

Bellingham Friends Meeting¹

Guidelines for Communication within Committees and Between Committees and our Monthly Meeting

Bellingham Friends Meeting recognizes that our monthly Meeting for Business² is central to the spiritual connectedness and functioning of our worshipping community. “The Quaker method for reaching decisions involves searching for the right corporate decisions and [discerning] the 'sense of the Meeting' or unity.” (*North Pacific Yearly Meeting - Faith and Practice*)³ “The commitment to search for unity depends upon mutual trust, implies a willingness to labor and to submit to the leadings of the Spirit, and grows as members become better acquainted with one another... Friends seek divine guidance, are patient with each other, and are concerned for the good of the meeting as a whole. Friends allow adequate time for deliberate and prayerful consideration of the matter at hand. Friends attend meetings for business open to the leadings of the Spirit.”

Friends wait upon the Spirit to move forward; without unity, Friends may choose to hold over an issue, refer it to a committee for a recommendation, or have a second hour or threshing session, worship sharing, or clearness process as they wait for clarity to emerge.⁴

Memberships, nominations, annual budgets, and other weighty decisions are generally held over for a month of seasoning before being approved. While the prayerful and Spirit-led participation of attenders is welcome, Meeting members are responsible for the decisions of the Meeting.

Crucial to the proper functioning of our Meeting is the connection between our monthly Meeting for Business and our committees, which help carry out our collective leadings. Committees also use the Friendly discernment process, above, to carry out the work of the Spirit, as charged by the Meeting. Standing committees have written job descriptions which are approved by the Meeting, and generally make regular reports to Meeting for Worship for Business. Sometimes a leading emerges from with a committee and the Meeting is asked to consider approving their proposal. Other times committees are unable to reach unity and bring questions and requests for guidance to the Monthly Meeting. In

either case, any participant in Meeting for Worship for Business is welcome to raise a question, keeping in mind the Quaker practice of only speaking once to an issue, minding the Light, and assuring that the question is inspired by a concern for the best interest of the Meeting as a whole. Unless specifically charged by the Meeting to take right action on its behalf, neither committees nor individual Friends speak or act for the whole Meeting without bringing their concern to the business meeting for discernment. Financial donations and endorsements of organizations and individuals are approved and minuted at Meeting for Worship for Business.

Committees are created by the Meeting to do the work of the Meeting, but they are not empowered to substitute their own decisions for those of the Meeting as a whole, except in limited ways as noted above. Whether a committee is standing or ad hoc, committees make recommendations and provide due diligence in seasoning concerns and proposals. Their faithful discernment may bring the Meeting a clear, thought-out proposal, saving time and avoiding bogging down the Meeting for Worship for Business. However, the Monthly Meeting is the fundamental unit of the Religious Society of Friends, and all significant decisions are made in accordance with Friends' time-honored practice of finding the sense of the Meeting. Friends appointed to committees are given latitude to discern the inner workings of their committee, but significant changes in committee job descriptions, the formation of standing subcommittees, or other substantial changes to or actions by committees should come to the Monthly Meeting for approval. If any member of a committee feels that an action or decision is "substantial," it should be in the committee's report to the monthly business meeting.

To welcome Friends old and new to join in our discernment practices, and to enhance the smooth functioning of our committees and our Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business, we offer the following guidelines for communication within committees and between committees and the Monthly Meeting:

1. From *NPYM -Faith and Practice (1993)*: "It is important that every meeting for discernment by a meeting, committee, or other decision-making body begin with a period of worship rather than with 'a few moments of silence,' so that the spirit of worship will pervade the transaction of business."

Committees are reminded to “mind the Light” as they go about the work of the Meeting. Committees are encouraged to minute their meetings and give regular reports to the Meeting.

2. Be kind, joyful, patient and loving with one another in all decision-making. Humor, trust and compassion are essential.
3. If a Friend has a concern, they are encouraged to bring it to the relevant committee by approaching the committee clerk and asking to be placed on the agenda of the next committee meeting. Or they may bring the concern directly to Meeting for Worship for Business if the issue is not appropriate to any single standing or ad hoc committee or if the concern cannot be addressed in a timely manner by the relevant committee.
4. Members bringing a concern directly to Meeting for Business are encouraged to contact the clerk of Meeting in advance and give a brief description of their concern.
5. Committee meetings are open to all Meeting attenders wishing to contribute to the work of the committee. If there is business of a confidential nature to be discussed by the committee, guests may need to leave while those matters are discussed.
6. Friends wishing to attend any committee meeting are encouraged to contact the clerk of the committee and let the clerk know if they have anything to be added to the agenda, and also to contact the host. Clerks are encouraged to arrange the agenda considerately to accommodate the guest's agenda item (i.e., during the portion of the meeting mutually convenient to committee and guest.)
7. Friends may ask a committee to consider their concern, even if they are not able to attend the committee meeting themselves. They may submit the concern in writing.
 - a. The Friend who brought the concern to the committee can expect to be informed of the committee's discernment and any recommendations.

- b. If the committee decides to lay down the concern, the Friend can expect to be informed, so if they wish can take their concern to a different committee or Meeting for Business.
8. If committees have a matter of an urgent nature to bring to Meeting for Business, they are encouraged to try to address it in a timely fashion so that they can come to the regularly scheduled Meeting for Business. If that is not possible, urgent issues that come up unexpectedly can require that a Called Meeting for Business be held as soon as possible. Such called meetings are often clerked by either the clerk of Meeting or the clerk of Ministry and Counsel.

¹ We are part of a denomination historically known as the Religious Society of Friends of Truth. The formal name of our Meeting is Bellingham Friends Meeting. Bellingham Friends Meeting is part of North Pacific Yearly Meeting and Pacific Northwest Quarterly Meeting.

² The monthly decision-making meetings of Bellingham Friends Meeting are usually referred to as “Meeting for Worship for Business” or “Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.” However, in the interests of clarity and brevity, they are sometimes referred to in this document as “Meeting for Business” or as “business meeting.” These terms are interchangeable.

³ The original wording from NPYM Faith and Practice (1993) was, “The Quaker method for reaching decisions involves searching for the right corporate decisions and *arriving at* the 'sense of the Meeting' or unity.” “Discernment” may better describe how Quakers come to unity. *

⁴ For additional guidance on Friends' practices for handling controversial or intransigent issues, please refer to the *NPYM Faith and Practice* section of Chapter 5 -The Monthly Meeting: “Friends Method of Reaching Decisions,” with special attention to sections on “*Sense of the Meeting*,” “*Unity*,” “*Threshing Sessions*,” and “*Serious Differences of Opinion*.”

Approved by Bellingham Friends Meeting November 2016 after seasoning from March 2015-November2016.

* Note: These guidelines were approved in 2016 and references to Faith and Practice here refer to the revised second edition (1993). The third edition was published in 2018.