

**REVISED BY-LAWS  
OF THE  
MADISON MONTHLY MEETING OF THE  
RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS**

considered: September 6 and October 5, 2020

approved: November 3, 2020

ARTICLE I

Name and Location

This society is incorporated under Chapter 181 of Wisconsin law as MADISON MONTHLY MEETING OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS and is a non-profit organization. The Meeting is organized exclusively for religious, educational and charitable purposes within the meaning of section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. The meetinghouse is located at 1704 Roberts Court, Madison, WI 53711.

ARTICLE II

Membership

All persons are welcome to seek Membership in this Meeting. Membership shall be open to any person who applies and is accepted by the present membership in accordance with the established process. The membership records as prepared by the Statistical Clerk shall be sufficient evidence of membership in the Meeting.

ARTICLE III

Board

The Board of the Meeting shall consist of the Clerk, Recording Clerk, Treasurer, and Statistical Clerk. The members of the Board shall be selected and approved by the membership of the Meeting as set forth in Article VI. Terms shall be determined by the membership of the Meeting. The Board may delegate its authority to the membership of the Meeting or to Committees of the Meeting. The Board shall meet at least annually to review the by-laws, delegations of authority, and any matters referred to it by the membership of the Meeting.

ARTICLE IV

Meetings for Business

Meetings of the membership shall be held each month as determined by the membership unless determined otherwise by the previous meeting. Meetings of the membership shall be conducted after the manner of Friends as stated in Article VIII of these By-Laws.

Called meetings of the membership shall be held at such additional times and places as shall be designated by a monthly meeting of the membership or by the officers. Notice of called meetings of the membership including the topics for discussion shall be provided at least 7 calendar days prior to the meeting.

## ARTICLE V

### Committees

The Meeting shall have as many committees as determined by the membership. The Nominating Committee shall nominate the officers and other positions and committees as determined by the membership including the number serving on the committees and the length of terms.

## ARTICLE VI

### Selection of Officers and Committees

No later than the meeting of the membership held in the fifth month of each year, the Nominating Committee shall propose its nominations for officers and for membership on all committees determined by the membership except the Nominating Committee. At the same meeting the Ministry and Counsel Committee shall propose members for the Nominating Committee.

On approval of any such nominations at a meeting of the membership, the officers and committee members shall serve the term as determined in Article V or VII, unless they choose to terminate their position or committee membership prior to when their term ends.

## ARTICLE VII

### Officers

The Officers of the Meeting shall consist of the Clerk, Recording Clerk, Treasurer, and Statistical Clerk. The Clerk and Treasurer shall be members of the Meeting. The Officers shall be selected and approved by the membership of the Meeting as set forth in Article VI. Terms shall be determined by the membership of the Meeting.

The duties of the Clerk shall be to conduct or designate someone to conduct all meetings of the membership of the Meeting and in general to be responsible for administering the affairs of the Meeting.

The duties of the Recording Clerk shall be to keep a record of the proceedings, actions and decisions of all monthly and called meetings of the membership of the Meeting. The Recording Clerk may

delegate any or all of their duties to other persons, who are members or attendees of the Meeting.

The duties of the Treasurer shall be to keep an accurate record of all monies and property received by the Meeting and all disbursements of the monies of the Meeting, to pay such bills, claims and other expenditures as may have been authorized at any meeting for business, and to periodically report on the financial status of the Meeting. The Treasurer and Assistant Treasurers shall deposit all monies of the Meeting in such banks or financial institutions as may be selected by the Meeting, and shall have authority to open or close accounts and draw checks or drafts upon said funds for such purposes and in such amounts as the Meeting authorizes.

The Statistical Clerk shall keep all records of membership of the Meeting.

The officers shall have authority to purchase, receive by gift, lease, or otherwise acquire, and to control, rent, maintain, manage or otherwise preserve, and to lease, sell, or convey property of the Meeting pursuant to policies adopted by the membership of the Meeting. The officers may delegate authority to perform these acts to any duly selected officer, member, or committee of the Meeting.

