

Chapter 3

General counsel on church affairs

INTRODUCTION

- 3.01 This chapter refers especially to our main meetings for church affairs, and in particular to area and local meetings. Attendance at these meetings is the right, and indeed the responsibility, of all Friends. The principles governing our Quaker business method, however, are equally relevant to less regular meetings for church affairs held by recognised meetings and to the committees appointed by any of our meetings. Committees should appoint clerks, if this has not been done by the parent meeting, and minutes should be made during the course of each committee meeting. The general advice in this chapter will be helpful in enabling these meetings too to be rightly held.

See also 2.85-2.92

THE SENSE OF THE MEETING

- 3.02 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 based on silence, and they carry the same expectation that God's guidance can be discerned if we are truly listening together and to each other, and are not blinkered by preconceived opinions. It is this belief that God's will can be recognised through the discipline of silent waiting which distinguishes our decision-making process from the secular idea of consensus. We have a common purpose in seeking God's will through waiting and listening, believing that every activity of life should be subject to divine guidance.

The sense of the meeting

This does not mean that laughter and a sense of humour should be absent from our meetings for church affairs. It does mean that at all times there should be an inward recollection: out of this will spring a right dignity, flexible and free from pomp and formality. We meet together for common worship, for the pastoral care of our membership, for needful administration, for unhurried deliberation on matters of common concern, for testing personal concerns that are brought before us, and to get to know one another better in things that are eternal as in things that are temporal.

- 3.03 Our meeting communities vary in size and in the circumstances and experience of their members. Sometimes we may need to vary the ways in which we manage our meetings for church affairs in order to make better use of the talents, time and energy of our members. Co-clerkship, for instance, has been beneficial in a number of meetings; sometimes the monthly pattern of business meetings has been varied to good effect. We should be open to learning from the experiments undertaken by other meetings. Being set in an unsatisfactory routine 'because we've always done it this way' may be as detrimental to seeking God's guidance as throwing our traditions to the wind. We are enjoined to live adventurously, but experiment must be grounded in the experience of generations of Friends, which offers us a method, a purpose and principles for the right conduct of our business meetings.

If we sometimes think things are wrong with our meetings for church affairs, it would help us to look at the situation in perspective if we could realise how many troubles arise not from the system, but from our human imperfections and the variety of our temperaments and viewpoints. These meetings are in fact not merely occasions for transacting with proper efficiency the affairs of the church but also opportunities when we can learn to bear and forbear, to practise to one another that love which 'suffereth long and is kind'. Christianity is not only a faith but a community and in our meetings for church affairs we learn what membership of that community involves.

- 3.04 Our method of conducting our meetings for church affairs is an experience which has been tested over three hundred years. In days of hot contest and bitter controversy the early Friends, knit together by the glorious experience of the Holy Spirit's guidance in all their

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affairs, came into the simple understanding of how their corporate decisions should be made.

We have learned to eschew lobbying and not to set great store by rhetoric or clever argument. The mere gaining of debating points is found to be unhelpful and alien to the spirit of worship which should govern the rightly ordered meeting. Instead of rising hastily to reply to another, it is better to give time for what has been said to make its own appeal. We must always be ready to give serious, unhurried and truly sympathetic consideration to proposals brought forward from whatever part of the meeting. We should neither be hindered from making experiments by fear or undue caution, nor prompted by novel suggestions to ill-considered courses.

- 3.05 The right conduct of our meetings for church affairs depends upon all coming to them in an active, seeking spirit, not with minds already made up on a particular course of action, determined to push this through at all costs. But open minds are not empty minds, nor uncritically receptive: the service of the meeting calls for knowledge of facts, often painstakingly acquired, and the ability to estimate their relevance and importance. This demands that we shall be ready to listen to others carefully, without antagonism if they express opinions which are unpleasing to us, but trying always to discern the truth in what they have to offer. It calls, above all, for spiritual sensitivity. If our meetings fail, the failure may well be in those who are ill-prepared to use the method rather than in the inadequacy of the method itself.

It is always to be recognised that, coming together with a variety of temperaments, of background, education and experience, we shall have differing contributions to make to any deliberation. It is no part of Friends' concern for truth that any should be expected to water down a strong conviction or be silent merely for the sake of easy agreement. Nevertheless we are called to honour our testimony that to every one is given a measure of the light, and that it is in the sharing of knowledge, experience and concern that the way towards unity will be found. There is need for understanding loyalty by the meeting as a whole when, after all sides of a subject have been considered, a minute is accepted as representing the discernment of the meeting.

