decision
16. the role of the clerk in offering syntheses of the "sense of the meeting" that are progressively modified until there is unity
17. the role of the clerk in resolving difficulty in coming to unity (see appended notes page)
18. decisions are made not by majority vote, nor by consensus, but by unity
19. the organizational structures that bring to bear the voices of many collectivities

The implications of these are seen as follows:



## 1. grounding of all participants in the desire for the common good

Quakers start their business process with a period of silent worship in which they aim to center themselves in that of God within or, in the case of universalist Quakers, in the sense of loving kindness to-and identity with-all creation, or, in the case of Buddhist Quakers, in the compassionate, non-attached, no-self. In so doing, what they all have in common is that they are putting their egos in place to serve the task rather than using the task to serve their egos. They are also opening to the awareness of the larger whole, the greater good; and they are inwardly joining together in holding the meeting community in their care.

All this derives from a culture held and evolved over the past 350 years. This is not something that can be expected from those who are not party to this culture. In many cases, however, it is possible even in a secular context to hold a few moments of silent recollection of the gravity of the business in hand and centering in the spirit which all are enjoined to hold. Even where this seems difficult to invoke, it is possible for a tone to be set at the beginning of business and for agreement to be reached that the meeting is to discern and serve the common good. For those at early stages of values development, it may not be immediately possible to aspire to more than the search for "win-win" solutions to problems. But even this may be enough to start with to engage people ultimately in an appreciation of, and desire for, the common good and to lead them, beyond tolerance of those that they would not join, to a sense of mutual appreciation and concern. And it is possible to require that the ego should serve the task and not the other way round and make people mutually accountable in this regard.

## 2. ensuring that all voices are heard and listened to

It is the task of the clerk-or facilitator-to ensure this. In a Quaker meeting it is understood that all voices will be heard and that there need be no competition to be allowed to speak.

## 3. respect for all persons-both participants and those outside (but affected by) the decision making process

This, again, is a tone that may be set and held by the facilitator given support from participants in holding one another accountable. It may be given to understand that participation is contingent upon maintaining a code of conduct whose principles may be made explicit. (See Annex.) Ability to sustain respectful behavior is likely to depend on the observance of (para 4)

## 4. respect and caring for the agreed legitimate interests of all

In secular situations, especially, it is important to make the legitimate interests and concerns of all parties explicit, agreed, and subject to the explicit commitment of all to uphold. The goal is to move beyond this to mutual caring, but simple acknowledgement and respect will go a long way to supporting the emergence of collective wisdom.

One implication of this is that, legitimate interests and concerns being explicit, hidden agendas become easy to name and to call into question. In a Quaker meeting, there would, should such a situation arise, be a call for silence and discernment of the presence or absence of the Spirit and a searching for a Spirit-led way ahead.

None of this should ignore or deny the necessity for trust. In situations of existing extreme distrust the possibility of progress is likely to depend on providing for accountability, generally by an external body. However, our prime concern here is our inability to be wise together even where there is no overt enmity and antagonism. Even in such situations, there may be an underlying fear of loss to be calmed. The ability of the clerk/moderator/facilitator to earn everybody's trust is essential. All must feel that their perceived legitimate interests will be heard and protected.

#### 5. maintaining community-loving relationship-as a primary concern

In a Quaker meeting, a decision is never a victory for one view or another. A good-Spirit-led-decision is one that not only results in sound practical consequences, it is one that maintains the loving community. Even should there be those (seldom more than one or two) who cannot unite with the decision arrived at, they are nevertheless willing to stand aside trusting the wisdom of, and maintaining their love for, the meeting. The function of the clerk in ensuring the articulation of dissent, of making sure that it is fully received (and felt to be truly heard) and "labored" with, then assessing the readiness of the meeting and dissenters to move on to a minute of decision, is critical.