#### ARTICLE VIII

##### Decision Making

Madison Monthly Meeting is a member of Northern Yearly Meeting (NYM) of the Religious Society of Friends. Madison Monthly Meeting follows Northern Yearly Meeting's process guidance including the procedures for Business Meetings and Decision Making as set forth in NYMs Faith and Practice. (attached to these By-Laws as Attachment 1.) A quorum of at least 12 members is required for decisions to be made.

#### ARTICLE IX

##### Operational limitations

Notwithstanding any other provisions of these articles, the Meeting shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by a corporation exempt from Federal income tax under sections 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law) or; (b) by a corporation, contributions to which are deductible under section 170 (c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law).

No part of the net funds or earnings of the Meeting shall inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to, its membership, attendees, board, officers, or other private persons, except that the Meeting

shall be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to grant financial aid to members and attenders following procedures developed and approved by the membership.

#### ARTICLE X

##### Legislative or Political Activities

No substantial part of the activities of the Meeting shall be the carrying on of propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation and the Meeting shall not participate in or intervene (including publishing or distribution of statements) in a political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office.

#### ARTICLE XI

##### Dissolution Clause

The decision to dissolve the Meeting should follow procedures in Article VIII. Upon the dissolution of the Meeting, the officers and board shall, after paying or making provisions for the payment of all of the liabilities of the Meeting, dispose of all the assets of the Meeting to such organization or organizations organized and operated exclusively for religious, educational, charitable or scientific purposes as shall at the time qualify as an exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law), as the Officers and board shall determine.

Any such assets not so disposed of shall be disposed of pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 181 of the Laws of the State of Wisconsin.

#### ARTICLE XII

##### Non-Discrimination

Madison Monthly Meeting seeks to find that of God/the Divine in every person. The meeting shall not discriminate at any time on the basis of cultural differences, race, creed, color, religion, sex, physical appearance, national origin (including limited-English proficiency), sexual orientation, ancestry, age, pregnancy, marital or parental status, physical, mental, emotional or learning disability, conviction record, political beliefs, gender identity or expression, or any physical or mental disability. When hiring, Madison Monthly Meeting will consider the essential functions of the job.

ARTICLE XIII

Limitations of Liability and Indemnification

Limitations on liability and indemnification for members shall be guided by s.181.0612, S.181.0670, s.181.0855, and s.181.0871 - 0881 Wis. Stats.

ARTICLE XIV

Amendments

These by-laws may be altered, amended or repealed at any meeting of the membership, provided that notice of such proposal and the details shall be given in accordance with Article IV. The Board may not amend the by-laws.

The above By-laws were approved at the meeting of the membership of the Madison Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends on November 3, 2020.



Kate Lieber, Clerk

## **Attachment 1**

# **Faith and Practice**

Northern Yearly Meeting of the  
Religious Society of Friends

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## Decision Making

*Friends, keep your meetings in the power of God...and in the love of God...and wait upon the Lord...*

—George Fox, 1658. (1)

*Friends conduct business together in the faith that there is one divine Spirit which is accessible to all persons; when Friends wait upon, heed and follow the Light of Truth within them, its Spirit will lead to unity. This faith is the foundation for any group decision...it is of prime importance that Friends understand and follow this procedure for business in the Monthly Meeting...[This] principle underlies all activities of the Society of Friends.*

—North Pacific Yearly Meeting, 1986. (2)

## Worship as the Basis

Friends make decisions based on the experience that the will of God can be discerned both individually and as a group. Regular worship as a faith community is an important foundation for that discernment. The Divine Spirit is active among us. Heeding the Light within can help us find unity in what we do. Thus our group decision-making occurs in a meeting for worship to conduct business.

## History

Historically, groundwork was laid for the current method of making corporate decisions in the late 1650s in England. The meeting of Friends in Balby, Yorkshire, in 1656 wrote:

*Dearly beloved Friends, These things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with a measure of light which is pure and holy may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter; for the letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life.*

—Meeting of Elders, 1656. (3)

Also at a general meeting at Skipton in 1659, Friends in the North wrote:

*That the power of the God head may be known in the body...that none may exercise lordship or dominion over another, nor the person of any be set apart, but as they continue in the power of truth...that truth itself in the body may reign, not persons nor forms... (4)*

George Fox established monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings in England and America in the late 1660s and early 1670s. These meetings were established because the

Society was in need of a means to check individual leadings against the larger group decisions and leadings. Initially, business meetings were for men only but separate women's business meetings began to appear as early as 1656, and George Fox urged that women's business meetings be established everywhere. By 1671 there was a business meeting in London including men and women. Today men and women participate equally in the decision making in the same meeting for worship for business.