The sense of the meeting

Not all who attend a meeting for church affairs will necessarily speak: those who are silent can help to develop the sense of the meeting if they listen in a spirit of worship.

- 3.06 The unity we seek depends on the willingness of us all to seek the truth in each other's utterances; on our being open to persuasion; and in the last resort on a willingness to recognise and accept the sense of the meeting as recorded in the minute, knowing that our dissenting views have been heard and considered. 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. We must recognise, however, that a minority view may well continue to exist. When we unite with a minute offered by our clerk, we express, not a sudden agreement of everyone present with the prevailing view, but rather a confidence in our tried and tested way of seeking to recognise God's will. We act as a community, whose members love and trust each other. We should be reluctant to prevent the acceptance of a minute which the general body of Friends present feels to be right.

As a worshipping community, particularly in our local and area meetings, we have a continuing responsibility to nurture the soil in which unity may be found.

In a meeting rightly held a new way may be discovered which none present had alone perceived and which transcends the differences of the opinions expressed. This is an experience of creative insight, leading to a sense of the meeting which a clerk is often led in a remarkable way to record. Those who have shared this experience will not doubt its reality and the certainty it brings of the immediate rightness of the way for the meeting to take.

- 3.07 The meeting places upon its clerk a responsibility for spiritual discernment so that he or she may watch the growth of the meeting toward unity and judge the right time to submit the minute, which in its first form may serve to clear the mind of the meeting about the issues which really need its decision. In a gathering held 'in the life' there can come to the clerk a clear and unmistakable certainty about the moment to submit the minute. This may be a high peak of experience in a meeting for church affairs, but for the most part we

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have to wrestle with far more humdrum down-to-earth business. It must always be remembered that the final decision about whether the minute represents the sense of the meeting is the responsibility of the meeting itself, not of the clerk.

Sometimes it will be right to leave the decision to a later meeting, but the clerk should bear in mind that this can be the 'lazy' option. Sensitivity is required in recognising when the meeting is really too tired to proceed further. It may be realised that more background work would be beneficial, or that time is needed for everyone to consider the options more carefully. A decision to come back to the subject on a later occasion will then be a positive and important part of the process.

Friends should realise that a decision which is the only one for a particular meeting at a particular time may not be the one which is ultimately seen to be right. There have been many occasions in our Society when a Friend, though maintaining her or his personal convictions, has seen clearly that they were not in harmony with the sense of the meeting and has with loyal grace expressed deference to it. Out of just such a situation, after time for further reflection, an understanding of the Friend's insight has been reached at a later date and has been ultimately accepted by the Society.

We have a responsibility to uphold our clerks in prayer as they try to discern unity in sharply divided meetings. We must not expect to be delivered from differences of opinion – and indeed our life as a religious community would be dull and unprofitable if we were; but we do need to hold firmly to our conviction that divine guidance is there to be found.

PARTICIPATION IN MEETINGS FOR CHURCH AFFAIRS

- 3.08 Are your meetings for church affairs held in loving dependence upon the spirit of God, and are they vigilant in the discharge of their duties? ... Do you individually take your right share in the attendance and service of these meetings so that the burden may not rest upon a few?

Participation in meetings for church affairs

Queries, 1928

- 3.09 It is not expected that any Friend should attend every meeting or sit upon innumerable committees. Decide what is within your physical and spiritual capacity, and be responsible in your attitude to what you do select. Be as regular, faithful and punctual as possible in your attendance.

All members are entitled to attend their local, area and general meetings, which are the units of Britain Yearly Meeting's regional organisation, and Yearly Meeting itself. You are encouraged to do so as regularly as you are able, because our business method depends on the widest possible participation by our members. Friends may be appointed to attend area and general meetings in order to ensure that enough Friends will be present but this does not excuse or prevent others from being there. It is recommended that those appointed be asked to report back to their own meetings.

When you are appointed to attend a meeting, you attend with local knowledge which may be of assistance: you are not there as a delegate with an inflexible brief to put over on behalf of another body of Friends which is not itself going through the exercise of the meeting.