#### 6. grounding of all participants in their own humanity and their experience of it during the meeting

Quakers use silence to punctuate a meeting to allow for such grounding. In secular contexts, it is likely to fall primarily to a facilitator to be sensitive to the need for grounding and to help people to ground themselves in what they are feeling and the roots of their feeling. This reflects an underlying understanding that there are powerful and-when tested in community-reliable ways of knowing that do not depend on rationality. Helping people to tap into what they know makes particular demands on a facilitator's skill and training.

#### 7. speaking out of the silence (the state of being personally grounded)

In a Quaker meeting, ideally at least, silence is allowed after each contribution to allow it to be fully absorbed and to allow subsequent contributions to flow from a grounded state. In my experience, this is perhaps the greatest challenge in changing the habits of secular discourse.

#### 8. sensitivity to interdependence-open systems thinking

A major task of a facilitator is to support open systems thinking. This implies understanding the wider context in which a concern-and the sought for response to it-arises. It requires becoming clear about the system of which the concern is the indicative state variable and the implications of interdependence for the common good, the good of the whole.

#### 9. addressing the clerk not one another

The effect of this is to reinforce the sense that each contribution adds a new piece or perspective to the total picture rather than canceling or trumping others' perspectives.

#### 10. speaking simply and not repeating what has already been offered

This is about the avoidance of tricks of speech designed to bully or obfuscate with sophisticated rhetoric or to impress by weight of words. In secular situations, a facilitator may ask for brevity and avoidance of repetition and, as necessary, summarize the essence of an overblown presentation and check with its author that this was an accurate summary. While, in non-Quaker meetings, several people might feel the need to amplify and underline a contribution that they agree with, Quakers wishing so to do will respond with "That Friend speaks my mind" thus saving time and assisting the Clerk to gain the sense of the meeting.

11. contributing personal perceptions and convictions-speaking one's own truth-without advocating that all should act on it

This, again, is about contributing to a greater understanding rather than attempting to confine the understanding to one perspective. Each is seen to hold, potentially, a piece of the truth and all contributions have their place in the collective perception of the greater truth.

12. the commitment to air dissent

Unity-the essential goal-is not possible if some withhold dissent-especially if there is intent to subvert or subsequently disown a decision. Openness is essential. Truth is seen to emerge from consideration of all perspectives. Establishing this as a shared understanding and commitment requires explicit discussion where it is not to be taken for granted. The norm that solidarity is expressed by withholding dissent is turned on its head. The task of the facilitator is to make it safe for people to express dissent.

13. not using emotion to sway others while being authentic with the expression of feeling

Authenticity is key. Authentic, grounded expression comes with evidence of the emotion behind it. This is not simply appropriate and permissible, it is what has to be. But any simulation of emotion in order to affect others is entirely inadmissible and should be discouraged and discounted by the facilitator. A Quaker Clerk's call for silence after such a breach calls attention to it and puts it in perspective.

14. distinguishing "threshing" meetings from meetings for decision making

Not all meetings need be designed to arrive at decisions. Where decisions are complex or where they are likely to reveal major differences of feeling or understanding, preliminary meetings to air these differences and to hear from one another may be desirable and help the process of mutual understanding. Quakers designate such meetings as "threshing" meetings that serve to focus down on what is essential.

15. preparing factual and analytical material for assimilation prior to meetings for decision

Decisions need to be informed by data and analysis and provision is needed to prepare this and for its critical review prior to decision making.

16. the role of the clerk in offering syntheses of the "sense of the meeting" that are progressively modified until there is unity

The Quaker Clerk attempts periodically to summarize the state of the collective perception as the decision making process evolves. This is a way of testing the degree of convergence and divergence of perceptions and revealing where the picture is still less than clear. This poses no difficulty in secular situations though it not always an accepted role of meeting facilitators.

