Conflict in Meetings

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2nd edition

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Introduction to the second edition

Historically and in our own time, the contribution of Quakers (or Friends, as we also call ourselves) to conflict resolution throughout the world has been widely recognised. When it comes to dealing with our own conflicts, however, we struggle just like everyone else.

In 2000 the agenda of the Yearly Meeting of Quakers in Britain included a session on *Facing Conflict in Our Lives and Communities*. The response showed not only that there were Friends feeling isolated and hurt, but also many who would welcome the chance to offer help.

A number of meetings have approached their disagreements in a creative way, either through traditional Quaker practices, or by using techniques from the fields of mediation and conflict resolution. In the process they have found that the life of the meeting has been revitalised, that they have come to know each other better and gained in understanding and empathy.

At the same time, many have found it hard to speak openly about difficult relationships, 'unQuakerly' attitudes, disturbed and disturbing behaviour. They are troubled when conflict arises in the life of their meetings; to some it feels like failure to live the Peace Testimony.

In the course of workshops both in Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre and as part of their On-the-Road programme, Friends as individuals and as elders, overseers and clerks are seeking help in responding more confidently and constructively when conflict arises.

The greater part of this revised version of the book remains unchanged. Caring individuals have been

mediating disputes and passing on the philosophy and principles of peace building for generations. Friends need not be afraid of conflict: the denial that it exists can be more damaging to a meeting than the conflict itself. We hope that the book will help local Friends to continue that tradition and help to build an atmosphere where conflict is regarded as an ingredient of living adventurously; to promote confidence in their ability to approach it without guilt or undue fear. You may wish to use the 'Questions for reflection and discussion' at the end of each chapter as a starting point for this process – a review of the strengths and limitations in your meeting. The more that local meetings can help each other, the stronger will be our witness for peace-full relationships at all levels.

> *In our desire to be kind to everybody, to appear united in spirit, to have no majorities or minorities, we minimise our divisions and draw a veil over our doubts. We fail to recognise that tension is not only inescapable, however much hidden, but when brought into the open is a positive good.*
>
> Kenneth C Barnes, 1984
> *Quaker faith & practice* 10.24

Conflict in Meetings

….by the interaction of contrasting views we may discover not that one is right and another wrong, but that truth is complex.

Laurence Lerner
The two Cinnas, Swarthmore Lecture 1984

About this book

Friends' personal experience of conflict in their meetings varies widely. Some may wonder why a book is needed at all. Others know that conflict can profoundly affect the life of a meeting. Understandably, it has often been difficult to speak widely about it. Many have felt isolated and have struggled through unaided.

This book, the fourth in the handbook series on eldership and oversight, draws from the experience of conflict within meetings and tries to share some of what has been learnt.

It will consider the tools that we have to hand in existing Quaker procedures, and how they may be used in particular situations. It also encourages Friends to seek outside help where that is likely to be more effective and points to where such help might be found.

The second section explores the philosophy and basic skills of conflict resolution, outlining techniques and processes for improving communication and building trust so that constructive responses begin early. It is not a mediation manual, neither can it provide answers for particular circumstances; each conflict is personal and unique, but there are some signposts towards the end for

those who wish to know about specific training in mediation and conflict resolution.

We should like to think that the book will be used in different ways: as reading for interest, for general information or perhaps as a departure point for study groups. At the end of each section, discussion questions are suggested for those who wish to use them. We hope it will provide guidance to clerks, elders and overseers or anyone who is called upon to deal with potential, incipient or actual conflict.

We are all to take a 'right share in the privilege of watching over one another for good', as *Quaker faith & practice* 12.19 reminds us. Therefore in this book we understand 'elders' and 'overseers' to include all who undertake this responsibility seriously and with commitment, whether their meeting makes formal appointments or shares the tasks corporately.

Most of all, we hope it will enable Friends to identify the resources that exist in their own meetings and use them to forge for the twenty first century a living, wholly-owned Peace Testimony which is not just about opposition to war and violence, but a way of living our lives.

We are grateful to the many Friends and meetings who contributed their experiences and insights or worked on the draft text. Quaker Social Responsibility & Education provided valuable support in preparing the original version of this book.

Quakers and conflict

> *Peace begins within ourselves. It is to be implemented within the family, in our meetings, in our work and leisure, in our own localities, and internationally. The task will never be done. Peace is a process to engage in, not a goal to be reached.*
>
> Sydney Bailey, 1993
> *Quaker faith & practice* 24.57

Meeting with God changes lives. Change frequently brings loss of certainty and confidence. The new confronts the old and the resulting conflict can take us either back to what is known, comfortable and reassuring, or forward on a journey. That journey may toss and turn us but can lead towards an inner conviction and stillness which has earned the description 'the peace which passeth all understanding', to use Paul's words in his letter to the Philippians, 4.7.

The life of Jesus was marked by controversy and his teaching was met with violence, yet he left an indelible mark on human behaviour and understanding. George Fox's ministry and that of early Friends was countered with hostility. The Quaker Peace Testimony arose out of their response to the violence they met and it has been an enduring guide to those who followed.

For the majority of Friends today, the witness to our belief in peace is expressed through everyday and ordinary events. That witness is no less valuable for being undramatic. But because the demands it makes are less obvious, it is sometimes easy for us to lose energy and become passive; to avoid conflict rather than confront it in a

collaborative way which looks both for the cause and for the opportunities for growth that it contains.

Conflict is inseparable from adventurous living. Whether it constrains or liberates us depends to a large extent on how we respond to it. We look in vain for permanent, correct responses, for 'right answers' or advice that has universal application. Yet it is through making choices that we grow beyond confusion, guilt, fear or anger into a genuine exploration of why the conflict has happened and what can be done. Tools exist for increasing our skills and making us more assured and self-confident. There are people and agencies ready and able to share the load when our personal involvement with a conflict means that we cannot bring to it the necessary objectivity. To call for help before the crisis gets out of hand is not failure. To decide when that time has come takes discernment and wisdom.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What is 'peace'? What is 'conflict'?
2. Where are **we** witnessing? Where are we falling short?
3. How alive is our local or preparative, our area or monthly meeting, to issues of conflict?
4. Where are the points of constructive conflict?
5. Where are the points of destructive conflict?

Conflict and the Meeting

> *Conflict happens, and will continue to happen, even in the most peaceful of worlds. And that's good – a world where we all agreed with one another would be incredibly boring. Our differences help us to learn. Through conflict handled creatively we can change and grow; and I am not sure real change – either political or personal – can happen without it.*
>
> Mary Lou Leavitt, 1986
> *Quaker faith & practice* 20.71

What happens when conflict arises within the Quaker meeting? Often, the situation is approached thoughtfully and with practical good sense. The meeting moves on, not without having experienced pain and distress, but having gained in understanding and insight through the process. If the right balance between caring interest and respect for personal freedom is maintained within a meeting, it is easier for its members to talk to someone about a problem so that action can be taken early.

Such a meeting will encourage realistic expectations in its members and a practical, unsentimental approach to conflict. It will demonstrate that a measure of confusion and discomfort need not be feared; indeed they may bring understanding and growth.

Sometimes, problems remain hidden and the deep roots of a dispute may not be discovered until much later. It is not easy to know when to speak out. Friends are understandably reluctant to interfere or inflame what might just be a passing difficulty but if problems are not shared at an early stage, support for each other may become partisan

and objectivity lost. We can hide behind confidentiality to avoid action or be so worried about gossip that we forget plain speaking. A quiet word with a wise and discreet Friend may clarify whether action is needed.

Sometimes, hostility is recognised, but the right words or occasions for bringing it into the light cannot be found and it simmers on behind an apparently undisturbed and friendly façade. Friends may feel that being in conflict is somehow wrong: we have a Peace Testimony and should ourselves be peaceful people. That feeling may be strong either in the people with the problem or expressed, implicitly or explicitly, throughout the meeting. A look at some of our most revered models will show that avoidance of conflict was not usually their style! How 'peaceful' would our meeting remain if a George Fox or John Woolman were dropped into it? What marked their confrontations was the loving respect in which they held the people whose lifestyles they challenged, their deep personal experience, centredness and self-knowledge, the authenticity of their message and the response that it evoked in those to whom they spoke.

❁ See *Quaker faith & practice* 2.79 on John Woolman's struggle.

Occasionally, conflict may divide and tear a meeting apart, leaving a continuing rift and wounds that take a long time to heal. It can centre around:

✣ **personalities and relationships**: ongoing problems between individual members which have not been faced; the handling of the separation or divorce of members of the meeting, when others take sides; the 'difficult' member; criticism of those who take

responsibility by those who don't, leading to accusations of 'cliquiness'; inability to recognise individual needs for attention or personal space.

- **behaviour**: ongoing unsuitable ministry which continues after disquiet has been expressed; too frequent or argumentative ministry; assuming the authority of a representative of the meeting when acting in a personal capacity; unwillingness to respect well-established Friendly disciplines.
- **lack of adherence to time-honoured and established Quaker practice**: different interpretations of *Quaker faith & practice*.
- **corporate decisions**: the use of the meeting's resources, including money, or the meeting house itself; affiliation to other groups.
- **clashes of values or belief:** lack of tolerance for the views of others; uncaringly-expressed views on sexual or other relationships.
- **domination of a small meeting by a group or an individual with a strong personality**, with members feeling unable or unwilling to express their disagreement.
- **confusion over boundaries of responsibility or authority**: where statutory requirements such as child protection, employment or charity law conflict with traditional Quaker practices.
- **prejudice and discrimination**: Friends edged out of a meeting because of their sexuality or race, who were happily accepted until they challenged assumptions or raised issues.

- **hasty generalisations**: made without due thought and expressed with insufficient testing.
- **employment issues**: contracts for wardens, caretakers or others which have not been clearly drawn up, resulting in misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations; non-observance of agreements made and inability adequately to address problems for fear of being 'bad employers'.

A look through Quaker history in this country and abroad will show that conflict, either internal or with the world at large, is nothing new. Working through to reconciliation is not easy but it can be done. Often, this is achieved by using Quaker insights and practices as fully, deeply and selflessly as possible. Sometimes, specialist help is needed. Whatever the way, a growing number of meetings can testify to the new life and greater understanding they have gained as a result.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How is conflict seen in our meeting? Is the atmosphere one of openness to conflict?
2. What sorts of conflict do we experience? Which are signs of an active and adventurous community?
3. Have we a history of dealing constructively with conflict?
4. Are problems recognised and faced early enough?

