

The Clerking Corner

By June Etta Chenard

A helpful resource, even for experienced clerks, is *Quaker Faith and Practice* (QF&P), not only on spiritual matters, but also in practical ways. For instance, it has sections on: help while clerking, co-clerking, setting the pattern of worshipful listening, arrangement of the agenda, prior preparation, a detached attitude, minutes, the silence, right balance, a sense of humour, and general administration.

Even as inexperienced clerks, if we set a pattern of worshipful listening, and do our best to strengthen our clerking abilities, all else will fall into place.

It is very helpful to participate in large meetings for worship with attention to business clerked by different people, and dealing with complex issues, such as we find at Canadian Yearly Meeting and Representative Meeting sessions. Fortunately, there are also many written resources to help us learn techniques for clerking.

The following practical advice is based upon 1980 minutes of Richmond Friends Meeting:

It was agreed that we would strive to adhere to the following practices in the conduct of meeting business:

- *Before the meeting, Friends provide the clerk with written notices of any items which are to be presented to the meeting for discussion.*
- *Clerk calls for the reading of minutes of decisions at the time they are made, not at a later date.*
- *Friends speak only once to an issue.*
- *Meetings for worship for business begin punctually, and a clock is visible in the business meeting room.*
- *Committee convenors provide the clerk with minutes or a written synopsis of committee meetings, and do their best to have a representative present.*
- *Meeting clerks post the meeting minutes, and the agenda for the upcoming meeting for worship for business, at least two weeks in advance.*

In 1994, Otto Dahlke of Richmond Friends Meeting, wrote: "When is a Meeting for Business not a Meeting for Business? The answer is quite simple. A meeting for business is not a meeting for business

when it is not a meeting for worship... True. We ritualistically start with a silence and a query, and after that, it is rapidly downhill. Much of the conduct that takes place could not and would not take place in a meeting for worship..

In the first place, what happens is more like a threshing session. That does not comport with that waiting and listening which leads one to speak "inwardly from God". Secondly, there is a sociability incompatible with the decorum and dignity appropriate to a meeting for worship. There is no reason why the meeting for worship on the occasion for business could not take on the qualities of a gathered meeting. Thirdly, there is not enough silence... Fourthly, during a prolonged business meeting, especially after the third hour, there is an attrition of members so that eventually only a few hardy souls are left. The tendency is that after one's business has been attended to, the person is most likely to leave. That fractures the meeting. Fifthly, our priorities need examining... Can committees be trusted to make right decisions in small matters? Britain Yearly Meeting has this to say: "Members not involved in the preparatory work should trust and value the work of preparation. Care should be taken to avoid reworking in a way that belittles the work already done." He offers other suggestions, though he ends, "these points... are secondary to the waiting, listening, and the silence."

Above all, it is imperative that we each remember our responsibility for seeking God's way, rather than our own way — by reminding ourselves again and again that it is a meeting for *worship* with attention to business. Listening for the Spirit's guidance is key.

The QF&P section on clerkship ends by reminding us to also, "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 all the performance of your task."

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