#### 17. the role of the clerk in resolving difficulty in coming to unity

Among Quakers, there arise situations when, having labored with dissenting Friends, there seems no immediate hope of resolution of differences. Where immediate decision is avoidable, and generally where decisions are weighty even where there is no dissent or evident unease, Quakers allow time for "seasoning" a decision to allow for further reflection and for unease to surface. But there are times when decisions need to be made and action initiated. The role of the Clerk in sensing the willingness of the meeting to proceed is critical. The guidance offered to clerks in such situations might well be adopted in secular contexts also. (For guidance offered to clerks in such situations see appended notes.)

#### 18. decisions are made not by majority vote, nor by consensus, but by unity

Friends do not vote or act on the will of the majority. In Quaker experience, it is possible for all to unite in a decision, even when some have reservations. A united Meeting is not necessarily of one mind but it is all of one heart. (See Annex.) This may be too high an expectation in secular contexts, but a willingness to settle for compromise is antithetical to seeking wisdom. Moreover, in a secular context, it may not be easy even to secure the willingness of a minority to "stand aside." While there are those whose concerns are not reflected in a proposed decision, the work of discerning wisdom needs to continue. This is likely to hinge on securing agreement about the legitimacy or otherwise of concerns and on the consequences for sustaining community of alternative decisions. Compromise is only acceptable where legitimate concerns are otherwise irreconcilable.

#### 19. the organizational structures that bring to bear the voices of many collectivities

It is one thing to secure the wisdom of a gathered group of people, it is another to find the collective wisdom of hundreds, thousands or millions of people. The Quaker structure of Monthly, Quarterly, Yearly meetings and General Conference and the process-by which concerns may emerge at any level and evoke the response of the whole-has proven effective in providing for inclusion and voice and the manifestation of collective intelligence. While it is true that the participants in Quaker process are self-selecting for a willingness to observe the culture, it is argued above that effective leadership can do much to promote it and to educe collective wisdom.

It should be noted that these principles do not help to resolve matters of taste. Rather they apply to matters of values. If the answer to the question, "Why should we do that?" is simply a matter of personal preference, we may not be able to come to unity.

Of course, there are other, more general, considerations to be observed for successful decision making processes. It is helpful, even essential, to structure discussion in a sequence in which aspects of concern may be considered according to some necessary critical path while expecting nothing to be resolved until the picture is whole. Both clerks and facilitators have a key role in this and in making clear what constitutes relevance at any time. At first, deliberate avoidance

of structure or sense of anything being irrelevant may be the way to go. The trick then is to know when the picture is beginning to form and to help it do so.

Within the framework of principles offered here, there is a variety of devices that may be used to promote process. Some of these offer further useful principles. "Appreciative inquiry," for example, emphasizes the need to focus on what should be rather than on diagnosis of what is wrong. Others offer ways of, for example, encouraging equality of voice by separating ideas from their authors and thus avoiding bias that might come from the influence of status. Many of these might find circumstances in which their application might prove appropriate and productive within the larger framework of principles.

What is clear, however, is that the manifestation of collective intelligence in collective decision making depends on behavior exhibited outside decision making forums. The effectiveness of collective decisions depends on the actors' ability and willingness to walk the talk and to be held accountable for this. The connection between individual behavior and societal transformation becomes apparent. The collective decision and the values expressed in the process of its making also affect the individual. Individual and group/organization/society both advance and constrain one another.

## Annex

Extracts from Faith and Practice: A Guide to Quaker Discipline in the Experience of the Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

### (1) "Meeting for Worship for Business"

"Being orderly come together proceed in the wisdom of God not in the way of the world not deciding affairs by the greater vote [but by] assenting together as one man in the spirit of truth and equity, and by the authority thereof."

-- Edward Burrough, 1662 (Abridged from Britain YM QF&P, 1995. 2.87)

There is little record of how Friends' unique practice for conducting business evolved, but there can be no doubt that it is derived directly from Friends' faith. It is guided by three core beliefs: that there is that of God in everyone, that each can experience that of God within, and that divine guidance will lead to the realization of a single shared truth.