On taking your seat, try to achieve quietness of mind and spirit. Try to avoid having subcommittees or conversations just as the meeting is about to begin. Turn inwardly to God, praying 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.

For regulations on attendance of non-members at meetings for church affairs see 4.08 for area meetings, 4.32 for local meetings, 5.03 for General Meeting for Scotland, 5.04 for Meeting of Friends in Wales & 6.15 for Britain Yearly Meeting.

See also 11.28 for sojourning membership

- 3.10 Remember the onerous task laid upon the clerk and do all you can to assist. Submit information about matters to come before the

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meeting in good time and preferably in writing. Avoid if you possibly can any last-minute messages to the clerk.

Give your whole attention to the matter before the meeting. If you want to speak, try to sum up what you have to say in as few words as possible. Speak simply and audibly, but do not speak for effect. A pause after each contribution will enable what has been said to find its right place in the mind of the meeting. Do not repeat views which you have already expressed. Do not address another Friend across the room but speak to the meeting as a whole. Be ready to submit to the direction of the clerk. Except in very small meetings, those able to stand to speak should do so.

On some matters before the meeting you may feel very strongly. Listen as patiently as you can to all other points of view. Even Friends you consider ill-informed or wrong-headed may make positive or helpful points: watch for them. Do not put into other Friends' mouths things which they did not say. Be certain of your facts. Avoid stating as facts things which are matters of opinion.

Do not take offence because others disagree with you. Be chary of ascribing, even in your mind, unworthy motives to others. Try not to take things personally. Promote the spirit of friendship in the meeting so that Friends may speak their minds freely, confident that they will not be misinterpreted or misunderstood.

Value the meeting as a social occasion. Introduce strangers to one another. Be approachable; be cheerful. If you are an experienced Friend, invite newcomers to come with you. Help them to understand the business and to get to know the membership.

- 3.11 If, when all that is necessary has been said, the clerk is not ready to submit a minute, uphold those at the table in prayerful silence. If the minute is in general acceptable, do not harass the clerk by raising several minor corrections at once. Do not, under the pretext of altering the minute, raise new matter for discussion or reiterate your original contribution.

CLERKSHIP

- 3.12 The clerk needs to have a spiritual capacity for discernment and sensitivity to the meeting. In conducting the meeting and drafting minutes on its behalf, the clerk's abilities are strengthened by an awareness of being supported by the members of the meeting. Friends who have not known the unforeseen joy which comes from this experience may gain encouragement from this knowledge, should they be invited to serve. If the clerk's service is under concern in the certainty of God's presence and help in the meeting, then strength beyond her or his normal powers will be given.

The service of the assistant clerk can be of great benefit both to the clerk and to the meeting. The clerk bears the final responsibility for preparing the business, conducting the meeting and drafting the minutes. It is recommended, however, that the assistant clerk be enabled to share in all the clerk's duties as much as possible. Consultation will often help the clerk to come to a right judgment. The assistant clerk will gain experience and maybe the confidence to accept nomination as clerk in due course. Planning for a period of apprenticeship through assistant clerkship can provide for a smooth transition. Some meetings have found that co-clerkship can be highly successful. This may involve two or more Friends, with or without an assistant clerk, and enables Friends' differing abilities and skills to complement each other, particularly when time and energy are at a premium. Such a departure from tradition usually takes place after careful consideration and planning, and can result in a lively and varied interpretation of the clerk's responsibilities.

The following advice to clerks should be seen as being equally relevant to co-clerks and assistant clerks, and to conveners whose responsibilities are similar to those of clerks. (For further information about conveners see 3.21.)

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Advice to clerks

- 3.13 Remember that while you, as clerk, are the servant of the meeting, you do, by your very attitude and your arrangement of the agenda, set the pattern of worshipful listening which should characterise our meetings for church affairs. The meeting is likely to repose great trust in you, and you bear an important responsibility in enabling the meeting to listen and wait for God's guidance in its deliberations. Your experience in the ways of Friends and your understanding of the Quaker business method are very important in helping the meeting to discern God's will and to recognise the way forward. Help Friends to remember that the period of silent worship at the beginning of the meeting prepares for and opens the way to the consideration of the business; the worship does not finish as the business begins, and the clerks do not shake hands until the close of the business. The meeting has given you a measure of authority which includes an expectation and an acceptance of leadership and firm guidance. At the same time it will usually respond willingly if you find yourself at a loss and ask for help. Above all, it is your responsibility to come with heart and mind prepared.