Responding to conflict

> *Reconciliation, in the biblical sense, is not about ideologies or beliefs but about people, their relationship and response to God, and their relationship and response to each other. God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, and he calls each of us to a ministry or vocation of reconciliation.*
>
> Sydney Bailey, 1980
> *Quaker faith & practice* 24.32

1. Quaker practices and processes within the meeting

Conflicts arise naturally when people live creatively and adventurously. Helpful though it is to learn and use specific conflict resolution practices, much is already available to Friends in our structures, practices and processes. It is easy sometimes to take these for granted, to become set in the way we carry them out or to see them as jobs that are done by other people. Our ability to deal with conflict in a constructive way grows from the quality of our oversight and eldership, our meetings for church affairs and the other gatherings, formal and informal, that make up the life of our meetings.

Oversight

Oversight in most meetings is formally the province of appointed people. In a small but increasing number of others, oversight is shared among the majority of the attending members of that meeting. Whatever the structure of the system, where a sympathetic, non-busybodyish awareness is kept alive and help is sensitively and

understandingly given, a corporate support develops. As a result, seeking and receiving help occur almost spontaneously and without fuss. A varied social programme helps to build relationships and family feeling. Ideally, oversight will be both a pleasure and a responsibility and good induction and support are needed to maintain a high quality of pastoral care. It doesn't 'just happen'! Overseers may be the first people to recognise an incipient or actual conflict, or may be the first to be asked for help.

❁ See *Quaker faith & practice* 12.13 for more about oversight.

Eldership

Where a meeting sees this as the job not only of selected, special people, but as the sharing of wisdom and relevant experience by everyone in the worshipping community, practical everyday support widens and deepens until it is hard to separate pastoral from spiritual care. The resulting atmosphere makes it easier for members to bring to others their cares and concerns and discuss them in the light of the Spirit. But the meeting will look to its elders for inspiration and guidance, and unpopular or uncomfortable action may sometimes need to be taken. As for overseers, induction, preparation and training are essential.

❁ See *Quaker faith & practice* 12.10-12 and 2.71.

Meetings for church affairs

Friends try to carry the spirit of worship into their business meetings. In aiming to discern the 'will of God' they need to look beyond their personal opinions and preferences to the whole picture, as far as it is possible to see it. This may at times mean staying silent, at others it

may require speaking out. That often takes courage, particularly when what is to be said is at odds with the general feeling. The right words are found in stillness and centredness.

Clerks bear a heavy load and a wise meeting respects and supports them. Creative thinking may be needed to provide opportunities for training, refreshment or temporary respite. A periodic look by everyone at what is asked of the clerk and also of those who make up the meetings will repay the time and effort. Business meetings do not need to be ponderous. Simple guidelines, revised and distributed from time to time, may introduce newer attenders at the meeting to the disciplines; guidelines also remind established members where they are falling short of the ideal!

❁ A wealth of advice can be found in Chapter 3 of *Quaker faith & practice*.

A meeting for church affairs may be the first place where a conflict becomes apparent to the whole meeting. A clerk who is assured of the understanding and support of the meeting will be able to deal more confidently and easily with the inevitable disagreements that arise.

The Quaker business method demands a great deal of those who participate, and the fact that it is not always successful leads Friends, from time to time, to doubt its validity. *Beyond majority rule*, a study in depth undertaken by Michael Sheeran, is illuminating and helpful. It deserves a place in every meeting house library.

Threshing meetings

This evocative name is still used for meetings called

specifically to work through opposing or controversial issues, without the pressure to reach an immediate decision. Careful preparation is essential so that objectivity and a caring respect are maintained throughout while feelings are shared and personal animosity acknowledged. The need for confidentiality and wise, empathetic clerking should be fully understood.

❁ See *Quaker faith & practice* 12.26 and page 29 below on confidentiality.

Meetings for clearness

'When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God's guidance and offering counsel to one another?'

❁ See '*Advices and Queries'* 27, in *Quaker faith & practice* 1.02.

Whereas the threshing meeting focuses on the matter in hand, the meeting for clearness is usually convened to support individual people. Traditionally used to test a couple's 'clearness' for marriage, it can be immensely powerful and effective in helping someone to see the way forward at a time of opportunity, decision, uncertainty, difficulty, or disagreement. Meetings for clearness are a rich and valuable resource within Quaker practice, and their use can only deepen Quaker discernment. By taking part in clearness meetings we are attempting to bring the whole of our lives under the guidance of the Spirit. Much helpful literature now exists explaining this method, and a brief annotated resources list on clearness is available from Quaker Life. Confidentiality is again vital.

❁ See *Quaker faith & practice* 12.22-25.

Small groups

Some people, particularly on first acquaintance with Friends, may find the meeting for worship fairly awe-inspiring. Smaller, informal groups in Friends' homes may provide a safer environment for asking questions, testing ideas and building a feeling of belonging. These groups can be for discussion, study, creative listening, general interest or social gatherings, as well as the opportunity for a first testing of an apparent conflict. The reason is unimportant compared with the pleasure, comfort and trust that can be discovered. These lay the foundation for confidence in the wider group. A 'meeting for learning' (see *Quaker faith & practice* 2.82) can be used to deal with a problem. Any process set up lovingly and thoughtfully may allow the working through of conflict.

❁ See *Quaker faith & practice* 12.20-21.

Worship sharing

Meetings for worship sharing are based on silence, as are meetings for worship, but with a greater expectation that people will speak. They are an opportunity to listen to one another, rather than discuss the contributions. This method may or may not be appropriate for addressing a conflict directly but it can help background factors and different perspectives to emerge without developing into an argument. It may give great support to those who are carrying responsibility and help to keep matters in the light of the Spirit rather than becoming an everyday wrangle. Patricia Loring's *Listening spirituality* has a very helpful section dedicated to the subject.

❁ See *Quaker faith & practice* 12.21 and 12.80-81.

Creative listening

The aim of such groups is to provide a setting where people can speak in a way which helps to discover new or previously unrecognised insights in what they or others say. Practices vary. Simple ground rules cover confidentiality and the need to accept tenderly all contributions. Some groups use a stone, shell or small beautiful object, which is held by the speaker to focus attention. As it is passed round the group it enables everyone to speak once before anybody makes a second contribution.

Appointments to office

Nominations committees have a very special responsibility which extends far beyond finding people to do jobs. In a small meeting particularly, the primary concern may seem to be how to get the work done. If this is the sole consideration, people may be given tasks to which they are temperamentally unsuited, leading to problems later. Sometimes the proven competence of previous office holders may obscure the fact that most functions can be fulfilled in different ways. Turning the process around and starting from the gifts and needs of the members of the meeting calls for creativity and careful thought but, besides bringing fresh insights, the attempt may illustrate that some work is beyond the capacity of the meeting and can be laid aside for the time being. Occasionally the nominations committee is subject to pressure from people who feel slighted because they have not been given office and so feel undervalued by the meeting. This most difficult situation may call for help and support from others.

Preparation for membership

All the above are tried and tested procedures that have been used over time by the Society of Friends. In the early days when most Quakers had been born into the Society, familiarity with its traditions could be taken for granted. The majority of Friends are now Quakers 'by convincement' and in some meetings there can be as many attenders as members. It is important that preparation for membership includes a grounding in the distinctive features of our business method, and of meetings for discernment of any other kind, and that attenders joining any meetings for church affairs have a clear understanding of the structures and methods that will be used. If this is not done, over time valuable disciplines may be lost and processes go awry.

Monthly meeting committee for help in the resolution of conflict

Monthly meetings are encouraged to appoint a group of experienced and knowledgeable Friends who would be available to give general assistance in the amicable settlement of disputes, in *Quaker faith & practice* 4.21. This recommendation is approached differently in different meetings, and the composition of the committee will vary according to the geography of the area. One such group derives from the days when general meetings used to appoint a panel of Friends with legal experience to discourage members from taking each other to law. Now it also includes people with conflict resolution experience and each monthly meeting in the general meeting appoints two Friends. This arrangement enables Friends to be available to help in a preparative or monthly meeting

other than their own where their relative anonymity may be an advantage. To be effective, it is essential that all meetings in the area are aware of the group's existence. More often, an ad hoc group is set up at monthly meeting level to deal with situations as they arise.

Sadly, such committees are rare across the Yearly Meeting so that a fine opportunity is missed for local Friends to help each other when in trouble, or to share experiences and skills, which builds confidence in an ability to handle conflict without guilt or undue fear. Friends who undertake this work should be aware of the need for supportive supervision (see below, page 54)

❁ See Section 2, below.

A meeting is a community: a fellowship of different people, families and groups. Diversity makes for creativity, which in turn leads to change and development. Whether conflict steals up slowly or breaks suddenly upon a meeting, it is important for all those who are given the responsibility for dealing with it to remind themselves that conflict is part of life, even among Quakers! Staying centred and grounded in the conviction of that of God in every single person, including ourselves, however heavily it may be obscured at the time, is the key to passing through the experience and emerging strengthened.

2. Help from outside the meeting

When, despite loving contact, listening and the use of the procedures outlined earlier, matters are becoming more divisive and acrimonious, what is a meeting to do? Each problem is unique and calls for its own individual solution, but general guidelines can be laid down.

There will be questions to ask and decisions to make. Who will take responsibility for carrying this forward? Is it a matter for a few people who are directly concerned with the situation or should it include elders, overseers, clerks? The meeting may include among its members someone with the conflict resolution skills and experience needed for dealing with the situation, but is that person sufficiently detached from the situation to address the problem effectively? This is the time when a standing committee at area or regional meeting can be of real help. Sometimes a small group may be convened to discuss these questions with one or more of the committee's members and decide how to take things forward.

Such a group needs to be carefully chosen. There must be no ego trips; the work calls for quiet, unobtrusive, unselfish service, which may go unrecognised by the meeting as a whole. Not everyone in the meeting will be satisfied with what is done, so the ability to cope with criticism is needed.