From these beliefs it readily follows that a Friends' Meeting for Business is a Meeting for Worship in which business is conducted by seeking God's will in the decisions that are to be made. The silent worship with which the Meeting for Business both opens and closes, connects individuals to the Spirit. It prompts them to be sensitive to and grounded in the Love that binds the Meeting.

Anyone may call for silence in the course of a meeting, when resolution of a matter is proving difficult, when there is a need to reflect on what has been said, or to return the Meeting to a spirit of quiet reverence. A call for silence is always a call to worship, to focus on the guidance of the Spirit, to listen with a loving and open heart. As in other Meetings for Worship, Friends may feel moved to speak out of the silence on the matter in hand.

Friends strive to observe a discipline of plain speaking, expressing themselves simply and directly. This discipline extends to not interrupting or interjecting remarks. The occasional "That Friend speaks my mind" shows support for a viewpoint. Friends maintain order and ensure full participation by waiting to be recognized by the Clerk and usually standing to speak, addressing all comments to the Clerk and not to one another.

Although Friends study and discuss issues in advance, they should not come to Meeting for Business with minds made up. Seeking to be reverent to that of God in themselves and others, Friends should offer their personal perspectives and avoid taking fixed or adversarial positions.

Friends pay careful attention to all expressions, searching for the truth behind the words, aware that it may come from unexpected places. However, the voice of an experienced Friend is often especially valuable, providing wisdom that the Meeting needs.

Listening is at the very heart of Friends' faith and practice. By listening to the divine in ourselves and in each other, Friends are better prepared to find God's will. Friends should not listen for the most convincing argument but for the greater understanding to which each contributes and to which each may assent. A sense of the Meeting evolves from the interplay of all contributions and the skilled guidance of the Clerk. When unity is realized, the outcome is deeply satisfying. It produces a sense of the rightness of the decision and a loving connection between members.

Friends do not vote or act on the will of the majority. In Quaker experience, it is possible for all to unite in a decision, even when some have reservations. A united Meeting is not necessarily of one mind but it is all of one heart.

Unity requires active participation: where there is division over an issue, it is especially important for everybody to be heard. When Friends withhold expressions of dissent in the interest of avoiding controversy, the unity that results is spurious. The collective wisdom of the Meeting can be realized only to the extent that all participate in seeking it.

When Friends come to an issue with conflicting views, they are challenged to pool their knowledge and experience, and to experience the joy of discovering a new understanding that encompasses all of these elements in a far better form than previously imagined. This process requires love, courage, trust, and an ability to truly listen and change.

In coming to unity, Friends draw upon feelings and contemplative insight, not simply upon rational thought. Honest emotions are essential to discernment, but they should not be abused to sway the Meeting's decision. Time is also essential for "seasoning" important decisions. Sometimes decisions must be deferred for reflection and to allow residual unease to surface. Decisions made in unity are not victories or defeats when Friends remain faithful, preserving the loving unity and higher purpose of the Meeting. Business conducted as a corporate endeavor in a Meeting for Worship enables Friends to move forward with confidence and joy.

(2) extracts from "Friends Process for Making Decisions"

PRINCIPLES

The Quaker method for reaching decisions is based on religious conviction. Friends conduct business together in the faith that there is one divine Spirit, which is accessible to all persons. When Friends wait upon, heed, and follow the Light of Truth within them, its spirit will lead to unity. This faith is the foundation for any corporate decision.

Friends do not resort to a vote to settle an issue. Friends expect to find unity. This unity transcends both consensus, which retains only the views common to all present, and compromise, which affirms none of the positions presented. Unlike a decision resting upon a majority vote, one made according to a true "sense of the Meeting" can avoid overriding an unconvinced minority. It allows unforeseen insights to emerge and it enables Friends to modify previously held opinions. They may then agree on a new and better view of the matter under consideration.