Do not leave all your preparations to the last minute. Before the meeting discuss the business with your assistant clerk if possible. Check beforehand all facts which may be in question, so as to avoid plunging the whole meeting into fruitless and time-wasting speculation. It will save time in the meeting to bring at least the factual part of your minutes in draft form.

When introducing business into the meeting try briefly to provide sufficient background information to set the meeting purposefully on its course. In the subsequent deliberations you may need to advise on procedure or make a suggestion if none is forthcoming on a routine matter. A very small meeting may wish you to participate on occasion. Remember, however, that your main task is to discern the meeting's united mind and that it may be much harder to do this if you try at the same time to be a participant in the discussion. Be chary, therefore, of making known your own views. You may well find that this very discipline of detachment leads to a new and deeper relationship with the other members of the meeting. If you are deeply involved in a decision to be reached, the meeting should be invited to ask another Friend to act as clerk for the occasion.

Clerkship

- 3.14 Do not be afraid to ask the meeting to wait while you prepare your minute. You will then usually be able to complete it and have it accepted in that meeting. In some cases you may need to have time for reflection and to bring in a minute after an interval in the meeting.

Make sure that the minute covers all the points on which a decision is required and remember that reference may need to be made to it in the future. Where minutes record the presentation of reports which will be filed with them, it should not usually be necessary to quote the contents at length in the minutes themselves.

You may be required to draft a minute of record concerning a past event, a minute of exercise, which indicates the area and range of the discussion and records the experience or progress of the meeting, or a minute of decision.

Remember that any minute you present is only a draft minute until the meeting has accepted it as its own. If you have drafted alternative decisions, be ready to minute a decision of the meeting which is different from all the possibilities you had in mind. Accept with good grace improvements to your draft made by the meeting. The drafting of a minute is a spiritual exercise. Every clerk needs the full support and attention of the meeting, so that together they may achieve high standards of clarity and accuracy.

- 3.15 Acceptance of a minute must be a deliberate act. Even if it is not thought necessary to read out the whole of an agreed draft minute again at the moment of acceptance, the meeting must be sufficiently aware of its terms from the preceding exercise to be conscious of uniting to accept it. It is at the moment of accepting each minute that the united meeting allows you to record it as a minute of the meeting. It is good practice for the rough minutes to be signed at the meeting's conclusion. This also gives the clerk authority to sign any fair copy once it is certain it has been correctly transcribed. Very minor amendments such as punctuation and points of style may be made, but any alteration of the sense should be avoided most carefully. It is undesirable that minutes should be prepared afterwards for presentation to a later meeting when the membership may not be the same as that which originally deliberated.

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The sending of copies of the relevant minutes to those who are required to take follow-up action after the meeting is the responsibility of the clerk.

You are responsible for the safekeeping of the minutes once the meeting has accepted them. They belong to the meeting, and only the meeting has authority to amend, countermand or supersede them by a subsequent minute. If minor corrections or annotations of a factual nature are necessary, these must be indicated as such in the margins or as footnotes in order to safeguard the integrity of the minutes.

For the safekeeping of records see 4.39-4.41

- 3.16 Remember that the Friend with particular gifts of judgment is not necessarily the one whose opinion is most needed on all matters; seek to assess the value of individual contributions. Do not forget that the silence of some is often of greater significance than the speech of others.

Be aware, however, that silence does not necessarily mean consent. When conflicting views have been expressed, leave time and opportunity for those who have previously disagreed to indicate whether they are ready to unite with the minute.

When strong division of opinion seems to be threatening the worshipful basis which should prevail in meetings for church affairs, a period of silent and prayerful waiting on the will of God may well have a calming and unifying effect.

- 3.17 When a Friend accepts an invitation to speak at your meeting, remember your responsibilities towards her or him. Try to ensure that the agenda is arranged to allow adequate scope for the introduction and consideration of the subject at a time when the meeting is not tired or overburdened with other matters. Try also to give the speaker quiet before the meeting, recognising that this service may be costing in nervous energy. If the speaker comes from a distance, be sure to advise her or him about travelling arrangements, including the time and place of arrival, and see that travelling and other expenses are quickly and graciously reimbursed.

