



## Becoming the Quakers the World Needs

### A Spiritual Reflection for World Quaker Day

Patricia Thomas, Campus Friends Meeting  
Wilmington Yearly Meeting, USA

*To become (becoming) suggests a beginning, a middle and an arrival. Becoming suggests a journey which starts here and now with you and me. Becoming means transformation and requires intentionality and commitment on our part.*

Hello, Friends. I am Patricia Thomas, presiding clerk of Wilmington Yearly Meeting in Ohio and Tennessee, USA. My membership is in Campus Friends Meeting, a welcoming and affirming unprogrammed meeting for worship in Wilmington, Ohio. The quotes in my essay come from Barry Morley's Pendle Hill Pamphlet *BEYOND CONSENSUS: Salvaging Sense of the meeting*.

*"Sense of the meeting requires listening rather than contending, weighing rather than reacting. It requires the kind of patience that understands that all things will work themselves out in the end."* <sup>(14)</sup>

After years of service as presiding clerk of various committees and task forces, monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings I am convinced that Quaker business process when it is faithfully practiced, is our gift to the world. When Friends understand the difference between *consensus* and *sense of the meeting*, when we have learned the art of listening, when we release our ideas into the deep fellowship of the Spirit, and when we allow ourselves to be directed to the solution that awaits us, God gets a voice, and the business session becomes a *meeting for worship with attention to business*. In this sacred space we are open to transformation

*"When I am able to set my ideas aside, and you are able to set your ideas aside, (then) doors are opened which allow solutions to enter on a shaft of Light."* <sup>(13)</sup>

Consensus is when we take charge of finding a satisfactory decision. Reaching consensus often involves compromising until a good enough agreement is reached



and our minds are satisfied. *Sense of the meeting* requires releasing our agenda in order to listen to God's agenda. I like to think of this process as listening to three voices: the 'voice' of a proposed minute or concern, the voice(s) of others in discussion, and the Divine Voice.

*"When we seek the sense of the meeting, the decision is a by-product. It happens along the way. The purpose of seeking the sense of the meeting is to gather ourselves in unity in the presence of Light" (p15)*

So, how do we reach *sense of the meeting*? Years ago, I heard Friend Parker Palmer offer a place to start when he answered a similar question this way: When someone is speaking their opinion, listen for what you agree with and speak to it. If we are busy constructing a clever rebuttal to demonstrate how stupid and wrong the other person is we squander an opportunity for dialogue, for adjusting our opinion, for seeking the will of God together.

*"The process through which Quakers reach the sense of the meeting transforms hearts, disarms minds, and feeds the spirit." (25)*

As Friends consider the budget or the calling of a new pastor or taking up a new ministry while also listening for the leading of the Spirit, faith and practice merge. If we are intentional about pouring our collective energy into holding meetings for worship with attention to business which are the God Centered, Spirit led process that speaks deeply to our condition, we will have come a long way on the journey to becoming the Quakers the world needs.

*"Sense of the meeting leads us to collective internal harmony. A world at peace is many collective internal harmonies." (30)*

And what does the world need that Friends experience in the way we conduct our business? We rediscover how hard it is to unite when all we bring to the table is our opinion. We find that in making space for every voice, we learn to value each other. Friends who are quick to speak learn to temper their tongue. In the gentle ebb and flow of listening, speaking and silence, we become better listeners especially when we listen for what we agree with. Friends come to understand transformation is possible when we listen carefully to the three voices. As we seek *sense of the meeting*, all present take on the identity of seekers of Truth and experience a sense of unity. We know why we have gathered and what our purpose is.

**NOTE:** All page references come from Barry Morley's Pendle Hill Pamphlet number 307: *BEYOND CONSENSUS: Salvaging a sense of the meeting.*