Friends begin Meetings in which decisions are to be made with a time of silent worship. In the stillness, they recall that a business or committee meeting is, in fact, a Meeting for Worship to deal with certain matters of importance. Until the Meeting can unite in a decision, the previous policy remains unchanged or no action is taken on new business, as the case may be.

Friends try to seek divine guidance at all times, to be mutually forbearing, and to be concerned for the good of the Meeting as a whole, rather than to defend a personal preference. Thus, having once expressed a view, a Friend is expected to refrain from pressing it unduly, at length or repeatedly. The grace of humor can often help to relax the tensions of a Meeting so that new light comes to it.

The authority and responsibility for decisions on the affairs of the Meeting reside with the members, and those present at a regular monthly Meeting for Worship for Business have the authority to make decisions for the Meeting. Until the Meeting can unite in a minute, the previous policy remains unchanged.

Most Meetings for Business proceed without distinction between members and non-members, and this benefits the Meeting. On occasion, a decision may call for invoking this distinction. At such times, non-members should not respond to the Clerk's call for affirmation of a proposed minute, and the Clerk may so remind the Meeting.

Friends' way of conducting business is of central importance. It is the Quaker way of living and working together. It can create and preserve the sense of fellowship in the Meeting, and from there it can spread to other groups and decisions in which individual Friends and Meetings have a part. Thus it contributes to the way of peace in the world.

-- George Selleck, New England Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, 1966 p.116

## DECISION-MAKING PRACTICE

Friends Meetings ordinarily take care of their business at their regularly scheduled monthly Meeting for Business. However, the Clerk may call for a special session to deal with an urgent matter. Adequate notice of a Called Meeting (see Glossary) should be given, particularly if the topic is controversial.

Committee clerks and members should inform the Clerk ahead of time when they have business to come before the Meeting. As items are dealt with, the Clerk makes sure that all present have opportunity to express their views. Friends address the Clerk, not one another. Friends who

stand to speak find that their ministry is more faithful, concise, and better heard. Each vocal contribution should be something that adds to the material already given.

The Meeting's work of discernment is a corporate search. The clerk does not direct the communication toward certain predetermined goals, but keeps dialogue open, promoting free and full exploration of the matter under consideration, while fostering a sense of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The clerk is responsible for discerning and stating the sense of the Meeting and presenting a minute when unity has been reached. Members of the Meeting may sometimes assist the clerk in this. If a member believes that the clerk has incorrectly discerned the sense of the Meeting it is appropriate to speak up. Similarly, someone may propose that unity actually has been reached and suggest that a minute should be recorded.

When the wording appears satisfactory, the Clerk asks Friends if they approve the minute. If Friends approve the minute without objection, it is recorded as an action of the Meeting. If, after careful consideration, minor editorial changes appear to be needed, the Clerk should have authority to make them. Those changes should be noted at the next Business Meeting, when the minutes of the previous session are read.

If the business before the Meeting is difficult, anyone may request a pause for silent worship. This can often lead to finding a way forward. Sometimes a member with doubts about a minute favored by most of those present will voice his or her reservations but release the Meeting to move forward. This will be recorded in the minutes as "one Friend standing aside." In rare cases a member may ask to be recorded as standing aside; however this practice is best limited to occasions when that member's professional or legal status might be jeopardized by implied consent to a minute.

Another way of avoiding a deadlock is for the Clerk or another member to suggest that a matter be held over for consideration at a later time. It may be helpful for the Clerk to ask a small committee, including Friends of diverse leadings, to revise the proposal in the light of the concerns and objections, and report to the next Meeting. If the matter is urgent, the committee may retire from a given session to return to it with a revised proposal.

## DEFERRING DECISIONS

Many decisions are of a routine nature and can be handled during one Meeting for Business. Business Meeting accomplishes much of its work by trusting standing and ad hoc committees to have adequately seasoned matters beforehand.