Clerkship

- 3.18 Be careful to maintain a right balance in exercising the authority which the office lays upon you. Use discretion in deciding which matters should be brought before Friends and which may be dealt with by yourself. Beware, however, of the dangers of exceeding your authority in making decisions yourself on matters which should be referred to the meeting. In cases of doubt you may find it helpful to confer with Friends of experience. In the meeting deal courteously but firmly with those who speak at too great length or too frequently stray from the point under discussion. Remember that the right exercise of the clerk's authority is of great service to the meeting in promoting the smooth and expeditious handling of its business.
- 3.19 In preparing the business for the area or local meeting, you should try to be in regular contact with the various committees of the meeting. It is important that committees report regularly to their parent meeting. It may be possible to save the meeting's time by adequate preliminary discussion. With regard to nominations, for example, you may be able to avoid having to make appointments 'subject to consent'. It is also important that, in minuting appointments, the term of service and the date of termination be clearly stated.

the meeting clerks are advised to be in close touch with elders and overseers, for example, when applications for membership are being considered. More generally, you should be aware of the responsibilities laid upon elders and overseers for the spiritual life of the meeting, for encouraging full participation in meetings for church affairs, and for the right holding of meetings for worship including meetings for church affairs.

Keep a sense of proportion and a sense of humour. Be sensitive to the tempo of the meeting. Do not be over-brisk nor allow matters to drag tediously. Be alert to those who may need encouragement to speak.

- 3.20 Apart from the preparation and conduct of the business, as clerk you are also responsible for the general administration of the meeting. You need to follow up previously agreed minutes and ensure that tasks undertaken are carried out, that enquiries are dealt with, and that committees are functioning satisfactorily. You may be

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involved in some committees ex-officio, and by sensitive awareness of the different activities in the meeting, you can help the meeting to function smoothly and steadily. Giving notices and welcoming visitors are important tasks. You need skill in deciding what to include in the notices, and sensitivity to the concerns and interests of members of the meeting.

Think affectionately between meetings of the needs of the community which has appointed you and how they can best be met; ask guidance of God continually in the performance of your task.

Conveners

- 3.21 The term convener is sometimes used as an alternative to clerk as, for example, in committees of area or meetings, and of elders and overseers, where either term may be used according to local custom and practice. It is often preferred in the case of a group or subcommittee which has been appointed for a task of limited duration and is directly responsible to a more permanent committee or meeting for church affairs. In such a case the convener is expected to perform the functions of a clerk and should conduct meetings of the group in accordance with our Quaker principles and practice.

Alternatively conveners may be appointed in the first instance with the specified responsibility for bringing together the appointed members of a group. It should always be made clear at the outset if this is the intention, since the first job of the convener at the initial meeting will then be to enable the group to appoint a clerk from among its members. When no convener or clerk has been designated, convening the first meeting of a group is by Quaker tradition the responsibility of the Friend named first in the minute setting up the group. It should not be assumed that the convener will necessarily be appointed as clerk.

NOMINATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

- 3.22 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (I Cor 12:4-7)

It is a responsibility of a Christian community to enable its members to discover what their gifts are and to develop and exercise them to the glory of God.

- 3.23 Much of the work of meetings for church affairs and committees will be undertaken by Friends especially appointed by the meeting or committee responsible for the work, most often on the recommendation of a nominations committee. The process of appointment starts when the meeting identifies the need for a task to be performed. It is good practice for a meeting to have a clear view of the tasks that need to be accomplished on its behalf and to fix the length of service required so that both the meeting and the Friend appointed understand the commitment.

Many of our gifts are latent. A particular appointment may enable one Friend to exercise unsuspected abilities. Other Friends may find themselves overburdened by being appointed to service beyond their capacity and experience. It requires great discernment to know the right moment to ask a particular Friend to undertake or lay down a particular task.

Most appointments should be for either one or three years. It is generally undesirable for someone to hold an appointment for more than six years continuously although there may be exceptions. Meetings should give thought to the training of replacements for existing officers and it will help in this process if those appointed try to give the meeting some notice of wishing to be released from service.

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Meetings will differ widely in the appointments they need to make. In some meetings, there may be a shortage of people willing to undertake the work that is needed. In others there may be many who are anxious to serve and some may feel excluded from the busy life of the meeting if not offered appointment. It is important that the whole process be open and clearly understood by all who attend.