Where a standing committee does not exist, other sources of help may be available. The monthly meeting may decide to set up an ad hoc group. Some meetings maintain a register of the skills and experiences of their members which may provide the names of people who are qualified to help. Quaker Life, in particular the Committee on Eldership & Oversight, can offer guidance. If the conflict involves an interpretation of church government, the Recording Clerk's Office is the one to contact. Many Quakers are actively involved in mediation and conflict resolution projects, nationally or in local communities. Quaker Peace & Social Witness maintain up-to-date information. When making the initial contact,

giving as much information as possible will make it easier to find the best people to help.

If outside help is enlisted, it is likely that one or preferably two Friends will be suggested, whom, for ease, we will call the mediators, whether or not formal mediation takes place. If their names are acceptable to the meeting, they will get in touch and will need to be appraised of the situation. It is important for the meeting to recognise that the mediators' effectiveness requires their complete impartiality. Occasionally they are called in to 'knock some sense' into one of the parties and will then need to point out that this is not their role.

They will wish to have an outline of the problem before any decisions are made on how to proceed. This can sometimes be done by telephone and may, in itself, clarify issues, restore confidence or support a suggested course of action, which the meeting will then carry forward by itself. The need to explain to someone what is happening is often helpful in throwing new light on feelings, fears and needs, or changing perceptions. Putting information into a letter may also help to clear misunderstandings. Over and over again, community mediators find that this airing of a problem with an experienced person results in an easing of tension, and problem solving begins to take place almost of itself. Mediators will appreciate feedback afterwards.

It may be that a meeting for clearness, or other small group, convened and facilitated by the mediator(s) may be helpful where one carried out by the meeting itself was not, simply because the outsider is free from the emotional encumbrances which even the most skilled or caring member of the meeting is likely to have.

Mediation

This is a process that allows people to talk, through an impartial person or people, about their problem, the feelings it generates and the effects it has on them and their lives. They are enabled to speak of their own experience and listen to each other's, with the help of simple ground rules designed to promote and maintain a co-operative atmosphere. Becoming more aware of each other's circumstances, they can more easily consider possible solutions to the problem and with the help of the mediators work out together what might be done to meet needs and set fears at rest.

Before any joint meeting takes place the mediators will wish to talk individually to each of the people concerned, or to representatives of the various parties. The mediation itself will take place on neutral ground; the people must see it positively and want to be there; everyone will need to understand the importance of confidentiality. Where antagonisms and fears are so acute that a joint meeting is not acceptable, mediators may act as interpreters, listening first to one group, then feeding back to another, until understanding is reached, and/or they feel secure enough to meet.

Mediation is not suitable for every dispute or disagreement. A positive outcome is likely when both sides have a good case and they are willing and able to achieve some degree of empathy, when the ongoing relationship is important or there is a strong wish to solve the problem. Difficulties arise if people are unable for some reason fully to understand the process or to accept that they remain responsible throughout for their own actions. Anyone who is seeking a ready-made solution from the mediators

is likely to feel let down; the mediators will control the process and build an atmosphere in which everyone feels safe and secure, but they will not impose a solution.

Mediation provides a framework within which attitudes and actions can be altered without losing face. The aim is to reach an accord in which each of the parties gives and gains something.

There will not always be a totally happy ending. Mediation is not a soft option, and tough choices may have to be faced. But a course of action that is chosen in the light of understanding and support, and with time for adjustments to be made, may feel very different from one seized upon in the heat of the moment; in retrospect the episode may come to be seen as an opportunity to move on. A meeting will also need to recognise that the outcome may be unexpected or that accepted ways and methods might be called into question. Those involved in any way with the conflict and its resolution will need the backup of the meeting. Prayer, sympathetic listening and quiet availability are some of the ways in which a meeting can show support.

The 'difficult person'

There are few of us who have not been a 'difficult person' for somebody or some group at some time in our lives. Difficult behaviour usually happens because we feel that our needs are not being met – a feeling which may or may not be justified. Unmet needs generate anger. Most of us have a choice of action – to nurse our feeling of resentment or to voice our hurt. Whether we are able to find the courage or the words to do the latter effectively depends on both our own conflict resolution skills and

our personal self-confidence, and also on our trust in the person or people to whom we express our feelings.

In most of us, ongoing resentment saps self-confidence, and someone who is distressed may be quite unable to find the courage or the words to say so. It falls to the meeting, in the persons of elders, overseers or concerned Friends, to ease the way. Giving and receiving ongoing emotional support is costly to both giver and receiver, but in the end, it is often the people whom we label 'difficult' who help us to know ourselves better.

It is instructive to ask whether or in what way the meeting itself may be contributing to or responsible for the problem. Is there unacknowledged prejudice or discrimination? Are there personal factors which we can not or should not know? How can we explore these questions in a sensitive and constructive way?

However, the time may come when a person is making demands on the meeting which cannot be met and limits need to be set. Conflicts that centre around an individual person need particular care, as a sole individual does not have the mutual support available to a group.

The decision on how to deal with the problem needs to be made prayerfully, perhaps in a worship sharing or creative listening group. The meeting may have people with the skills and sensitivity required; if so, are they distanced enough to be objective, and how would this affect the ongoing relationships within the meeting? The help of a monthly or general meeting advisory group can be invaluable here. Exploring with their help may enable the meeting to approach the matter itself with greater assurance, or make it clear that outside Friends would be

in a better position to help. Formal mediation between a single person and a group may not be appropriate, as it can increase a sense of isolation; but an exploration of a related or consequent difficulty, within the mediation framework and observing similar ground rules, may well focus attention on problems which can be addressed co-operatively, rather than on the views or behaviour of one person.

Ongoing problems

Not all conflicts can be happily resolved. Where an insoluble problem remains within a meeting, those responsible for oversight and eldership need to be very aware of what is happening, giving people who are directly involved an opportunity to offload feelings or, where appropriate and possible, to share the load or be given respite from responsibility.

From time to time, a meeting may be faced with conflicting positions that cannot be reconciled. The outcome may be that membership of the meeting, or even of the Religious Society of Friends, is no longer appropriate for the person or people involved. That is a hard decision to reach and even harder to live with afterwards, but it may be the right one for the circumstances. If the issue has been addressed with integrity and committed attention to what is God's will for each person it is quite possible for relationships to remain friendly or even be strengthened as a result.

Evidence that anti-social behaviour is the result of deep emotional trauma is becoming more widely accepted and it is being demonstrated that healing can take place in even the most extreme cases. This is specialist work calling

for skill and experience, training and supervision. Occasionally, deeply damaged people find their way to Friends' meetings – we should welcome that – but a meeting is not a community of professional therapists, and it helps nobody if Friends get drawn in to situations that they cannot handle. Seeking specialist advice without betraying confidentiality calls for great sensitivity.

Confidentiality

What exactly does 'confidential' mean? Sometimes the Humpty Dumpty principle comes into play and it means what each of us thinks it means. As a result, expectations do not match and people are hurt. Real dilemmas can be created if the levels of confidentiality are not mutually understood. Within a meeting, firm rules are hard to lay down and a balance needs to be kept between betraying trust and shouldering burdens alone which could be better shared.

It is essential to be clear about the difference between gossiping and seeking help for oneself or for another from the most appropriate quarter. At the general level, 'If in doubt, don't tell' is a sound rule of thumb. That cuts out gossip and reduces rumours. If staying silent causes anxiety, checking with a wise Friend, elder or overseer of known discretion brings in a second opinion. It is possible to address a matter openly and honestly as a meeting without everyone having access to every detail. Friends will usually respond very positively to being told that matters are being dealt with by the appropriate people and that their prayerful support would be valued. It should go without saying that it is vital that elders and overseers make a very clear distinction between information of legitimate

neighbourly interest to the meeting, and that which is told to them in confidence in their capacity as overseers or elders – this is of particular importance in meetings where eldership and oversight are corporate responsibilities and therefore shared throughout most of the members of the meeting.

At its best, confidentiality enables people to share intensely private issues free of the fear that they will be misunderstood. At worst, it is an abuse of the helpful relationship when it forbids the sharing of a load laid on someone else. If someone says to us 'Can I tell you something in confidence?' it is wholly appropriate to qualify our answer so that there is no breaking of trust if it is shared with an overseer, elder or other person of discretion who may have reason to know. If we feel that matters are being laid on us that we can not or should not keep to ourselves, we are entitled to say so. What should not happen is that information is disclosed after the speaker has been led to believe that what has been said will not be shared with anyone else.

However, if we are worried that someone is at risk, the need to prevent harm overrides confidentiality, and mediation is inappropriate.

In some areas, such as child protection, disclosure is a legal requirement. Difficult though this issue is for Friends who wish to believe the best of everyone, guidelines exist and the handbook, *Meeting safety,* provides an excellent basis for a meeting to face these questions before they have arisen.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. Is our meeting a caring meeting? How does that come about?
2. Do our meetings for church affairs bring potential conflicts into the light?
3. How do we support our clerk(s)?
4. Could we use other kinds of meeting to deal with difficult situations?
5. Do clerks, elders and overseers know whom they can consult outside the meeting in case of need?
6. Do all members of the meeting know whom they can consult in case of personal problems?
7. How clear are we about what we mean by confidentiality?

Conflict resolution in practice

> *To 'listen' another's soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another … For in penetrating to what is involved in listening do we not disclose the thinness of the filament that separates men listening openly to one another, and that of God intently listening to each soul?….*
>
> Douglas Steere
> *Where words come from,* p. 14

Some fictional case histories

Readers of this book will have no difficulty in understanding why actual case histories are not being quoted. However, many themes recur and it is possible to describe situations that are realistic without being factual. Outcomes to a problem may differ widely depending on personal or local factors, so the ones described can only be seen as examples and illustrations of what might happen. However, they do provide pointers to a range of interventions which, when carried through with honesty, sensitivity and awareness, have proved their worth.

1. A situation faced by a number of meetings is that of redevelopment of their premises. For some the chosen course has been to remain in buildings that have for them a time-honoured or historical value, while for others modern, purpose-built premises have provided the opportunity for outreach and community service. Sometimes the decision has been easy, their course of action plain and non-controversial; at other times it has not.

Imagine a meeting that was offered a significant sum of money for the sale of its town centre meeting house and redevelopment on a suburban site. Friends had found the matter deeply divisive, and in the end felt bound to decline the offer. Some in the meeting had been very resentful of what they saw as lost opportunities for Quaker witness. When a new offer was made about twenty years later, memories were revived and lobbying began to take place both for and against acceptance.

