



# How Quakers Conduct Business

## Discernment

Friends' decision-making is based on communal discernment of where God is leading us. Discernment involves careful listening and recognizing God-inspired leadings. Discernment offers tools to distinguish between an interior leading from God and a worldly impulse such as a desire to feel important or look clever.

In meeting for worship, Friends can come into a powerful experience of unity. The same unifying spirit of worship is the basis for Friends' decision-making. Quakers do not decide by voting. Instead, we look for a unity deeper than majority rule.

## Business Meeting

Local congregations, called "meetings," usually schedule time once a month to hear reports and make decisions (which is why they're called "monthly meetings"). Each monthly meeting appoints a clerk, a treasurer, and whatever other officers it finds useful, including a recording clerk (secretary). It also appoints committees to perform tasks that the meeting wants done. Typical committees include Ministry & Nurture which serves pastoral functions; Finance; Peace & Social Concerns; Building & Grounds; etc. The officers are servants of the meeting. The clerk's task is to help those present at a business meeting discern the will of God. The recording clerk takes minutes.

Everyone who attends worship is encouraged to come to business meeting, which functions as a committee of the whole. Often referred to as Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, the proceedings are held in a worshipful attitude. Items to be decided may deal with membership, finance, community building, the quality of worship, appointments, action to be taken to further the cause of peace in the world, or other matters. Many issues are considered by a committee before being presented to the whole body, and part of the committee's responsibility is to recommend how the meeting might proceed. Controversial items are presented and discussed among those in the meeting well in advance of the business session so Friends can come to the business meeting prepared with sufficient information and prayerful consideration to engage in group discernment.

The business meeting begins with silent worship. When the clerk judges the meeting is ready, he or she begins the business meeting. The clerk will usually go over the agenda and then present the first item for consideration. People who have something to contribute speak one at a time and allow silent reflection between comments. The clerk can pull together and summarize feelings which are being expressed in the meeting. The meeting seeks to come to an understanding of where God is leading the group. When those present agree on the sense of the meeting, it is written down in the form of a minute and those present are asked to approve it. The next item is then presented.

Ideally, Friends come to business meeting in a prayerful, open state of mind ready to listen attentively to others and to the Spirit. We may express contradictory views, but do not argue with one another. We state what we want to say frankly and briefly without belittling each other.

Because Friends place such a high value on unity, we are willing to wait until we can agree on a decision before moving ahead. This may seem impractical, not to mention exasperating in how long it seems to take to come to a decision. Implementation, however, may go quickly.

If we imagine a line with "idea" on one end and "implementation" on the other, the distance between the two remains the same no matter when the group chooses to make a decision. If the group

