

GUIDELINES
for
UNDERSTANDING PROCEDURES
of
FRIENDS MEETINGS FOR BUSINESS
(CHURCH AFFAIRS)

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In our Meetings for Worship we seek through the stillness to know God's will for ourselves and for the gathered group. Our meetings for church affairs, in which we conduct our business, are also Meetings for Worship carrying the same expectation that if we are together, truly listening to God and each other, God's guidance can be discerned. Within the experience of worship and unhurried deliberation on matters of common concern we may have our thoughts confirmed, enriched or changed. It is this belief that God's will can be recognised through the discipline of prayerful waiting which distinguishes our decision making process from the secular idea of consensus.

A time of waiting upon God at the beginning of a Meeting for Business helps to bring those gathered under a sense of the divine presence and prepares them better for transacting the business of the meeting. Turn inwardly to God, pray that the meeting may be guided in the matters before it and that the clerk may be enabled faithfully to discern and record the mind of the meeting. The practice of deliberating our business in the presence of God and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit is our unique understanding of how corporate decisions should be made. This well tested experience is a priceless heritage.

Reaching the desired unity depends on the willingness of all present to seek the truth in each others utterances and to endeavour to recognise the sense of the meeting. We do not vote in our meetings because we believe that this would emphasise the divisions between differing views

and inhibit the process of seeking to know the will of God. There are occasions when minority views continue to exist.

When the meeting unites with the minute offered by the Clerk it expresses, not a sudden agreement of everyone present with the prevailing view, but rather a tried and tested way of seeking God's will knowing that all our views have been heard and considered.

ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Preparative Meetings

All who attend a Meeting for Worship are encouraged to be present at the Meetings for Business of that Preparative Meeting.

Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings

All members have the privilege as well as the responsibility of being present at Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly Meetings.

It is at these four meetings that the handling of the affairs of our Society takes place.

*Attendees at Meetings for Worship need to ask the relevant Clerk for permission to be present at Monthly, Quarterly and Yearly business meetings.

Wisdom and courtesy suggest that this should be done prior to the date of the meeting and, in the case of a Yearly Meeting, at least two weeks in advance. When matters of membership are being discussed attendees should not expect to be present.

Representatives to a business meeting are appointed from the members of the appointing meeting. This is to ensure the involvement of each meeting.

* People who worship regularly at a Meeting for Worship are known as Attenders.

HOLDING OF MEETINGS

The Clerk has a different role to that of a chairperson in wider society. The Clerk is the servant of the meeting but also draws up the agenda and guides the meeting through the business.

This is a fine balance but rarely poses difficulty. However if the clerk is closely or personally involved in the topic to be discussed, it is advisable for an assistant clerk or other Friend to act as clerk.

Assistant clerks may share in the running of the business by, for example, reading reports, preparing of and reading minutes.

Clerks do not participate in discussion but if a Clerk feels strongly and wishes to speak they should step aside from the table, explain it is a personal view, and then not be involved in writing the ensuing minute.

Anyone wishing to speak should stand and wait to be called by the Clerk; it is not only the Clerk being addressed but all in the meeting room. It is customary not to stand when the Clerk is speaking. It is the Clerk's responsibility to discern the sense of the meeting and prepare a minute to record this. It is long established practice that minutes are made and agreed during the meeting. All present at the meeting should uphold and support those at the table. When a minute has been read and accepted it is not the Clerk's but owned by all present. The end of the meeting is indicated by the Clerks shaking hands.

Friends are encouraged to inform clerks of items they wish to raise in Meetings for Business, where possible, prior to the day of the meeting.

The recording of thanks to those who have given reports should be considered cautiously as it can become merely repetitious and trite. Appreciation expressed at the time or in a following letter, but not by applause, may be more acceptable. This of course does not preclude recording welcome to any visiting Friend at the beginning of the meeting.

Nominations generally are forwarded to meetings by a nominations committee but if requested can come from the body of the meeting at the time. Self-nomination is to be avoided.

Clerks, and others who give service to our Society, may feel nervous but generally they are conscious of Friendly support and gain satisfaction and even enjoyment from their role!

These meetings give the opportunity to meet with others, deepen and strengthen our spiritual life and enjoy social contact over a cup of tea.

This leaflet gives some information about our Meetings for Business, but fuller and more detailed information can be found in the book Organisation and Christian Discipline, from which some of this information was taken, the Book of Committees, and the book of Names and Addresses, all of which are produced by Ireland Yearly Meeting.

APPENDIX

FROM I.Y.M BOOK OF COMMITTEES

ROLE OF ATTENDERS

- a. Yearly Meetings Committee is to consist solely of members. Other committees may have some attenders.
- b. An attender is someone who has been attending Meeting for Worship regularly for the past one or two years.
- c. When certain matters are being considered, such as making policy decisions for the Religious Society of Friends in Ireland, or allocating the subscriptions of Friends for particular purposes within the Society, it is not appropriate that those who have not committed themselves to Membership should make these decisions on behalf of the Society.
- d. Attenders and those not in membership need permission of the clerk to attend Yearly, Quarterly and Monthly Meetings. They should leave when matters of membership and other sensitive subjects are to be discussed. The clerk should explain this to the attender and those not in membership and ask them to leave the meeting.
- e. When considering nominating non-members to committees, nomination committees should nominate people who have attended regularly in the last one or two years.

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