A small group was convened whose task was to listen to as many people as possible in the meeting who had views on the subject. Some discussions took place in informal gatherings while others were person-to-person. As a pattern began to develop, it was possible to identify what particular factors were of value, and possible conditions of sale could be defined. Several of the older members believed that the garden represented a still, green space that had a spiritual value out of all proportion to its size. A request that a small memorial garden, with a plaque commemorating the architecture and history of the meeting house, should be built into the plans for the new development was one of a number of suggestions which met their concerns.

The preparative meeting at which the decision was to be made was carefully planned; everyone in the meeting made a special effort to attend and extra time was allowed so that discussion would not be rushed. In the event, concerns were shared, proposals put forward, and a decision to proceed with negotiations reached harmoniously without the need for additional

time. There was a strong feeling that the meeting had gained in understanding through the exercise.

2. A small meeting held an outreach initiative based on the Peace Testimony, which attracted a number of new attenders. These included several activists who saw the Quaker meeting as an opportunity to become involved in nonviolent direct action. They were well informed, appeared to be livening up a meeting that had had a rather quietist approach, and appealed to the younger members. They seldom attended meetings for worship for business, but did make a point of being there when matters that concerned them were on the agenda, when they put their proposals very strongly. A number of the older members who had kept the meeting going over many years were extremely disturbed. Several of them began talking of moving to a nearby meeting where they could again find 'real Quakers'.

   The matter came to preparative meeting and, faced with increasingly acrimonious discussions, the clerks prepared with especial care. The formation of a peace committee was proposed by a member of the meeting, and was felt to be a positive way forward. The meeting worked quickly to nominate and appoint committee members who were encouraged to co-opt up to an agreed number of additional people. The boundaries of their authority to act on behalf of the meeting were clearly set out and the new committee set to work. In time, one or two, frustrated by what they saw as Quaker caution and red tape, resigned to work with other organisations.

This was upsetting to some, but the increased activities of the meeting as a result of the episode were felt by most to be beneficial and good relationships with the former members were maintained.

3. A local group, seeking the use of shower and toilet facilities for homeless people during daytime hours, approached the meeting. Two Friends who were volunteers with that group were strongly in favour and many members of the meeting, aware of the valuable and useful work they were doing, wished to support them. Others felt strongly that it would be treating the meeting house as a public utility whereas its real purpose was as a place of quiet where people could seek God. Others recognised potential problems if the clear guidelines that would be needed were overstepped, and worried about the effect on other users of the premises and the considerable load that would be placed on the wardens.

   Matters degenerated and someone from another monthly meeting, who had mediation experience, was asked to advise. He spoke on the telephone with the clerk and with the two volunteers. The clerk felt that there was no problem; the matter was being discussed at the next preparative meeting. During the other call, one of the couple broke down and described how hurt she had been and how badly she felt the meeting had let them down. It was a long call and she thanked the mediator for listening so sympathetically. It was agreed that it would not be helpful if any intervention were made before the

preparative meeting, but that the mediator would be available on the telephone for anyone who wished to talk afterwards. He followed up the two calls with carefully worded letters confirming what had been agreed, suggested that in view of the strongly held feelings, additional time and preparation would be helpful, and assured them of his prayers. Later the couple telephoned to say that it had been an extremely gathered preparative meeting, at which disagreements had been expressed on both sides but in a way that was no longer felt to be personally antagonistic. They accepted that the request could not be granted at the present time but felt that their work was now appreciated.

4. A meeting, concerned at both the nature and the frequency of spoken ministry from one particular member, had over many years expressed disquiet, both officially through elders and personally by individual Friends. The effect on the ministering Friend was always transient, and in time people began to stay away from worship. Others became extremely worried that newcomers were feeling that Quakers did not provide what they were seeking, and would go elsewhere.

   Elders met to discuss the matter yet again and agreed after much heart-searching and long discussion to meet with the member. They formally advised her that the meeting felt that her contributions were not in line with *Quaker faith & practice*. Her response was clear; she was the vehicle only, and not the originator of what she said. If she was not able to allow God to speak

through her with Friends, she would have to find a church where she could. Despite misgivings, elders did not dissuade her, and she became a member of a charismatic church in the area. Several people in the meeting had to come to terms with feelings of guilt at having, as they felt, rejected someone of strong faith and conviction. A support group was formed to hear their concerns and the meeting remained friends with their erstwhile member, who settled happily into her new church.

5. The teenage children of a mixed race family attended a gathering of Black Friends and their families. In their report back to monthly meeting they described an almost overwhelming sense of togetherness and support and expressed quite forcefully their feelings of having felt the 'odd ones out' all through their time in the children's classes. Only now had they felt able to say this. They thanked the monthly meeting for enabling them to attend and asked for support to remain in touch and active with the other Black Friends.

   The report was received respectfully, but over tea a heated discussion broke out. Two long-standing and hardworking members of the children and young people's committee felt very criticised, and were annoyed that the young people seemed not to appreciate their membership of a caring community. Another member, a social worker, then accused these two of racism and lack of understanding. A fourth spoke of the damage that misguided Friends had done elsewhere by fostering or adopting children from

other cultures. Conscious of the embarrassment caused to the family of the teenagers, someone suggested that it was not the time for this particular debate. To mutterings of 'Friends sweeping things under the carpet, as usual' people went home.

Overseers in the home meeting of the family concerned met to discuss what had happened and one of their number sought the feelings and wishes of the parents. Their request was for no 'fuss' to be made. However, in the discussion it became apparent that the teenagers' feelings of isolation and resentment were just as strongly shared by the parents, but had not been exposed for fear of making matters more difficult for their children. With their agreement, one of the meeting's discussion groups immediately decided to seek out some material on cross-cultural understanding. In due course, a new series of gatherings was established at which members of the meeting were invited to share the personal journeys which had led them to Friends. These gatherings fostered a considerable increase in understanding and friendship within the meeting as a whole and a number of other people felt able to share their feelings of exclusion for various reasons. In time the parents felt ready to share their story. One other preparative meeting set up discussion groups along similar lines.

6. A couple were separating after having been members of the meeting for a long time; one planned to live with a new partner. Having found separation extremely painful, both had turned to Friends for

support. Supporters, strongly identified with 'their' party, became defensive and sought to blame the other; sides were taken and positions intensified.

Overseers themselves were divided over whether one of the partners had behaved badly, and whether the meeting therefore should be strongly supporting the other. A member of the meeting, who was not closely identified with any of the people concerned, was asked to see whether a meeting for clearness would be acceptable to the couple, and to convene and lead it if it were. In due course it took place, the couple themselves felt able to attend meeting for worship together and to tell Friends that matters had now been finally arranged. Thanks for support given and a request that they should now be left quietly to adjust were well received.

7. Around the country, various meetings hold responsibility for trust funds and for the management of charitable bodies or work. Where practices, boundaries or visions have changed over the years, it is easy for misunderstandings to creep in which lead to complex situations. Disagreements are particularly painful when they get in the way of valuable work for social and Quaker concerns.

   Formal mediation is not always acceptable, but the intervention of mediators has been helpful in a number of ways:

   An exploratory weekend workshop in a serene and peaceful place provided an opportunity for one group. Facilitated by Friends with conflict resolution

experience, and with time set aside for shared activities and fellowship, they were able to discover common ground, and work out how they could approach areas of disagreement so that they no longer soured relationships and hampered ongoing work.

In another case a series of meetings, facilitated under mediation ground rules by three Friends from outside resulted in restored relationships, despite the fact that one of the parties had strongly opposed formal mediation.

Shuttle or indirect mediation, in which the mediators act as go-betweens, has paved the way for mediation or provided a solution in itself.

Mediators sometimes find themselves upholding individuals caught in the cross-fire, such as nominations committees faced with unpopular decisions, or office-holders who feel that their long and faithful service has not been appreciated.

Many problems are happily sorted with no conscious recourse to 'conflict resolution skills'. Some people seem to be natural problem solvers, not because they have special gifts denied to the rest of us, but because their conflict resolution skills have become a frame of mind rather than a bolt-on extra for use when a problem comes along. A growing number are finding that identifying the reasons why certain approaches are effective and practising the skills that they require has enabled them to help when conflict has called for attention. Some of these skills and approaches will be described below for those who wish to explore them further.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How well equipped is our meeting to respond to conflict in an affirming and constructive way?
2. Do we possess the skills within the meeting?
3. What systems have we in place for finding appropriate help?

Acquiring the skills

> *The role of the mediator has a special quality… The reconciler must believe that there is a solution. But to be valid it must be discovered by the parties involved, in a joint search; if it comes from him or her, it will either be rejected out of hand or adopted and then subtly sabotaged. This demands great forbearance: not only in not making suggestions, but also in containing the painful feelings experienced during the process, not passing this pain back to the quarrelling parties, but finding one's own way of resolving it without further hurt to anyone.*
>
> John Lampen
> *Mending hurts,* p. 43

Conflict resolution is not a soft option. It is intensely demanding, because it seeks not to impose or even offer a solution to those who are in conflict, but facilitates new perception from within. The recent growth of mediation in the family, community or workplace has identified helpful approaches and taught specific skills and processes for resolving conflict. These provide a framework within which attitudes can be changed and healing take place.

Perhaps the most effective of all is listening. We listen for many reasons – pleasure at the sound of what we are hearing, for information or learning or for friendly enjoyment and sharing. In some cases, no demands are made on us; in others specific attention or discipline is required. The aim of active and attentive listening is that the speaker becomes aware of thoughts and feelings

which may have been unacknowledged, unrecognised or repressed. Focused, non-judgmental listening, perhaps with occasional brief and simple feedback, can show that the speaker has been truly heard, and may clarify issues and point the way ahead. Contributions such as our own experience, unwanted advice, false assurances or shared gloom, however well-meaning, may not be helpful and can deprive someone of sorely needed, quality listening.

Language plays a major part. Feelings of frustration, power-lessness, anger or fear often cause people to become defensive and seek their own goals at the expense of others'. A skilled and sensitive choice of words can have a profound effect. Reframing a statement in a way that is descriptive but does not blame can help disputing parties move from entrenched positions to a genuine statement of their needs or fears. With imagination it is possible then to shift the mood from one of past problems to one which considers ideal solutions, generating ideas and creating options from which a choice can be made.