Some matters are better served by, and deserve, longer periods of deliberation. It is standard practice to hold over decisions in matters of membership, marriage and nominations for at least one month before a final decision. The extra time of seasoning allows Friends to labor together in an orderly exploration of unexpected objections and thus better to discern God's will. This is characteristic of Friends' sense of "good order." (See Glossary)

Items may be held over for later consideration, as committees or the Clerk deem necessary, and it is generally helpful to name the date when it will be reconsidered. The absence of Friends with a specific interest from Business Meeting (after notice has been given) should seldom be a factor in delaying a decision.



It is the responsibility of the Clerk to discern when it is appropriate to delay a decision or refer a matter back to a committee for further seasoning. If the Clerk has decided in advance that no decision will be made at a given session, he or she should inform the Business Meeting before discussion begins. The Clerk should also indicate the possible consequences of a delayed decision.

## IN TIMES OF DIFFICULTY

Another highly important issue in arriving at a decision, and one that calls for a good deal of inner discipline and seasoning on the part of the members, is the matter of what constitutes unanimity. If it were necessary for every member to feel equally happy about the decisions reached, we should be presuming to be settling matters in an angelic colony and not among flesh and blood members of a local Quaker meeting! From the point of view of myself as a member of a meeting, the kind of unanimity that is referred to is a realization on my part that the matter has been carefully and patiently considered. I have had a chance at different stages of the process of arriving at this decision of making my point of view known to the group, of having it seriously considered and weighed. Even if the decision finally goes against what I initially proposed, I know that my contribution has helped to sift the issue, perhaps to temper it, and I may well have, as the matter has patiently taken its course, come to see it somewhat differently from the point at which I began...I have also come to realize that the group as a whole finds this resolution what seems best to them. When this point comes, if I am a seasoned Friend, I no longer oppose it...I emerge from the meeting not as a member of a bitter minority who feels he has been 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 Steere, *The Quaker Decision Making* quoted by David O. Stanfield in *A Handbook for the Presiding Clerk*

Sometimes Friends have business that seems to require decision, but their differences appear unresolvable. Usually no action is taken, and the matter is held over with the expectation that unity can and will be found. Deference to the objections of even one or two members demonstrates the great reluctance of the Meeting to override any of its members - especially when matters of conscience are involved. Some people mistakenly believe that this procedure provides each member with a veto. Rather, Meetings place a high value on unity.

Unity does not imply unanimity of the entire membership of a Monthly Meeting. A Meeting may proceed in the absence of, or (more rarely) over the objection of one or more Friends present while recognizing that objections may contain, or lead to, new light on the matter being considered. Friends with hesitations may choose to state that they are "standing aside" when the final decision is made, or, rarely may ask to be recorded as standing aside.

Meetings may occasionally act even over the objections of one or more Friends. Due weight should be given to the insights of any Friend long experienced in Friends meetings, whose judgment and service have been proven over considerable time. A "stop" in such a member's mind should be heeded. If, on the other hand, the one who is withholding support is known for persistently objecting, then the Clerk may call for a period of silent worship and, if so led, announce that the weight of the Meeting seems decidedly to favor the action and the proposal is approved. The same principle applies even on occasions when there is more than one objector.

One of the Clerk's more demanding responsibilities is to tell the difference between those occasions when it is right that the objector's views be heeded, and those times when the Meeting has reached unity and, despite objection, it must act. Friends seek neither unanimity (a matter of votes), nor consensus (a resolution of differing opinions). Friends seek unity in the Spirit. When the Clerk is clear that the Meeting approves an action, even in the presence of dissenting views, it is his or her obligation to articulate the sense of the Meeting in a minute and so record it unless others present also object.

