

When Unity is Not Apparent

These suggestions are borrowed from the writings of Art Larrabee, Elizabeth Boardman, and Marriellen Gilpin, and from the practice of other effective Quaker clerks

1. If resolution is needed and shortness of time rather than major differences caused the lack of unity, suggest that a committee continue the discussion and make the decision.
2. Propose that Meeting come back to the issue at a future time. If there seems to be one or overarching other issues that need to be resolved first, name them.
3. Ask the committee that made the recommendation to continue discussing the matter, in light of what was learned in the broader discussion. Individuals not currently on the committee be asked to sit with the committee, to help. Perhaps the committee should be given a specific charge (investigate a particular aspect of the issue, interview an expert, check other Meetings, etc.)
4. Propose forming an ad hoc committee to further explore the issues.
5. Reframe the matter and provide a process, to open minds and find new perspectives.
6. Decide what learning the Meeting needs to do and arrange for that (a reading to discuss, research, a speaker, etc.?).
7. Propose a “threshing” session (for dialogue, not for decision making).
8. Set aside time in the next Meeting for Business for “worship sharing” (structured, worshipful, empathetic listening to each other). Friends come to worship sharing expecting to speak, than neither expecting neither to speak/not speak.
9. In a respectful and not threatening way, reach out to the particular individuals who seem to be out-of-step with the others. Learn more about their concerns. Helping individuals become more clear might help the meeting become more clear.

An observation about unity, by Barbara Rose Caldwell

(found at <http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-QuakerCI.html>)

Friends do not vote or act on the will of the majority. In Quaker experience, it is possible for all to unite in a decision, even when some have reservations. A united Meeting is not necessarily of one mind but it is all of one heart. This may be too high an expectation in secular contexts, but a willingness to settle for compromise is antithetical to seeking wisdom.... While there are those whose concerns are not reflected in a proposed decision, the work of discerning wisdom needs to continue. This is likely to hinge on securing agreement about the legitimacy or otherwise of concerns and on the consequences for sustaining community of alternative decisions. Compromise is only acceptable where legitimate concerns are otherwise irreconcilable.