Children are wonderfully inventive, and if asked, will provide a host of suggestions for dealing with a situation. As we grow older and take on responsibilities, we develop our critical judgement and a habitual caution may over-ride creativity. Learning to separate imaginative exploration from a critical evaluation of possibilities is part of the problem-solving process.

Perhaps the most important attribute of the peacemaker is a manner that affirms the personal worth of each and every person, which as Friends we term 'that of God in every one'. Translating this belief into action is not always as straightforward as it seems. Some people 'bring out the best in us', and we respond openly and easily. With others,

we are uncomfortable or defensive. Active conflict resolution demands of us an ability to relate, not to the outward, presenting behaviour of other people, but to that which we believe is buried beneath it: to see a 'problem person' as a person with a problem.

An affirming manner stems from belief in ourselves; not pretending that we are something we are not, nor that we are better than others, but believing that we are loved and valued for what we are. People who have lost that belief need above all to have it restored; affirmation is the bedrock on which constructive conflict resolution is built.

Some simple techniques and processes

1. Active listening

Good listeners make the speaker feel comfortable by a relaxed, friendly and interested manner. Seating position is important; setting chairs at right angles to each other allows easy eye contact and the opportunity to avoid it when needed. Open body language, non-verbal responses like nods and murmurs and open-ended questions encourage the speaker. Being comfortable with silence helps people to take thinking time.

Avoiding the temptation to interrupt, to put words into the speaker's mouth or finish their sentences for them encourages an unhindered flow of thought and words. Similarly, the listener's personal views and experience, however relevant they seem, may not be helpful at this time.

Reflecting back what the listener has understood, using objective language that neither blames nor condones, enables the speaker to feel heard. It is important, if this is

done, to check that the reflection is still acceptable to the speaker, and that it has not diluted or altered what he or she wanted to express.

2. *Separating facts from feelings*

A fact can be measured or verified. It is very easy to believe that facts are real and feelings are imaginary and that somehow facts are therefore more important and feelings can be dismissed.

A feeling is something we experience inside us; it exists even if it has no rational foundation. People may feel very frightened of somebody who has no intention of doing them any harm, but the fear is real. Feelings are a natural response to outside events; they are neither good nor bad in themselves; it is anti-social or aggressive behaviour as a result of uncomfortable feelings that may need to be challenged.

Sometimes people in conflict are only too pleased to have a chance to talk about how they feel. Many others keep their feelings strictly bottled up; they may avoid having to say how they really feel, because that makes them feel vulnerable.

One of the tasks of the mediator is to build an atmosphere of trust in which feelings can be expressed. Open questions such as 'What happened then/when...? How did you feel when that happened?' or 'What was the effect of that?' will encourage someone to express the feelings associated with a particular person or event. It may then be possible to address the other person with 'Pat, how do you react to what Chris has just said?' The use of personal names makes the approach less threatening. If ground rules can be observed, the way may be clear for an honest expression of hurt and

anger which can be heard by the other party for perhaps the first time. There may be a strong emotional release, and the mediator must remain affirming and assertive to make sure the exchange does not get out of control.

Once a feeling has been recognised and accepted the way may be open for exploring what the associated needs are.

A problem that frequently presents itself is the person who never stops telling others about his or her feelings or troubles. There is no easy answer here. Evasion merely postpones the next attempt; submission to yet another onslaught causes mounting resentment and a determination to avoid the person in future, which continues the vicious circle. A way which can meet the needs of both people is to say clearly 'I would be happy to hear this, but I only have [time] and then I must go.' During that interval, quality listening should be given, but it is important that it comes to an end at the specified point. Eventually, it will be noticed. If there is a genuine problem, it is then more likely that it can be brought into the open and help enlisted.

3. Co-operative assertiveness

Defining boundaries may be difficult and Friends are understandably reluctant to adopt an authoritarian manner. But it is all too easy to use that reluctance as an excuse for not confronting unacceptable statements or behaviour at the time they take place, when a simple statement of unease would raise awareness and clear the way for straightforward speaking and listening. The 'I-statement' makes a clear declaration of the speaker's need, while respecting the integrity of both parties. 'I'm sorry, but I am not able...' provides firmer ground than, for example, 'You can't expect me to...' .

Similarly, those who encourage two disputing people to express their feelings to each other must be confident of their ability to remain in control of the situation if emotions run strongly, without losing the sense of co-operation. Wording statements as descriptions of what the speaker needs, although they may still be challenging or confronting, is less likely to be experienced by the receiver as a personal attack than is a statement starting with 'You ought not' or 'You mustn't do that'. Mediators can use the I-statement either to express their own needs within the exchange – 'We will not be able to continue with this unless you are each able to listen to what the other is saying' or to encourage other people to describe the problem in the least threatening way – 'Could you express that another way which says what you feel when it happens?'. Using the person's name at the beginning lessens the feeling of confrontation.

More about 'I-statements' and other conflict resolution skills can be found in *Everyone can win, Ways and means today* and in many of the training manuals listed in the resources section, page 71.

4. *Reframing – or defining the problem in a non-threatening way*

Conflict situations are often complex, and are seen very differently from the different perspective of the people involved. Rewording what has been said in objective, non-emotive words may bring about new understanding and pave the way for adjustments in perception and behaviour.

Keeping it very simple avoids arguments. Examples illustrate the technique, but the actual words used are less important than the way in which they are said. A tone

which shows understanding of what is being felt, and implies neither approval nor blame, is most likely to make the speaker feel heard and able to be objective about what has just been said.

Example 1: 'The children aren't looked after properly any more. They are so badly behaved when they come out of their class, screaming and running around, they take away all the effect of meeting and drown out the notices.'

Reframed: 'You're troubled because the children come out of their class immediately after meeting, and their noise is disturbing after the silence and makes it hard to hear the notices?'

Example 2: 'That's no way to behave in a business meeting – they're always rushing to get their word in first and it isn't Quakerly.'

Reframed: 'You are worried because they don't observe a period of silence before speaking, and it is affecting the meeting?'

It is important that the redefining of the problem does not minimise the feelings that have been disclosed. If it is put forward with a degree of diffidence the speaker has 'permission' to challenge it, and offer a new re-wording. That in itself may help the speaker to recognise new aspects of the situation.

5. Four questions for problem solvers

Sometimes the use of conflict resolution skills in an informal setting is enough to bring about a solution or accommodation of the problem, but where this happy

situation does not exist, a framework is needed within which people can very slowly review their perceptions and consider changing behaviour.

Besides the individual skills, there are processes which can be used to open up and work through a problem. One simple framework is 'four questions for problem solvers'.

> What is the problem?
>
> How do you feel about it? *Sometimes better expressed as*: What effect is it having on you?
>
> What would you really like to happen?
>
> What could you actually do?

Each question should be put to both, or to all the people concerned before moving on to the next one. The sequence takes the group through four stages.

1. Identifying **FACTS** and defining the problem: this requires objectivity and a description of what is actually happening, for example 'S/he is telling other people things about me that are not true'.
2. Acknowledging the **FEELINGS** caused: accepting what is said, without questioning whether the feelings are justified at the rational level, for example 'I am frightened of them' can be acknowledged at this stage, even if 'they' have no intention actually to harm.
3. Visualising ideal solutions, however impracticable they might be. These **FANTASIES** are often the turning point as the focus shifts from the past to the future.
4. Considering what practical, realistic steps **FORWARD** might be agreed. Bearing in mind the

feelings, fears and needs expressed in the second stage and the wishes from the creative thinking exercise in the third, small steps can usually be negotiated which will slowly improve the situation.

People often ask the first and the last questions, but going through the intermediate stages opens up additional possibilities.

These questions are the basic framework of the mediation process. They may initiate a progressive series of in-depth discussions for a long-standing, painful conflict, but they are equally useful as a quick framework for do-it-yourself problem solving at the everyday level.

6. Ground rules

Conflict resolution is based on mutually agreed, mutually binding 'mini contracts'. By agreeing a minimum standard of behaviour before any problems are addressed, the mediators, or anybody who is involved in trying to reach a measure of agreement, can refer back to what was agreed, rather than fall back on an authoritarian demand for acceptable behaviour. Ground rules also reassure those who fear aggressive behaviour.

Ground rules are a helpful basis for any collaborative exercise where personal disclosures are likely to be made. They are based on respect for the individuals concerned, their need for confidentiality, time for talking and listening, and personal and emotional security.

If the atmosphere is very hostile the mediators will have to frame the ground rules themselves and obtain agreement to them. Sometimes it will be possible to ask the people concerned to suggest them, or to propose them in outline and ask for amendments or additions.

This acts as an example of co-operative working and lays an excellent foundation for what is to follow.

The ground rules may well be transgressed, but the initial agreement and intention to regard them is a first step in exercising self-control and co-operation.

They will run somewhere along the following lines:

> There will be no verbal or physical abuse.
>
> People will agree not to interrupt each other.
>
> What takes place during the mediation is confidential.
>
> Everyone will make a genuine attempt to seek a solution.

Ground rules for a workshop may well include:

> People may 'pass' if they are uncomfortable with a particular activity.
>
> Nobody will 'volunteer' someone else.

7. Creating an inclusive, affirming environment

We all have certain perceptions, see people in certain ways, and prejudge issues. Without them we should have to evaluate every event in our lives from scratch. However, these attitudes may not be accurate, fair or helpful. Some of them are based on ignorance and fear and are accepted without thinking.

Many Friends' meetings are loving communities. Valuing this for the treasure it is must not blind us to the fact that prejudice and discrimination do happen, often unwittingly and usually through lack of thought or awareness.

Attitudes are not fixed. We can change them, often

because of new knowledge or experience. It is not always easy to do. The first step is to increase our awareness of our own attitudes. Another is to learn how to challenge prejudiced and hurtful statements or behaviour in the most effective and least destructive way, aiming to open up a dialogue rather than produce a hostile-defensive response to what feels like criticism.

