

NOTES ON STRENGTHENING OUR AREA MEETINGS
MEETING FOR SUFFERINGS, 2 IV 2011

[What follows is a transcript of the notes made by the clerks on the spot. They undoubtedly omit a good deal, and may well misrepresent speakers' intentions. We apologize for this; short of recording the meeting, this is the best we can do.]

- Always the same people who turn up to business meeting; low numbers. Some Friends see themselves as belonging to the area meeting, others to Meeting of Friends in Wales or their local meeting. Are there good techniques for holding business meetings?
- Area meeting has instituted programme of each local meeting organizing a Meeting for Learning to accompany the area business meeting.
- Suggestion that experienced Friends or overseers take attenders to local and area business meetings.
- Role of trustees in relieving area meetings from routine business, freeing them up to concentrate on the spiritual life. Reflect on experience of trustees. The spiritual life of the meeting outside of business meeting is informed by that within the business meeting.
- Area business meeting incorporated within a 'summer camp' – children would insist their parents went!
- All clerks struggle to improve attendance. 'Congregationalism': identification with local meeting to exclusion of area meeting. The expression 'business' meeting is off-putting, but so is meeting for 'church affairs'. Many local meetings have weekends away to reinforce community; so could area meetings. Geographical extent of some area meetings.
- Importance of good discipline in business method; the present meeting is exemplary.
- Concern about accepting into membership those with incomplete experience, especially of the business method. This needs much care and thought, and deserves more emphasis.

- Three pillars of Quaker experience: meeting for worship; *Advices & queries* and *Quaker faith & practice*; monthly meeting. Central importance of participation in business to keep Society of Friends going.
- Young Friends General Meeting gives explicit guidance on conduct of business meeting before each meeting. *Qf&p* 4th edition is not well enough known. Local meetings especially tend to fall into habits of repeated pattern and assume these are proper business method.
- It has taken me a long time to experience joy in area meeting for business. If you're a Single Quaker In Family or have other family commitments it can be not easy to make time and space for business meetings. At best there is spirit and energy, but if they are too friendly it may dilute the effectiveness and spirituality of area meeting or lead to inconsequential chattiness. Meetings can be very 'excluding'. Must behave well in all respects. Recommends Jenny Routledge on eldership.
- Reporting back to meetings on Meeting for Sufferings can be part of the problem or part of the solution. Reports should be brief, engaging, and when appropriate humorous.
- Use the Forum for suggestions. Our area meeting is trying combining meeting for worship, lunch, area meeting (and parallel children's activities) on a Sunday.
- Hold meetings at different times of day or week, not always the same. Engagement at area meeting has been improved by representative reporting on Meeting for Sufferings to local meetings, not just area meeting. Have something meaty to discuss.
- We did the business in the first half of the meeting, then used the second half to deconstruct what we had done. Other educational resources at Woodbrooke, Quaker Life. Have held workshops for those who never intend to be clerks: what *they* should be doing in business meeting.
- Recommends a sort of Who's Who in the area meeting to help Friends get acquainted. The process of testing concern normally begins at local meeting level before progressing to area meeting; sometimes it may be helpful to begin directly at area meeting in order to engage Friends more directly.
- Numbers can be a weakness in a different way: the unequal balance between local meetings within an area meeting.

- Recommends use of technology: area meeting has one Yahoo Group for elders and overseers, another for everyone else. Annual residential meeting for clerks, elders, overseers.