

August, 1963

To Pacific Yearly Meeting Friends:

The responses regarding the Statement on clerks which was received from quite a number of individuals and Meetings, have been very helpful and much appreciated.

Many have indicated a desire for a more detailed and instructive statement than that presented at last Yearly Meeting.

In attempting to incorporate most of your suggestions, and personal comments to try to clarify some questions, it seems the result is far too long to be incorporated in main body of our small Discipline, in the event it is approved. However it was felt that this report is an indication of the exercise Meetings have experienced as a result of this effort.

Such exercise is perhaps more effective as a means of education than a statement in the Discipline to which members may or not refer, however necessary the Discipline may be.

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INTERIM COMMITTEE APPROVED having the statement circulated among members of PYM for study and consideration and referred to the Discipline Committee for whatever appropriate use it may be able to make of the statement.

STATEMENT ON QUALIFICATIONS, FUNCTION AND RESPONSIBILITIES
OF MONTHLY MEETING CLERKS

A clerk should be a person who has real respect and warmth for the individual members and attenders. He should have a sensitivity to deep spiritual insight, realizing that in the Business Meeting as well as in the Meeting for Worship, corporate guidance under the leadership of the spirit must be sought, found and obeyed if the group is to be able to act in love and unity. He must be a member of the Religious Society of Friends and should have a knowledge of the Discipline and a sense of good order; have an ability to hold discussion to the issues being considered; and set the pace so that the Meeting does not move too quickly nor too slowly. He should be able to comprehend readily an item of business or concern and state it simply and concisely; listen to contributions with open-mindedness and calm; and gather the sense of the Meeting at the proper time. It is desirable that he have a sense of humor. The clerk should have the confidence of the entire Meeting so that he will be able to represent the membership.

It may be added that few, if any, can fully measure up to the near-perfect clerk described here. However the experience of serving as clerk is a wonderful means of fostering spiritual leadership in persons with an ability to learn and grow.

The clerk should be a faithful attender of the Meeting for Worship. He should keep close to the work of all committees, particularly attending the meetings of the Ministry and Oversight Committee (committees) so that he is familiar with the condition of the meeting.

The clerk should be present at all business sessions unless unable to attend, beginning the Meeting with a time of worship so that this spirit may hopefully carry through and influence the business considerations. Queries may be used to further the sense of responsibility each member should feel.

While his position is not to be compared to the chairmanship of a committee nor to that of a presiding officer in the usual sense, he is often looked to for interpretation of matters under consideration and for guidance toward the achievement of the purposes of the Meeting, always mindful that he is subject to Meeting authority.

It is advisable for the clerk to prepare an agenda prior to the Meeting, following a regular procedure so that members become accustomed to order and more efficient discharge of business. This also assures that unfinished business is not neglected; that correspondence is attended to; regular committee reports heard for information or necessary action; and concerns considered.

It may be necessary at times for the clerk to encourage fuller business participation so that he may more readily gather the sense of the Meeting, although, with relatively routine items he may assume that silence gives consent.

He may need to urge conscientious weighing of matters as well as the patient and sympathetic consideration of varying opinions; or at times, to discourage argumentative persistence on the part of someone, humbly appealing to such a one that he might withdraw his objection so the Meeting can move. Common ground may sometimes be found by seeking an analysis from those not in general accord, or by making a small change in the wording of a minute.

Occasionally the clerk or another member may feel led to call for a silent period for a more intensive search for Divine Guidance.

Should the clerk feel a strong urgency to express his own opinions, particularly on a controversial matter, it is advisable that he first attempt to bring out such opinions through questions. However if he must state his views in opposition, he should realize that in doing so he may be complicating or hindering his ability to gather the sense of the Meeting and should ask the assistant clerk or someone else to do this and to state the Minute. Some meetings have found it helpful if the clerk moves from his customary position with the permission of the Meeting, when wishing to express a contrary opinion so that he gives no suggestion of being dictatorial.

When the clerk (or assistant clerk) feels that spiritual unity has been reached, when unanimity of opinion is gained or when those holding opposing views have sincerely withdrawn their objections so that the Meeting can act, - he formulates a tentative minute and if approved, records it. If unity cannot be reached the decision is postponed. (See Discipline, pp. 6 & 7.)

Perhaps the authority of the group as it was recognized among early Friends should be recalled more often, and the valuable experience of humble submission to group leadership under the guidance of the spirit be developed where strong individualism becomes over-emphasized or obstructive. The will and progress of the group are sometimes more vital than extended expressions of individual opinion.

On very important questions and policies requiring action, most Meetings follow the practice of approving and recording the final minute at that session, while minor or routine matters as well as a summary of the exercise may be noted for a later wording and for approval at the following monthly meeting.

Some items of business may be referred to committees and much correspondence placed on Bulletin Boards or noted in the Meeting News Bulletin.

The clerk should make sure that persons or committees affected by action of the Meeting are aware of notifying persons who were absent, preferably in writing.

He signs all official papers and minutes. Where two clerks serve, it is good practice for both to sign, particularly legal documents and minutes.

The clerk prepares and endorses certificates of removal; minutes for Sojourning members; minutes for members planning to visit among Friends under concern and with the approval of the Meeting; and endorses Minutes of Friends who visit his own Meeting. He writes letters of introduction of travelling members to identify them and to carry greetings from the Meeting to other Meetings.

The clerk also has the responsibility for co-ordinating the efforts of his own Meeting with those of the Quarterly or Half-yearly and Yearly Meetings of which it is a part. He should make an effort to attend their sessions; should see that delegates are appointed; State of Society reports written and sent to the proper officers; and that matters of business and concern which the Meeting has directed to the larger organizations are reported to them. In like manner, it is his responsibility to give time on the Monthly Meeting agendas for items sent to the Meeting from those organizations.

Assistant clerks may be appointed as needed.

(Draft, by Ruth Schmoe, for criticism, suggestion, and probably condensation.)

August, 1963 - McMinnville, Oregon
Committee on Ministry and Oversight
Discipline Committee