Raising our awareness of our own attitudes

Literally, 'discrimination' means 'to tell the difference between'. In current usage it is most frequently understood in terms of discrimination against some person or group. To raise our awareness of our own attitudes we can usefully ask ourselves:

- In what groups of people do I feel at home and confident?
- In what groups of people do I feel unsure of myself and lose confidence?
- What might bias me towards someone?
- What might bias me against someone?
- When did someone make a discriminatory remark or take a discriminatory action against me? How did I respond?
- When did I make a discriminatory remark or take a discriminatory action against someone? How did that person respond?

Useful responses to discriminatory statements

What makes you say that?

What has happened to make you feel that way?

Why do you think that happened?

Why do you think they did that?

That has not been my experience.

An 'I-statement' can be used to take charge of a situation which can neither be challenged nor ignored without making matters worse.

Affirmation of the intrinsic personal worth of every person is the basis of a manner that is inclusive rather than discriminatory and exclusive. Accepting ourselves for what we are allows us to explore our own prejudices without undue guilt, and not be threatened when we find we need to change. We should not expect never to make mistakes, but having done so, if our attitude is honest and informed and sensitive, we are less likely to block free and affirming communication to put things right.

Trying out, practising and developing skills

Practice is essential, as it is in the acquisition of any skill, and role play, resisted though it is by many people, provides an excellent vehicle for practising in a safe environment, with opportunities for feedback. The fictional case outlines on pages 32-40 can be used as scenarios for trying out clearness, threshing or other meetings, for practising individual skills or the mediation process itself. Constructively worded feedback is invaluable.

Knowledge of the techniques and structure of mediation can be gained from the many books and training manuals that now exist. They then need to be adapted for the age, background of the people concerned and level of severity, distress or danger that is involved in the specific situation.

What is not easily learned intellectually is the self-knowledge and self-awareness that are needed in order to cope effectively when people are in conflict and may therefore be manifesting insecurity and defensiveness. Strong emotions may be aroused and helpers or mediators need to be able to cope if resentment or anger is directed at them. Feelings of personal self-worth lead to recognising the worth of others, and to understanding that hostile or defensive behaviour can obscure the need for help, friendship and support. Personal growth takes place and confidence blossoms in a caring group, and a few people gathered together for training can support and stimulate each other.

1. Support and supervision

'Supervision' is an unpopular word, carrying connotations of a search for faults and inadequacies! Sensitively carried out, and combined with caring support, it is an essential requirement for those who undertake any intervention in the disturbed affairs of other people. Disregarding the need for some sort of oversight or mentoring of the mediator can carry a high price. There is also much to be gained from feedback to those who have a need and a requirement to know: not feedback of personal details which are confidential to those directly involved, but of the steps taken and their subsequent outcome.

2. Openness and confidentiality

A truthful and helpful dialogue presupposes an appropriate openness with each other, but also a sensitive regard for confidentiality. Balancing these is a skill that can be developed. We can learn from good practice in counselling, giving attention also to the requirements of

the Data Protection Act. We can reflect on the Truth Testimony in the experience of Friends, consider our understanding of trust, and agree when knowledge must be passed on if someone is at risk. We can become aware of our own emotions and find acceptable ways to gain support, as indicated above, and so avoid the temptation to gossip because the burden of knowledge has become unbearable. Guidance on openness and confidentiality is available from the Committee on Eldership & Oversight.

3. General conflict resolution workshops

A conflict resolution workshop which identifies and practises conflict resolution skills will raise awareness, consolidate existing skills and show where gaps exist. Such workshops provide a secure and understanding environment where people can explore the philosophy and practice of conflict resolution. They are a good team-building opportunity, allowing people to get to know each other better, deepen understanding and discover strengths and, possibly, weaknesses. The aim may be either to enhance knowledge and skills or to address a particular problem. They may offer solutions or point the way towards further focused work on a particular skill or subject.

Many meetings have members with experience as facilitators who can form a group to explore constructive responses to conflict. These explorations can start quite gently with listening and affirmation activities, and as confidence increases, move on to practise language skills such as assertiveness and reframing accusations in less inflammatory terms. Using simulation activities, participants can analyse decision-making methods and try out various problem-solving processes by working through imaginary conflicts in role play.

The skills gained will be of value in themselves if the exercise goes no further. On the other hand, participants may wish to share them with the meeting through a workshop or by being a resource to those responsible for oversight and eldership. The Quaker Bookshop at Friends House can direct enquirers to training manuals. Many of those designed for work with young people have a refreshing directness; they share the same underlying principles as those for adult use and can easily be adapted.

A meeting which does not have direct access to facilitation skills, or where it is felt right to seek such help from outside, can contact Quaker Life or Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW), who can put you in touch with suitably qualified people.

Mediation UK can supply a list of conflict resolution trainers, who are usually also qualified to facilitate workshops. Organisations like Leap Confronting Conflict offer training workshops from their North London base. Although most of their conflict resolution work takes place with young people their training is not restricted or applicable only to work with youngsters. They may or may not be members of the Religious Society of Friends. Leap Confronting Conflict are specialists in designing and delivering conflict resolution workshops for and with young people (aged 13-25 years). Training for young people and courses for adults working with young people are delivered from their London base, they have a large schools work programme, a UK wide programme working with young people in gangs, and they manage a youth-led mediators' network. They offer a consultancy service to organisations needing specialised input or training around working with young people and conflict.

4. Mediation Training

Local mediation services offer training for their own volunteers, often free of charge. Some courses are open to members of the community who are interested in learning the skills but do not wish to become mediators with the service; there is likely to be a charge for such training. Mediation UK publishes a quarterly magazine *Mediation Matters* which includes information about training opportunities across the country. Some courses are high-priced, but many offer excellent value for money; bursaries may be available. Monthly or preparative meetings may well be able to offer financial help to one of their members seeking to gain conflict resolution skills.

5. Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre

Woodbrooke offers courses which explore the philosophy and practice of conflict resolution and many other aspects of building Quaker communities. Woodbrooke has a comprehensive library and a small but wide-ranging bookstall.

❁ See Organisations, pages 79-82.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. What are the resources of our meeting in terms of people with conflict resolution skills?
2. And in terms of practices or structures that allow them to be used?
3. Do we wish to take steps towards developing the conflict resolution and mediation skills within the meeting?
4. If not, have we a policy for dealing with conflict? Or do we believe it is better to leave the shaping of an appropriate policy till something actually happens, and decide in the light of circumstances at the time?

Conclusion

> *As a Quaker, I see peace as much more than just the absence of violence and war. We each, individually, need to be at peace, with ourselves, with those around us, with those we don't know, with the planet. A tall order, and one which I am still striving to fulfil. I doubt I ever will entirely, but I'll keep trying.*
>
> Harry Albright
> *editorial in* The Friend
> *7 January 2000*

Conflict is inherent in change and renewal. We should not be surprised that it surfaces. Furthermore, Friends' commitment to a Testimony which rejects violence and coercion demands that we maintain and develop systems for handling conflict in a way which promotes healing and growth.

The increase in the use of mediation and alternative dispute resolution is evident both within and outside the Religious Society of Friends. Friends have been strongly involved in this movement, perhaps because its philosophy and practices are deeply embedded in Quaker beliefs and procedures.

The more we are able to apply these living skills to conflict in our own meetings, the more authentic and convincing will be our witness that there are effective alternatives to war and violence on the larger scale.

Appendices

1. Terminology

Terminology, even within conflict resolution circles, is open to different interpretations, and it may be necessary in a local situation to clarify what each person understands by certain terms.

Conflict describes a situation of opposing interests or strongly held views on a matter of importance. Within this book conflict is generally considered to be neither good nor bad in itself; the responses that are made to it are what determines whether it is helpful or unhelpful. However, it is so often associated with difficult or painful feelings that its negative associations are strong.

The term **problem** is used here to describe a disagreement or conflict that is disrupting relationships or a community to an unacceptable level.

Other terms related to conflict management include:

Advocacy – to speak or act on behalf of a person who, for whatever reason, is not able to act unaided on his or her own behalf.

Arbitration – a process where an outside person or party listens to and considers both sides of a conflict, then decides on the course of action to be followed. It differs from mediation in that the parties agree beforehand to abide by the arbitrator's decision whereas in mediation, the parties remain responsible throughout for choosing their own course of action.

Conciliation – used as a general term to cover an active but informal moving together towards the resolution of a conflict situation, with or without the intervention of an outside party. Sometimes it refers to a more structured process similar to mediation.

Mediation – literally, being in the middle – refers to an intervention by an outside, impartial party in a conflict. The aim is to help the people in dispute to talk through their problem in a way that would not be possible if they were on their own. The mediators' role is not to decide who is right or wrong, or what should or should not have been done; they do not represent or act on behalf of either party, advise what to do, or take over the management of the problem. They will usually use a sequence of questions to help the participants identify the cause(s) of the problem, how it affects them personally, how they would like to see it solved, and what small, practical steps they could both take to improve the situation. Mediation can follow a formal process or be conducted in a relatively unstructured way.

Indirect or shuttle mediation is a method used where there is a wish to reach a solution but the parties feel unable to meet face to face. Each talks separately with the mediators to clarify what matters they wish to have raised with the other party. This may enable the parties to meet at a later stage or to agree a solution through the mediators.

Negotiation – Generally used for the process of people in dispute working out an agreement between themselves, possibly with outside help.

2. Role play

Role play is essential in conflict resolution training to allow people to practise the skills and to experience the feelings involved in a dispute, but it does need an experienced and skilled facilitator. For a group unaccustomed to role play, experience should first be gained with short, simple and relatively undemanding scenarios before going on to more confrontational issues. Those who are deeply resistant to being involved have a useful role as an observer. They can either be left free to notice what they wish, or have their attention directed to specific issues through the observers' notes (*see page 56*).

Role play can arouse strong feelings and trigger memories of past experience, so it is important that the role is firmly left behind at the end. Uncomfortable feelings may need to be shared at that time and worked through. A role name on an adhesive name label for each participant not only helps the facilitator to identify what is happening, but can enable the player, symbolically, to separate from the role at the end as the label is peeled off. Feelings are best shared, first in the small role-play group, and later discussed with the whole group at whatever level is comfortable. This also gives the chance to compare the different outcomes which are the likely result of any scenario.