Any ministry in Meeting for Business may contain elements essential to discovering a Spirit-led decision around which the Meeting may unite. This is true of the ministry of experienced Friends, newcomers, and Friends whose ministry others often find unhelpful. Before considering going forward over the objection of a Friend, the Clerk and the Business Meeting must be confident that it has labored in good faith with the objecting Friend and that the Meeting has done its best to understand the objection and that the objecting Friend has had spacious opportunities to understand the leading of the Meeting to proceed.

It is unusual for a sense of the Meeting to be achieved over one or more objections, and there are good reasons for this. The objector(s) may actually be right, or the proposed action may profoundly strain their bonds to the Meeting. Sometimes concern for their feelings may weigh heavily in favor of deferring the decision. Meetings should not ignore these features of a decision taken over objection of some Friends, although the Meeting may still have to proceed. It is important to ensure that objections have been faithfully considered, and that everyone is satisfied that this has happened.

Where there is discomfort, Oversight or Worship and Ministry Committees should act quickly to heal wounds, lest they fester and spoil the community of trust. If Friends feel that the Meeting should not have recorded a particular minute, they should bring their concern to the Worship and Ministry Committee (which has the responsibility for the care of Meeting for Business) the Clerk, or the Meeting for Business. It is important for differences to be aired and faced rather than to try to muffle views or circumvent attitudes for fear of dissent. Friends believe that truth, fully and openly sought, will carry its own conviction, and that unity will be found in truth and love.

It must always be remembered that the final decision as to whether the minute represents the sense of the meeting is the responsibility of the meeting itself, not of the clerk.

-- London Yearly Meeting, To Lima With Love, p.19

## THRESHING SESSIONS

Occasionally an issue may be complex, controversial, dependent on technical details, or emotionally charged so that significantly more corporate preparation is required than can reasonably be accomplished in Meeting for Business. In such cases the Meeting should arrange a series of separate meetings. If technical details are crucial, study sessions may be in order. If matters are emotionally charged or members need to be heard in a receptive setting, Quaker dialogue or worship sharing may be helpful. If extended preliminary exploration is needed, threshing sessions may be appropriate.

Threshing sessions derive their name from the assumption that through them the chaff might be separated from the grain of truth, clearing the way for later action on the issue. However, no corporate decisions are made at such meetings.

The Clerk or moderator of a threshing session is responsible for ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to speak, drawing out the reticent and limiting redundancy. Special efforts must be made to see that Friends of all shades of opinion can and will be present. To the extent that Friends who hold a given view are absent, the usefulness of such a meeting will be impaired. Knowledgeable people should be asked to present factual or complex material and be available to answer questions. A recorder should take notes of the meeting for later reference.

## CLERKS AND CLERKING

The Clerk coordinates the business of the Meeting. The Clerk sees to it that all pertinent business and concerns are presented clearly to the Monthly Meeting in good order for its deliberate consideration, united action, and appropriate execution. The following guidelines apply generally to the Clerk of any Friends Meeting or committee.

The Clerk is a member of the Meeting, who enjoys the confidence of its membership and who, in turn, respects and cherishes its individual members and attenders. He or she seeks the leading of the Spirit for corporate guidance. It is essential for the Clerk to be familiar with Faith and Practice and other Quaker literature. The Clerk should be able to comprehend readily, evaluate rightly, and state clearly and concisely an item of business or concern that comes to the Meeting. He or she should be able to listen receptively to what is said, and, through spiritual discernment, to gather the sense of the Meeting at the proper time.

The Clerk attends Meeting for Worship and keeps close to the work of committees, in all of which he or she should be considered an ex officio member. In order to be aware of the condition of the Meeting, it is essential that the Clerk attend Meetings of the Worship and Ministry and the Oversight Committees.

The Clerk presides at all Business Meetings. (An Alternate Clerk may preside when the Clerk is unable to be present.) The Clerk prepares the agenda, and encourages committee Clerks and others to provide reports, concerns, proposals, and other materials in advance. The Clerk's care in preparing the agenda, and judgment of the relative urgency of each item greatly facilitates the Meeting's business. The Clerk sees that correspondence that comes to the Meeting is not neglected.

