

Southern East Anglia Area Quaker Meeting

In Right Ordering

An Introduction to Meeting for Worship for Business

Elders of Colchester Meeting
February 2015

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Local and Area Meetings for Worship for Business are held monthly, using the Quaker business method and held in the spirit of Quaker worship. Decisions are reached through attempting to reflect the leadings of the spirit.

The business meeting begins with silence. Here John Kay describes his first experience of a Quaker business meeting:

I first took part in a small business meeting at Friends House with only eight of us present, to discuss the arrangements for a Summer School. What greatly impressed me was the quiet, measured and worshipful silence which followed each contribution. No speaker was interrupted and there was a real sense of total participation in the business in hand. In great contrast to my previous experience of staff meetings in schools it was obvious that what I now know as Ministry was properly listened to and furthermore, properly considered.

In our business meetings, after the Clerk has explained and outlined an item from the agenda, or a report has been presented and questions taken, it is customary to consider this for a minute or two before any contributions are made. This process is not a debate or discussion – it is important to listen to and value each contribution equally and to be open to new ideas or insights from wherever they may come.

The business meeting works more easily when we remain open-minded, considerate and sensitive to each other. People who wish to speak stand (or if unable to stand through age or infirmity indicate by a raising of the hand) and wait to be acknowledged by the Clerk. If a Friend, wishing to make a contribution, is seated near the front of the meeting, it will help if a check is made to ensure that no one else is already standing. Friends are expected to make just one contribution to any item and then only if it adds to the business. There is no need to restate something that has already been said. Again it is Quaker practice for all to allow a time of silence after each contribution.

The Clerk will take the necessary time to hear every contribution from the meeting and relevant notes will be made. Each individual's contribution is carefully considered as the meeting works towards shared discernment and unity. This may take some time in order to achieve the goal of unity and collective decision-making. There comes a time when the Clerk discerns the sense of the gathered meeting and starts to write the minute. This is a time when the spiritual support of the whole meeting is very necessary. Friends are gently reminded that this is an opportunity to uphold the Clerk by remaining silent. Occasionally unity is not reached and the Clerk may acknowledge and state dissenting views, if necessary.

After the draft minute has been read to the meeting, there is a time when matters of detail or wording may be amended for

clarification; this usually proves helpful to the Clerk and results in a well-considered minute "in right ordering."