- 3.24 The following suggestions for good practice are intended to apply to all our meetings and committees and to the appointment of Friends and, where appropriate, attenders.
- a. In general a nominations procedure should be used when the appointment is to an office in the meeting, or for any other service of importance. Receiving nominations from the body of the meeting is not generally a good method of making appointments.
 - b. The great responsibility resting on nominations committees and their clerks cannot be too strongly stressed. Nominations committees should be large enough to be representative; impulsive Friends may need to be questioned, whilst the cautious and conservative may need to be encouraged to consider new ideas. The committee needs a balance of experience and age-groups. Members will need to have knowledge of the meeting and be prepared to take pains to understand the qualifications needed for the required appointments. They will need to be clear about the requirements of the office and where appropriate should consult the requesting body. They will also need to be discerning in judgment and tactful in manner. It is important that the members meet in a spirit of worship. Some meetings have found it helpful to survey the gifts of their members in a systematic way.
 - c. Nominations committees are appointed on behalf of the meeting, and suggestions for their consideration put forward by other members of the meeting may well be helpful to them. Such suggestions are best made directly to members of the nominating group. A nominations committee should act when asked to by its meeting or committee and only in exceptional circumstances on its own initiative.
 - d. Nominations committees are appointed in many ways. Sometimes names are suggested from the body of the

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meeting, on other occasions a special committee is asked to bring forward names of Friends to serve on the nominations committee. In some circumstances participating bodies send forward representatives. It is important to ensure openness and to prevent any suggestion of an inner group; thus membership should be for a limited duration. Many meetings retire one third of their nominations committee every year on a rotating basis.

- e. A nominations committee should think carefully before bringing forward the name of one of its own members for appointment. Any such nominee should withdraw from the meeting when her or his name is being presented.
- f. A nominations committee should meet in a worshipful manner. Committee members will occasionally need to consult each other by telephone, but this should not be the normal means of conducting the committee's business.
- g. The nominations committee is not the appointing body and must bring the suggested names to the body for which it acts. Members of this body have the responsibility for approving the names or not and must be given the opportunity to express any doubts they might have. Sometimes it may seem impossible to find someone to serve. Nominations committees should not hesitate to bring their problem back to the meeting to ask for both guidance and practical help.
- h. The duration and scope of an appointment should be explained to all who are asked to accept nomination; the approach should not be made casually or acceptance taken for granted. It will be helpful to ask those nominated if they would consent to serve if the meeting required it. When a nominations committee brings forward a name it should not then be necessary to appoint 'subject to consent'. However it is important that it is made absolutely clear that the appointment would be made by the meeting in its discernment and not by the nominations committee. It will be helpful to indicate when the appointment is likely to be made.
- i. Those nominated to serve as clerk of a meeting, elder, overseer, treasurer, registering officer or as a member of any nominations committee should be in membership. In case of difficulty the Recording Clerk may be consulted. (For further

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guidance on the appointment of elders and overseers see 12.07-12.09.)

- j. Where two Friends would be expected to work together (e.g. as a clerk and assistant clerk) care should be taken to talk the proposal over informally with them before making any firm approach.
 - k. When it is decided not to renominate any Friend holding an appointment, care should be taken to convey this information sensitively in person or by letter well before nominations are submitted.
 - l. Nominations committees should be required to report from time to time on their thinking and their way of working.
- 3.25 Despite being made prayerfully appointments do not always turn out as planned. It is at the discretion of a meeting to end an appointment at any time if it is necessary to do so. Loving and tender care will be essential. An appointed Friend who finds the service inappropriate should be released.

Responsibility for an appointment does not end when it is made. Having been fully involved in the making of the appointments, the meeting must support and uphold those carrying out the tasks. Some may be disappointed that they themselves were not asked to carry out a particular function; humility and prayerful support for those chosen will be better than a continuing resentment.

Our ability to discern the gifts of others is not perfect and we will recognise an element of God's grace in our deliberations. Be bold; welcome the chance to give opportunities to younger Friends and to those more recently arrived, and encourage those who underestimate their own potential for service.

