

On the weekend of the weekend of Feb.1-3, 2008, a workshop called Conversations about Clerking was held at Quaker Center. The workshop was led by Joe Franko, acting clerk of PYM, and Shan Cretin, a past clerk of PYM.

The major emphasis in the session was on the role of the clerk during Meeting for Business. It was emphasized that the Meeting for Business is a Meeting for Worship. During this meeting it is the clerk's role to help the members open themselves up to the will of the Spirit. "People often come to Friends Meetings for Worship on the Occasion of Doing Business believing that the process is designed to reach decisions. It is not. They often become frustrated because they misunderstand the reason for "Meeting for Business". The process is designed not to make decisions, but to lead us all into a greater understanding of the Spirit. The primary role of a clerk is to gather a sense of the meeting. "It is the clerk's role to sense that truth and put it into words.... in seeking the sense of the meeting the clerk helps facilitate everyone opening up to the spirit, so that we all sit in a place of unity in the presence of spirit..."

Friends believe that the Spirit has given each of us access to the truth, but that the truth is much larger than any one of us. For this reason, Friends believe that worshiping together is a way of reaching the truth that is beyond any one individual's perception of that truth.

Because Friends Process focuses on bringing members into a deeper relationship with the Spirit, the distinction is made between consensus and unity. Consensus is described as a process in which we use our intellects to try to arrive at a decision to which everyone can agree. It is a process of reasoning. We know we have reached consensus and not unity when we have been through a process in which compromises were made for the purposes of reaching a decision that we can all accept. We finish the discussion and realize that we have reached that decision intellectually.

Unity and a sense of the meeting is an expression of a spiritual process that cares for each member and the corporate body. Unity is based on the prompting of the Spirit. In striving for unity we reach toward a higher and greater Truth that speaks to all concerns in a way that could not have been foreseen. We discover what the Spirit wants for us, as opposed to what we thought we wanted for us.

"The process of reaching unity, unlike the typical corporate process, is not focused on achieving a product, goal, or a decision...Like non-violent civil disobedience when it is practiced well, the process is not designed to change anything at all, except us. Any decisions made are simply one part of a process that brings those we work with and us together under the Spirit. We say we are "covered" by the Spirit... I have come to believe that the problem comes [when we] focus on the "product" instead of the Presence. If our discernment processes do not lead us closer to the Spirit, if we are merely seeking a consensus with which no one is happy because it is not Spirit led, then we have missed the point of the Quaker Process..."

Can we, Visalia Friends, deepen our spirituality by approaching Meeting for Business with a new attitude? Can we come with an openness to the spirit, seeking unity rather than trying to come decisions? How can we provide the time necessary to enter into a deep relationship with the spirit while living in a world that operates on a different sense of time?

Klara East

## Quaker Decision Making Members' Responsibilities and Duties

- Request recognition from Clerk before speaking  
*Methods vary from "Clerk please?" to raising hands. There are many Friends who are not as quick to vocalize their thoughts. They need to be given a chance to do so. The decision should not go to the quickest tongue.*
- Address comments to the Clerk  
*It is vital that the flow of information be from the individual to the Meeting as a whole. This is best accomplished by addressing the Clerk.*
- Avoid preconceived conclusions  
*When possible, come to Meeting with sufficient knowledge of the business to be addressed. Some possible solutions will no doubt have occurred to you and you will want to share these. Once that is done, sit back and listen.*
- Speak once to a topic  
*'nuff said!*
- Be willing to "let go" of personal views  
*Be prepared to adopt decisions that may not have occurred to you. Avoid a feeling of NIH (not invented here) or pride of ownership.*

*Consider whether God's will for you as an individual may differ from God's will for the Meeting.*

- Allow a cushion of silence between speaking  
*We are more likely to understand a speaker if we are listening if not preparing for what we want to say as soon as the speaker makes the mistake of pausing for a breath. There is time to integrate your thoughts with what has gone before. True- you will often find you don't need to speak at all because others have "spoken your mind". "That Friend speaks my mind" is a venerable bit of Quakerese which is a very concise and effective way of expressing your views.*
- Listen-really LISTEN  
*Listen to the words- listen to the thoughts behind the words- listen to the Spirit.*
- Be willing to call for silence  
*Anyone can ask for a period of silence when it seems helpful-not just the Clerk.*