

A Guide to Spoken Ministry During Meeting for Worship

Meeting for Worship is central to our experience as Friends. Unprogramed Quaker Worship is called "Silent Worship." "Silent" is a significant word. Believing that "there is That of God within us," we sit in silence to commune with that "Still Small Voice" and listen for it to teach and guide us. Silence is required, both inward silence of mind and outward silence of the environment. We seek Peace. Your silent prayer and openness to God are themselves a form of ministry that enriches the Meeting community. Thus, when the silence is broken by someone's voice, we expect it to be a significant and deep Spiritual Message. It is no light matter to break the living silence. This should be done only with a sense of humility, awe, and reverence. Come to Meeting with neither an intention to speak, nor a determination not to speak, but rather with an attitude of openness to the leadings of the Spirit.

Unfortunately, too many of us attending Worship do not always understand the nature of Spoken Ministry, and speak, breaking the silence for everyone present, without giving a true message from Spirit. A message should come from the Spirit within, not from our own minds. We are not there to "share our thoughts."

Worship is not the place for intellectual exercise. Ministry comes through us, not from us. The Spirit will decide which experiences are relevant and which will speak to the condition of the Meeting. Ask wisdom of God that you may be sure of your guidance and be enabled humbly to discern and impart something of His glory and truth.

Ministry should arise from the Meeting itself, and not consist of pre-prepared speeches or pre-selected readings. If you feel moved to speak, follow this path: Center yourself in silence. Ask, am I being led by Spirit or by my human self? Is what I'm thinking of speaking something to be shared? Is what I'm thinking of sharing for anyone else beside myself? Am I clear that what I want to say is not political or a personal announcement? Is this the time and place to share this thought, or shall I wait until Worship has ended? Is this message truly Spirit-led? Must I speak? If you have to decide whether it is right to speak, consider that it isn't.

Inevitably, not all vocal ministry will be equally meaningful to all present. Remember that ministry that does not speak to you may nevertheless be valuable to others. If you find yourself struggling with another's words, learn to listen for the Spirit behind the words.

- Only minister once in any one Worship session.
- Wait to be sure of the right moment for giving the message. Let your message be brief.
- Leave silence after previous ministry so that it can be taken in and settle.
- Try to speak clearly so all can hear. If you can, you should stand up to minister.
- Do not reply, comment upon or question a previous person's ministry. Meeting for Worship finds no room for debate or for answering or questioning (still less for contradicting) one another.
- If you want to give a notice or make a protest, Meeting for Worship is not the place for it. Notices can be given after the meeting.
- Careful preparation enhances the quality of worship, so too does attention to the Light during worship. Arriving in time for the start of the meeting, and not leaving before the end, helps to maintain the worshipful atmosphere.
- Beware of speaking predictably or too often from meeting to meeting.
- Finally, remember that our manner of worship is ultimately a mystery under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Each Meeting for Worship is a spiritual adventure, unique and unpredictable. Let us remember in humility that "the end of words is to bring us to the knowledge of things beyond what words can utter" (Isaac Pennington, 1670).

At the end of our Worship, we ask if there are any concerns to be held in the Light. One should state their concern clearly and briefly, such as: "Please hold Tom in the Light as he had an accident.", "Please hold Mary in the Light as she is traveling.", "Please hold the homeless in the Light."

Once someone has made a request, everyone should maintain silence for a significant time to allow all to pray for that request before another request is verbalized.

Thank you for considering these guidelines. Should you have any questions, please ask.
Palm Beach Monthly Meeting