Most mediation role-plays will be in small groups. A clear explanation of what they are going to do, with time for questions, is essential before anybody begins. Supporting this with a handout helps to keep the role plays realistic, and reminds the participants about 'de-roleing' at the end. A handout (see page 56??) is also useful if several role plays are taking place together as it enables early finishers to manage their de-roleing and feedback if the facilitator

is occupied with another group. The facilitator should still check personally with each group.

Handouts and observers' notes are best if they are written with the specific users in mind; experienced groups will not need to have such a full explanation, while those to whom either role play or mediation is new will welcome more detailed guidance.

Information that may be useful in a handout includes:

A simple de-roleing routine:

> At the end ask yourself these questions and share the answers with the others in your role-play group:
>
> > 'How do I feel, now, in role?'
> >
> > Then remove the name label, listening to the sound as it separates from you.
> >
> > 'How do I feel, now, as myself?'
>
> Talk through any uncomfortable feeling you may have left with your group or the facilitator.

Observers' notes

These can include:

> What specific skills did you see being well used?
>
> How did the atmosphere at the end compare with that at the beginning?
>
> Was there a turning point? What brought it about?
>
> What did you see that was particularly helpful or affirming?
>
> Were there any missed opportunities?

The three roles in a mediation role play:

1 The parties to the dispute

Prepare yourself before the mediation begins by thinking about what your character needs in order to resolve the situation. The more realistic you can make your character, the more it will help the mediators, but don't get carried away! In an actual mediation session, people have usually come because they really want to resolve the problem. Remember how your character felt during the role play so you can give the mediators feedback at the end. Make sure you have thoroughly 'de-roled' at the end. If you are left feeling uncomfortable about anything, talk it through with the rest of the group.

2 The mediators

Act as if the role play is a real mediation session. Don't be afraid of making mistakes; that is the way everyone learns. Remember it is the process that is solving the problem. It doesn't all depend on you. Trust the process. Listen carefully to the feedback you receive after the role play and use it to improve your skills. Make sure you have thoroughly 'de-roled' at the end. If you are left feeling uncomfortable about anything, talk it through with the rest of the group.

3 The observers

Yours is a very important role. You can learn a great deal from watching others mediate and you help them by giving them good feedback. Use your observer's notes to guide you in observing, but note down

anything else that occurs to you that is not covered by the sheet. If you are left feeling uncomfortable about anything, talk it through with the rest of the group.

Giving feedback:

Feedback is what you say to people to help them to improve their performance in some way. It is:

- Related to something not someone – what was said or done and not the person concerned
- Balanced – describing both what was done well and what could be improved
- Specific – describing a particular action or event
- About things that can be changed
- Timely – at the time it happens
- 'Owned' – your own personal opinion from your own experience.

Receiving feedback:

Use feedback to improve your skills, not to criticise yourself.

Listen to both the positive and the negative feedback. If no positive feedback is given, think of some for yourself.

Remember that feedback is another person's opinions and observations – it is not necessarily the truth.

Feedback is as much about the person who is giving it as about the person who is receiving it.

Remember that none of us does everything right all the time – the really skilled people have used their mistakes to improve their skills.

Listen to everything that is said; later, when you have time, go over it alone or with someone you trust. Pay attention to the things that help you, forget what is of no use.

Receiving feedback is as hard as giving it, if not harder. Most of us feel that it is ourselves who are being criticised. Don't take it personally – it's about what you did, not about you. Expect to make mistakes – we all do it. That's how we get better at things. Feel good about what was well done, change what wasn't. Forget anything that wasn't good feedback.

Useful feedback questions:

How did it go?

What was really good about it?

What could be better next time?

Other comments?

'Three roles' and 'Feedback' adapted with thanks from Rick Cohen of School Mediation Associates.

3. *Conflict Management Styles*

Each person is unique. We all use strategies for responding to conflict, and patterns can be identified within the diversity. Different situations call for different styles: some are helpful in certain situations and not in others. The descriptions below should not be taken too seriously but they are helpful, not as personal value judgements, but as an aid to awareness of our own and other people's ways of responding to a situation of conflicting interests. An awareness of one's natural style and an ability to slip into another when appropriate are valuable conflict resolution skills.

When we are involved in conflict, there are two main concerns to consider:

- Achieving personal goals
- Maintaining a good relationship with the other person

Turtles withdraw into their shells to avoid conflicts. They are willing to give up both their personal goals and their relationships. They avoid the issues over which the conflict is taking place and the people with whom they are in conflict. They prefer to withdraw (physically and psychologically) rather than face them.

Sharks try to overpower their opponents. Their goals are far more important to them than their relationships. They are not concerned with the needs of others and seek to achieve their goals at all costs. Sharks assume that one side wins and the other loses. Winning gives them a sense of pride and achievement: losing a sense of weakness, inadequacy and failure. They try to win by attacking, overpowering, overwhelming and intimidating others.

Teddy bears rank relationships as more important than their own goals. They want to be accepted and liked by others, and think that conflicts should be avoided in favour of harmony. They believe that conflicts cannot be discussed without someone getting hurt, and that will ruin the relationship. To preserve the relationship they give up their goals.

Foxes are moderately concerned with their own goals and their relationships with others. They seek a compromise – each giving up part of their goals. They seek the middle ground and will make some sacrifice to find agreement for the common good.

Owls value highly both their own goals and relationships. They view a conflict as a problem to be solved and seek a solution that achieves everyone's goals. By seeking resolutions that satisfy both themselves and the other side, owls maintain the relationship; they are not satisfied until solutions are found and the tensions and negative feelings resolved.

Ostriches, although extremely well equipped for effective action, both confronting and defensive, frequently become vulnerable by putting themselves in a position where it is impossible to see the problem. Unfortunately, this damages their relationships and does nothing to achieve their goals.

Lemmings, when threatened, make relationships of paramount importance. As a result, their goals may be lost through following blindly the actions of the peer group, which may be counter-effective or disastrous.

Adapted, with thanks, from the Mediation UK training manual.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. In what different sort of conflict is each style most appropriate?
2. Are we equally comfortable with each of the conflict management styles?
3. How would each of us adapt our own style when face to face with the others?
4. What others can we identify?

4. Resources

For current prices and availability of specific titles, and a general catalogue, including *Quaker faith & practice* and the *Book of Meetings*, contact the Quaker Bookshop. A select list of Quaker publications on eldership and oversight is produced by the Committee on Eldership & Oversight, and can be obtained from CEO or from the Bookshop. A list of items on oversight and eldership that are free or can be borrowed can be obtained from CEO. For any enquiry on oversight and eldership, contact the Secretary of the Committee on Eldership & Oversight (see page 79).

The Quaker Bookshop

Open to personal customers Monday – Friday, 9.00–5.00. Orders can be placed by telephone, fax, email or on the web any time. An online catalogue is available with secure online ordering facility on www.quaker.org.uk/bookshop.

Friends House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ
Telephone: (020) 7663 1030; Fax: (020) 7663 1008
Web: www.quaker.org.uk/bookshop
E-mail: <bookshop@quaker.org.uk>

Quaker Life Resources Room

Most of the books listed in *Conflict in meetings* as well as many other books of special interest to Quakers can be borrowed by post or in person from the Quaker Life Resources Room, or consulted in the Library of Britain Yearly Meeting, at Friends House (see page 79). The catalogue is now available on line and can be searched by category, medium or topic: go to www.quaker.org.uk/library and click on 'search the

catalogue'. The library of your local or neighbouring meeting may have the books listed, plus many other helpful but out of print books, such as Douglas Steere *Where words come from* and Robert Halliday *Mind the oneness*. Just ask the meeting librarian!

Publications and videos

The three basic resources are of course:

Quaker faith & practice, 3rd edition 2005, The book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain. The full text is also available online on www.quaker.org.uk/qfp

Quaker faith & practice Supplement, chapters 3-17 of the 3rd edition, 2005, now available as a separate volume.

The Book of Meetings, new edition available from the Quaker Bookshop each February listing contact details for Quaker meetings and organisations in Britain. Or go to the website of Britain Yearly Meeting www.quaker.org.uk

Conflict resolution and mediation

Below is a selection of the many books and manuals now available that address conflict. Subtle differences of style and background make some more appropriate than others for individual use. Browsing in a shop or on the Internet may be fruitful. The following have all proved useful.

Beer, Jennifer and Stief, Eileen, *The mediator's handbook*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Press 1997

The training manual of one of the first community mediation services in the USA; third revision.

Requires some adaptation for UK culture and language, but is clear, simple and very practical.

Cornelius, Stella and Faire, Shoshana, *Everyone can win; how to resolve conflict*. London: Simon Schuster, 1989

A simple practical introduction to conflict resolution aimed at reaching win-win solutions; easy to read and applicable to a wide range of age and situations.

Craig, Yvonne, *Peacemaking for churches.* London: SPCK, 1999

Peacemaking and conflict resolution explored against a Christian church background by a counsellor, magistrate and mediator.

Fisher, Roger and Ury, William, *Getting to yes.* London: Arrow, 1990

One of the earliest books on conflict resolution theory; concise outline of the pragmatic approach.

Fisher, Roger and Brown, Scott, *Getting together: building a relationship that gets to yes.* London: Business Books Limited, 1989

Following on from *Getting to yes*, it deals with building long-term quality relationships, from working relationships.

Shrock-Shenk, Carolyn & Ressler, Lawrence, eds, *Making peace with conflict: practical skills for conflict transformation*. Telford, PA: Pandora Press US, 1999

A series of essays produced by the Mennonite Conciliation Service in Pennsylvania. Many treasures, particularly on listening and speaking.

With young people in mind

The following books have been written with young people in mind, but the material addresses the same needs and springs from the same basic principles. They are frequently more clear and direct than the adult works and the presentation can be adapted by anyone with facilitation skills.

Broadwood, Jo and Carmichael, Helen, *Tackling bullying: conflict resolution with young people,* London: LBTH Learning Design, 1996.

A manual of materials designed to provide ideas for activities though which young people aged twelve years and over can explore the issues involved in bullying behaviour.

Clifford, Sara and Hermann, Anna, *Making a leap: Theatre of empowerment*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1998.

A practical handbook for those wanting to use drama and theatre to explore personal and social issues in their work with young people. Developed from ten years of active research in community settings, the authors' holistic approach to theatre-making draws on a range of disciplines, including theatre in education, community theatre, youth work, group work and conflict resolution.

