

Considerations for Meeting for Business

Meeting for Business is one more opportunity to worship together and follow the leadings of the Spirit. We believe the Spirit can speak through any of us; therefore, we hold that we are all equally important as we strive to discern the sense of the meeting on those issues that come before us.

We realize that rigid rules and procedures may impede the free flow of the Spirit. With this in mind, we each take responsibility to speak in such a way that the meeting moves forward. We take responsibility for maintaining a spirit of worshipful listening, since leaving space between spoken contributions allows us to be mindful of what others are saying. We assume that the contributions of others are meant positively as we listen for the truth within their words. We monitor our own contributions so that we do not cut off or otherwise discourage others when they also wish to speak.

Our meetings differ from Worldly meetings because we try to decide issues through discovery of the sense of the meeting, and not through fiat or majority rule. We do not vote, nor do we settle for consensus. As Barry Morley puts it,

Consensus is achieved through a process of reasoning in which reasonable people search for a satisfactory decision. But in seeking the sense of the meeting we open ourselves to being guided to perfect resolution in Light, to a place where we sit in unity in the collective inward Presence. Through consensus we decide it; through sense of the meeting we turn it over, allowing it to be decided. "Reaching consensus is a secular process," says a Friend. "In sense of the meeting God gets a vote."

It is possible that disagreements may arise among us. If we are to reach real unity, instead of mere acquiescence, then we must address those disagreements and not avoid them. We must be willing to express our difficulties and ask for help in working through them. At times, when the Clerk thinks it would be helpful to this process, he or she might ask members to be recognized or request an extended period of silence. At other times, we may have to lay an issue aside. In all cases we will seek a resolution of conflict and try to heal the hurt that may arise. We will deal with each other in ways that are truthful without laying blame or otherwise hurting others.

The process we work through should be fulfilling and empowering as we allow ourselves to be open to the guidance of the Spirit during this Meeting and throughout our lives. It cannot be otherwise if we are cognizant of our responsibility to be in all ways reflective of our name as a Religious Society of Friends.

-approved by Berea Friends Meeting, Ninth Month 2001.