The Clerk judges the relative urgency of items and sets the pace of the Meeting to assure full and balanced expression of the views of the members. He or she does not express personal opinions, but if an essential viewpoint has not been presented, the Clerk asks the Meeting for permission to offer it. If the Clerk is led to take a strong position on a controversial matter, the Alternate Clerk or another appropriate person is asked to preside and take the sense of the Meeting.

As actions are taken, the Clerk makes sure that assignments are clear and responsible persons and committees are notified promptly in writing. The Clerk signs all official papers and minutes, including minutes of sojourn and travel, letters of introduction and certificates of transfer or removal. If legal documents and minutes are involved, it is good practice for both the Clerk and

the Recording Clerk to sign. The Clerk also endorses travel minutes and letters of introduction presented by visiting Friends.

The Clerk ensures that the activities of the Monthly Meeting are coordinated with those of its Quarterly and Yearly Meeting and that representatives to these gatherings are appointed. Reports, minutes and other concerns must be communicated to the proper officers on schedule. Business and concerns received from Quarterly and Yearly Meeting must be delivered to the proper persons and committees and to the Meeting as a whole.

# Proposal for Bellingham Monthly Meeting's decision-making process

1/11/15

Bellingham Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends of Truth recognizes that our monthly Meeting For Worship For Business is central to the spiritual connectedness and functioning of our Monthly Meeting. To avoid confusion and discordance about the decision-making process used by Bellingham Friends Monthly Meeting we offer the following guidelines.

If a Friend has a grievance or concern about the Meeting, we agree to allow that Friend to bring the concern to Meeting. Such a concern can be brought either to a committee meeting or directly to Meeting For Worship For Business. We agree that Bellingham Friends Meeting committee meetings are open and anyone not on the committee may attend. If there is business of a confidential nature to be discussed by the committee, the guest may be asked to leave while those matters are discussed. It might be best if the Friend contact the committee before they meet to let them know there is a concern.

If a concern is brought to a committee, Friends can expect it to be put on the agenda of the committee meeting whether the Friend with a concern can attend or not. If they cannot attend a committee meeting, they can submit the concern in writing. The Friend who brought it to the committee can expect to be informed if the matter was put on the agenda of a committee meeting and was heard and/or discussed. If the committee decides to lay down the concern, the Friend can expect to be informed of that decision. If the concern is not put on the agenda or discussed, the Friend with the concern can expect to be informed of that. A committee member may contact the Friend to discuss the issue, but the Friend with a concern can expect committee business will be conducted in a way that allows all persons on the committee to be "in the loop" of such discussions. If the committee makes a decision, all committee members can be expected to know about the decision, and to be in agreement with it.

Any final resolution of a concern will come out of Meeting For Worship For Business. The committees may make a suggestion for resolution, but do not have final authority for decisions. If the matter is of an urgent nature, there are avenues for expedition such as holding a called meeting. If the issue is not urgent, a Friend can request that the matter be allowed to season until the next business meeting. If the issue concerns changing a policy, until a decision is made to change it, the previous policy will remain in effect.

If a Friend, friend or committee is working in the society-at-large on an issue, and wants to use the name of Bellingham Friends Meeting, we can expect to be informed of such work and representation in advance at a Meeting For Worship For Business. We also can expect to have an opportunity to hear a report about their work. If BFMM supports an organization that is not part of the Religious Society of Friends of Truth with a financial donation or by giving an endorsement in our name, we can expect such support to be approved at a MFWFB, and minuted.

If a Friend has a leading to stand in the way of a decision, they may do so if it is discerned they are acting in the spirit of furthering the will of God or Love. We strive to recognize that the Spirit, or Light, or Love works in a manner of continuing revelation. We encourage each other to be open to revelation and change. We strive to work in unity with each other and the Spirit.