Darke, Dorothy and Rustin, Barbara, eds, *Dealing with conflict*. York: Sessions, 1999

From confrontation to co-operation: a citizenship project for 14-18 year old students including mediation and peacemaking skills, based on ideas developed at the School for Peace in Neve Shalom - Wahat al Salam.

Faber, Adele and Mazlish, Elaine, *How to talk so kids will listen and listen so kids will talk.* New York: Avon Books, 1999

An excellent book; the title is self-explanatory.

Fine, Nic and Macbeth, Fiona, *Playing with fire.* Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 1995 (orig 1992)

Tried and tested conflict resolution activities for use with young people in a wide range of situations.

Kingston Friends Workshop Group, *Ways and means today.* Kingston: the Group, 1996

Simply explained principles of co-operative conflict resolution philosophy, with training activities and sample agendas. There is also an accompanying videotape, *Step by step to problem solving*

Lampen, John, *The Peace Kit: Everyday peace making for young people*. Second ed. London: Quaker Books, 2005.

Written to help young people of 10 and upwards to understand their own feelings and other people's, and find ways of dealing with them. Adults gain a lot from it, too.

Leimdorfer, Tom, *Once upon a conflict.* London: Quaker Books 2004

Traditional fairy tales presented as scenarios for exercises and role-play in a workshop setting.

Tyrrell, Jerry, *Peer mediation*, London: Souvenir Press 2002

A process for primary schools, encouraging mediation skills in young children.

Whitehouse, Éliane and Warwick, Pudney, *A volcano in my tummy.* New Society Press, 1996

Designed for adults to help children handle anger – invaluable and easily adaptable for use with adults, alone or in workshops.

Quaker publications

For a full list, see the general Quaker catalogue available from the Bookshop, or the select list on eldership and oversight obtainable from the Committee on Eldership & Oversight at Friends House, or download it from the Britain Yearly Meeting website, www.quaker.org.uk.

Clearness: a brief annotated resources list Free, regularly updated

Sexual harassment a leaflet for those responsible for eldership, oversight and pastoral care

A Delicate balance: sexual harassment? a leaflet for display in meeting houses and at Quaker gatherings. These two leaflets free from the Committee on Eldership & Oversight, or to download from www.quaker.org.uk

Pastoral care of children and young people. London: Quaker Books, 2001

This is who I am: Listening with older friends. London: Quaker Books, 2003. A good introduction to good listening, with people of any age too.

Fisher, Simon, *Spirited living: Waging conflict, building peace*. London: Quaker Books, 2004.

The 2004 Swarthmore lecture.

Glazer, Daphne, *Trespass and trust: Quaker meetings and sex offenders.* London: Quaker Books, 2004

Meetings have faced honestly situations that can evoke anxiety, ensuring the inclusion of members in

deciding guidelines, listening to survivors, aiming to protect the vulnerable and keep offenders from reoffending.

Meeting safety: a code of good practice for volunteers working on children and young people's activities and events. London: Quaker Home Service, 2001; and
Supplement to Meeting safety: Procedures for working with the Criminal Records Bureau Procedures. London: Quaker Life, 2002

Good practice and team work can build safe, positive communities where participants learn to manage conflict well.

Redfern, Keith, *Before the meeting: a handbook for clerks.* London: QHS, 1994

Assistance for clerks and information on the Quaker business method

Other Quaker publications

Cronk, Sandra, *Gospel order.* Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1991, (Pendle Hill Pamphlet 297)

A Quaker understanding of faithful church community

Kelly, Thomas, *A testament of devotion.* San Francisco: Harper, 1996

In print since 1941. Social concern is the dynamic Life of God at work in the world; Kelly reflects on the perpetual return of the soul into the inner sanctuary, on the action of the Light.

Loring, Patricia, *Listening spirituality*. Washington, DC: Openings Press, 1997 and 1999.

Volume I. Personal spiritual practices among Friends; Volume II Corporate Spiritual Practice.

Practical spirituality, with, among many other treasures, an excellent description of worship sharing in Volume I. Also extensive reference and resources lists.

Loring, Patricia, *Spiritual discernment: the context and goal of clearness committees*. Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1992, (Pendle Hill Pamphlet 305)

Discernment and the evolution and practicalities of clearness committees in the Society of Friends.

McBee, Patricia, ed, *Grounded in God: care and nurture in Friends Meetings*. Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Press of Friends General Conference, 2002

Essential reading and resource for all involved in oversight or eldership, including straightforward articles on listening, clearness, separation and divorce, conflicts in meetings, and support in times of trouble.

Morley, Barry, *Beyond consensus.* Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1993, (Pendle Hill Pamphlet 307)

On salvaging the sense of the meeting

New England Yearly Meeting, *Living with oneself and others: working papers on aspects of family life.* Worcester MA: NEYM, 1993

Discussion papers prepared by a working group, who clearly state that Friends in NEYM were not in unity but have published them 'as a working tool in Friends' search for clarity and Light' as they face changing social mores. Cover marriage and separation issues, sexuality, ageing and youth, etc., offer suggestions, questions for discussion, reflection, clearness meetings and a huge bibliography.

Sheeran, Michael J. *Beyond majority rule.* Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1996.

A study in depth of Quaker decision-making by a Jesuit scholar, full of historical, spiritual and practical treasures.

Dealing with difficult behaviour in meeting for worship: (formerly titled *The wounded meeting*). Philadelphia, PA: Quaker Press, 2002.

Meeting the needs of the many while responding to the needs of the few; explore your options and find caring solutions.

Videotapes

The search for unity and *Not in the way of the world.* Two videotapes on the Quaker business method and accompanying booklet.

Following the format suggested in the notes for group leaders demands a great deal of preparation and discussion time, but there is much of value. Reactions to the tapes are varied, but they make an excellent discussion starter. The booklet contains a good description of worship sharing.

Community mediation. Mediation UK (see page 72 for address).

Describes the work of a community mediation service.

Step by step to problem solving. Kingston Friends Workshop Group. Accompanies the book *Ways and means today*, above.

Organisations

Britain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) You can make contact with any meeting or Quaker group via the *Book of Meetings* or the central offices, where you will also find the Quaker Bookshop, the Library and Resources Room, the Recording Clerk's Office, and departments such as Quaker Peace & Social Witness, and Quaker Life which exists to support and strengthen the life of local meetings.

173-177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ
Telephone: (020) 7663 1000
Fax: (020) 7663 1001
E-mail: ql@quaker.org.uk
Website: http://www.quaker.org.uk

To contact the Clerk or Secretary of the Committee on Eldership & Oversight for information, advice or resources, to find out about training, or to discuss a particular issue of pastoral care, including a conflict, in confidence if wished:
Direct telephone: 020 7663 1023
E-mail: anneh@quaker.org.uk

Leap Confronting Conflict is the specialist national youth organisation exploring the causes of and alternatives to conflict in young people's lives, delivers direct work with young people. It offers training programmes, consultancy and publications for organisations and adults working with young people.

The Leap Centre
8 Lennox Road, Finsbury Park, London N4 3NW
Tel: (020) 7272 5630
Fax: (020) 7272 8405
Website: http://www/leaplinx.com

London Mennonite Centre Mennonites have a long record of peace-building and conflict resolution: their Bridge Builders project can deal with conflict in religious congregations and organisations, offering training and mediation services. The Centre also sells books including some on conflict transformation, and has a library, two guestrooms and a prayer hut.

London Mennonite Centre
14 Shepherds Hill, London N6 5AQ
Tel: 0845 4500 214
Fax: 020 8341 6807
AlastairMcKay@menno.org.uk
website: http://www.Menno.org.uk

Mediation UK is a national voluntary organisation dedicated to developing constructive means of resolving conflicts in communities. It offers training, resources, publications, links to other organisations undertaking related work, contact details for local mediation services, and can put you in touch with mediators who are 'competent to practice'.

Alexander House, Telephone Avenue, Bristol BS1 4BS
Tel: 0117 904 6661
Fax: 0117 904 3331
E-mail: enquiry@mediationuk. org.uk
Website: http://www.mediationuk.org.uk

School Mediation Associates (in the USA) provide resources, training and services that help students, educators and parents manage school-based conflicts most effectively. Their publications provide information about mediating challenging disputes (involving gangs, sexual harassment, large groups, etc.) and implementing peer mediation programs.

School Mediation Associates
134 W Standish Road
Watertown, MA 02472, USA
sma@schoolmediation.com
Tel: 001-617-926-0994
http://www.schoolmediation.com

Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre offers short residential courses and conferences on all aspects of Quakerism, longer programmes of study, study materials for individuals or groups, and events run in meetings. Quaker Groups may book into the Centre to run their own events, independently or in partnership with Woodbrooke. There are also programmes of Quaker Studies, in conjunction with Birmingham University, leading to postgraduate qualifications.

The Committee on Eldership & Oversight works in partnership with Woodbrooke on courses and conferences on the spiritual life of meetings and pastoral care – including conflict. Details of 'Building Harmony', 'Finding New Ways Through' and other similar courses that take this book *Conflict in Meetings* further, and other relevant courses, can be found in Woodbrooke's brochure of courses and events issued twice a year. Full information and updates can be found on the website.

Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre
1046 Bristol Road
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QUAKERbooks

About *Conflict in Meetings* (2nd edition)

Conflict is inseparable from adventurous living. Whether it constrains or liberates us depends to a large extent on how we respond to it. This book encourages Friends to seek help where needed: there are lists of resources and useful organisations. The book can be read for interest, for general information or in study groups: discussion questions and practical exercises help us grasp the thorniest issues.

This book is for clerks, those responsible for eldership or oversight, and anyone called to deal with potential or actual conflict. It will enable Friends to identify the resources in their own meetings and use them to forge a living, wholly owned Peace Testimony for the twenty-first century, not just about opposition to war and violence but as a way of living our lives.

This is the fourth in a series of handbooks offering information, support and guidance to all those responsible for eldership and oversight. It has been revised following the experience of meetings using it, and the resources lists updated. This series is based on the insights of Quakers in Britain Yearly Meeting and covers many aspects of the spiritual life of the Quaker community, and its expression in pastoral care.

The Committee on Eldership & Oversight organises a gathering at the time of Yearly Meeting and, in cooperation with Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, offers courses in oversight and eldership.

£5.00