

Guidelines for Spoken Ministry

Spoken ministry in our Meetings for Worship is a distinctive Quaker practice that, like any intentional practice, benefits from deliberate discernment by both newer and more experienced Friends. Various Meetings and individual Friends have given thought to spoken ministry over the years and some common themes, or guidelines, tend to recur.

The following have been adapted from Howard Brinton's *Guide to Quaker Practice and Deepening and Strengthening Our Meeting for Worship* by 57th Street Friends' Meeting, Chicago. These guidelines to the qualities inherent in messages to be offered in spoken ministry should not, of course, be understood as "... a rule or form to walk by; but that all, with a measure of the Light, which is pure and holy, may be guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life". (From a Meeting of Elders of Balby, 1656)

- ◆ *Spontaneous* -The spoken message is not prepared in advance but emerges from the experience of a Meeting. This does not mean that Friends should not prepare for Meeting, nor that a message cannot emerge over a longer period of time, but such preparation should relate to 'general fitness, not explicit preparation for a special occasion'. Question the urge to speak if it comes frequently and, especially if it comes during all or almost all Meetings for Worship.
- ◆ *Spiritual* -The subject matter of ministry should be of a spiritual or religious nature rather than a secular nature. While these terms are difficult to define, Friends will likely find it easy to distinguish each of them when they hear them. Messages that are, essentially political in nature can be disruptive to the spirit of Meeting for Worship. Question whether messages prompted by current events contain a deeper insight
- ◆ *Not argumentative or a discussion* - Vocal ministry does not have the character of an argument, debate or discussion. Seek for a message that tends to be 'recognised as true by its very character'. Messages may be inspired by earlier messages but should not be simple responses to them. Meeting should also be a safe place and messages should not be used for criticism of others. Leave time for silence between messages.
- ◆ *Simple* - The simplicity of a message may be obscured by learned discourse and elaborate discussion. Exercise caution in delivering ministry that is overly intellectual or sounds like a lecture.
- ◆ *Brief* - Usually a message can be fully given within a few minutes. Often a single sentence, spoken with reverence and conviction, carries more weight than do many words.
- ◆ *Non-personal* - Those offering vocal ministry should think of themselves as an instrument through whom the Spirit speaks. A message should be meant for the Meeting. To this end, some Friends have traditionally questioned the use of 'I' in messages. Nonetheless, ministry which is from the speaker's own experience often carries conviction that quoted words might not.