THE USE OF SMALL GROUPS IN IDENTIFYING NEEDS AND REACHING DECISIONS

- 3.26 The focus of this chapter has been the working of our Quaker business method through the tried and tested structures of our meetings for church affairs. It is however important to be aware of the contribution that groups other than our meetings for church

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affairs and their committees can make to our decision-making process. These might include discussion meetings, threshing meetings or meetings for clearness. From time to time a meeting may benefit from looking at itself and identifying specific areas needing attention: pastoral care, outreach, or major changes such as rebuilding or developing premises. The discussion of such matters in small groups, properly constituted, can help to involve the whole meeting and prepare it for decisions which must eventually be taken in the regular meeting for church affairs. Valuable suggestions and solutions may come from individuals who would not feel able to voice them in the more formal meeting. The terms of reference and limits of the group's decision-making responsibility must be made clear at the outset.

For further guidance on the use of small groups see 12.20-12.21; for general guidelines about meetings for clearness see 12.22-12.25; for threshing meetings see 12.26.

For meetings for clearness see also relevant sections:

4.23 on the amicable settlement of disputes;

11.11 in relation to applications for membership;

13.01 on testing personal leadings;

13.08 & 13.11 in the process of discernment of concern;

16.19-16.21 in relation to intentions of marriage.

AUTHORITY FOR PUBLIC STATEMENTS

- 3.27 Individuals and groups must be careful not to claim to speak for Friends without explicit authority. Any activity or statement made in public which claims to be undertaken in the name of Friends and relating to the corporate life and witness of the Religious Society of Friends must be authorised by the appropriate meeting for church affairs. Any public statement which claims to be given on behalf of Friends in Britain Yearly Meeting as a whole will require the judgment of a more widely representative body than a meeting, area meeting or ad-hoc group; it should be considered and agreed by Meeting for Sufferings or by Yearly Meeting before publication. It must be made clear when local initiatives relate solely to local meetings. Similarly, individual Friends or ad-hoc groups should

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make it clear that they speak only for themselves unless their or area meeting has agreed a minute supporting their action.

On occasion it may be necessary for the clerk of a meeting, or another appointed Friend, to take urgent action to correct misleading reports in the press or other misunderstandings in the public domain. This section is not intended to hamper such necessary action undertaken responsibly in the interests of a meeting.

CONCLUSION

- 3.28 The ensuing chapters contain regulations governing procedure for our various meetings for church affairs. There will inevitably be cases not covered by a particular regulation, and meetings should seek always to appreciate the general principle behind the regulations. Meetings are counselled, however, against too easily admitting exceptions where circumstances do not warrant them, for these regulations are the fruit of the Society's experience in its corporate life. Friends are encouraged to get to know the relevant regulations before taking an active part in meetings for church affairs.

In our meetings for church affairs an effective continuing life can be secured only if there is at least a strong nucleus of Friends attending with regularity, willing to accept responsibility and to give judgments based on informed minds as well as spiritual wisdom. There are few things which tend to destroy interest and loyalty in any business so easily as prolonged and unnecessary discussions on trivia: such discussions are very often provoked and kept up by those who do not trouble to inform themselves adequately of the facts, or who use their occasional attendance to re-open matters already decided. The meeting should expect and encourage its clerk to take firm action in such circumstances.

- 3.29 There is no justification for wasting precious time in our meetings for church affairs under the excuse or delusion that we may safely do so because it is God's work. But they should be times of enjoyment as well as of hard work, times when we can see old

Conclusion

friends and make new ones over tea, when we can be stimulated by other people's ideas and insights as we deliberate together, when we can discover our own gifts and those of other members as we work together. It was said of Gilpin Gregory that 'when his health failed and he was daily seen by his doctor, he would frequently appear at monthly meeting against his doctor's orders and contrary to the advice of his friends, and if remonstrated with he would say, "It does me good; I shall be none the worse for it, and it may be for the last time"?' All our meetings for church affairs should be used imaginatively so that they are not 'business' meetings to be attended from duty or neglected with a sense of guilt but real meetings for church affairs which build us up in Christian love – and do us good.

- 3.30 Keep your meetings in the power of God... And when Friends have finished their business, sit down and wait a while quietly and wait upon the Lord to feel him. And go not beyond the Power, but keep in the Power by which God almighty may be felt among you... For the power of the Lord will work through all, if ... you follow it.

George Fox, 1658