

The most satisfactory ministry in the Quaker meeting of today arises out of a flash of insight, felt in the silence and delivered with brevity and a deep sense of concern!

Howard Brinton 1950, *Prophetic Ministry*, Pendle Hill, Pamphlet No. 54.

Meeting for Worship begins when the first person sits down in the meeting room. It is therefore desirable both for one's own tranquility of mind and for silence within the meeting, not to talk much outside beforehand.

One of the 1964 'Advices' (*Advices and Queries*, n.10) encourages us to "come ... with heart and mind prepared". This does not mean that one comes with speech prepared. We wait on the Spirit together; we listen both to our own inner messages of the Spirit and to those that come through others. Always, it is important to try to listen with open heart and mind and soul, allowing time after every message for it to be "taken in", allowing space for worship.

*I sometimes think of a Meeting for Worship as a time when nobody speaks, but everybody listens. Sometimes a person is moved to listen aloud, and this transforms itself into spoken ministry.*

Anon 1995, *this we can say*, 2.34

And then there is the perennial problem of being able to HEAR the messages that are given. Being able to see the speaker is a great help – standing up serves a variety of purposes both for the speaker and for the hearers. And being able to hear the speaker is essential but sometimes almost impossible when the person ministering is absorbed in thought and prayer or overcome by emotion. It is not easy to rise up and speak out, but we need to be mindful of the fact that sometimes Friends with hearing difficulties stop attending meeting because of the struggle to hear. They feel excluded from and therefore unable to participate in the ministry.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

(available from Meeting House libraries)

*Advices and Queries: A Compilation of Australian and British Advices and Queries*, 2008, Australia Yearly Meeting.

*Silence and Speech*, Richard Allen, 1992, Quaker Home Service.

*Quaker by Convincement*, Geoffrey Hubbard, 1974, 1985, QHS/Penguin.

*On Speaking Out of Silence*, Douglas Steere, 1972, Pendle Hill Pamphlet, n.182.

*The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship*, George Gorman, 1973, Quaker Books.

*this we can say: Australian Quaker Life, Faith and Thought*, Australia Yearly Meeting, 2003.

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# On speaking in Meeting for Worship



## Speaking in Meeting for Worship

*The intent of all speaking is to bring into the life, and to walk in, and to possess the same, and to live in and enjoy it, and to feel God's presence. If any hath anything upon them to speak, in the life of God stand up and speak it, if it be but two or three words, and sit down.*

George Fox, 1657

One of the most difficult aspects of Quakerism for new attenders, and perhaps for those not so new too, is that there are no rules to hang on to, no creed, and no-one to say what is going to happen nor when it should happen. There are, however, some common (although generally unspoken) understandings about Quaker procedure that can contribute to comfortable participation in Meeting for Worship.

*Ministry is the contribution made to the gathered meeting by one who has made the journey to the still centre of his being that we call centering down. This condition of mind and spirit – something much more than simple introspection, more akin to contemplation – is still a lonely one. To develop into ministry there must be movement of the spirit towards others in the worshipping group, a movement urged by loving concern. This is the real Meeting for Worship.*

Kenneth Wright 1980, *this we can say*, 2.26

Quakers believe that out of the silence, the communion with the Spirit, may come a message to be shared with the meeting. The message may come to one person or another, to be given as speech or prayer or (more rarely) song. Sometimes, there is no vocal ministry at all, but many in the meeting will have felt the communion during the silence.

*Towards the end of the discussion one question made us sit up. The Friend at whom the question was directed is much-loved and not many years short of celebrating her centenary. She is confined to a wheelchair yet she does not seem restricted in her mobility as one would expect. The question was, "You never give spoken ministry in meeting, yet, your silent ministry is so powerful that the whole meeting knows when you are missing. Could you give us the secret of your influence? What makes you so serene and at peace always?"*

*She replied with only a few words: "I am aware of God's presence."*

Leonce Richards 1992, *this we can say*, 2.28



George Fox himself was noted for an ability to speak powerfully and movingly for hours at a time. Would he be eldred today if he spoke at such length and perhaps with such political content? Quite likely! However, he seems to have had a tremendous gift for discerning when, where and what to speak, and his world was a very different one from ours of today. Twentieth-century Quakers continue to try to discern the leadings of the Spirit in their spoken ministry. Navigating between the hazards of messages that are intended only for oneself, messages that are more appropriate for open-forum debate and those that would be of value at a political rally can be daunting, so much so that some people never speak in Meeting for Worship at all, and the meeting is poorer for it.

*Ministry which seems out of place is hard to deal with but I think that if, as we claim, we are truly trying to place ourselves individually and corporately in the presence of God and to be receptive to His leadings, then we cannot reject an offering ...*

Frances Parsons 1990, *this we can say*, 2.33