*The Monthly Meeting is the fundamental unit of the Religious Society of Friends. It consists of a group of Friends who meet together at regular intervals to wait upon God in Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Business. —North Pacific Yearly Meeting, 1986. (5)*

### **Conduct of the Business Meeting**

The meeting for business begins with worship. Some meetings use this as an opportunity for worship sharing on a query or advice.

Those with agenda items let the clerk know in advance to allow proper placement of the items on the agenda. The clerk proposes the agenda, preferably publishing it in advance. He or she conducts the meeting, facilitating the discussion by drawing out those reticent to speak and encouraging others to share the time equitably. The clerk seeks expression of dissenting opinion, upholding the meeting in the Light throughout the process. The recording clerk or assistant clerk records the proceedings. The clerks discern and bring forth in words the sense of the meeting. At some point in a discussion the clerk may summarize his or her perception of the sense of the meeting for approval or further discussion. At times a member of the meeting may propose a minute, which attempts to summarize the sense of the meeting. When a decision is made, the recording clerk prepares and reads a minute, modifying it if needed for approval by the meeting.

Issues brought before the meeting are first clearly defined; then information is gathered, alternatives explored, and feelings and concerns expressed as the meeting moves toward decision. This process (studying an issue to seek the Light) Friends call seasoning. Seasoning of issues can be done in committee or by other means before the business meeting. The business meeting must resist the temptation to redo the work of committees, and the meeting must be open to new light in discussion of committee recommendations. Seasoning of agenda items before bringing them to the business meeting can help work out differences. Both the clerks and individual Friends have the responsibility to inform themselves about agenda items before the business meeting.

All present are responsible for the right working of the meeting for worship for business:

- maintaining a worshipful attitude;
- listening carefully to and being respectful of others;
- speaking when led, briefly, to the point and without repetition;
- addressing the clerk by standing or raising their hand when they wish to speak (depending on the size and custom of the meeting);
- not speaking to individuals;



- coming prepared and informed;
- seasoning matters by good committee work or other ways before bringing them to the meeting;
- coming with minds open to the working of the Spirit, being prepared to have their minds changed and setting personal interests aside;
- working towards unity when differences are present.

New truths may emerge along with new understandings as Friends seek to reach a decision.

In large meetings the clerk does not usually participate in the discussion. In small meetings the clerk often actively participates in the discussion. In either case the clerk steps aside as clerk if the subject is one where he or she has a conflict of interest, has strong opinions, or cannot be objective. In many meetings both members and attenders participate equally. If a person cannot be at a business meeting and wants an opinion shared, he or she may write a letter to the clerk to be read at business meeting. That person should understand that a letter is not a substitute for being present to hear the opinions of others and to sense the working of the Spirit. The clerk or anyone present may ask for silent worship at times of tension.

Business of the yearly meeting occurs at annual session and executive meetings with the same format and principles.

### **Unity, Sense of the Meeting, and Dealing with Serious Differences**

Friends strive to know and follow God's will for our meeting life. They do not vote or use majority rule. Rather they seek the truth and unity of the Spirit. Discerning God's leading is both an individual and a communal process in which the meeting listens to each Friend and each Friend listens to the meeting. They accept a decision when they sense it is the will of God. When they listen to God and to each other, and achieve unity in our sense of God's leading, they are living in the Truth. They call this unity "the sense of the meeting."

Unity is found when all or nearly all those present believe that the proposed decision is truly Spirit led. If an objection is raised to a decision supported by most, the person or persons objecting may offer to stand aside to allow the meeting to proceed, sometimes asking to have the objection recorded. If the person or persons objecting do not wish to stand aside, Friends must devote the necessary time to prayerfully, thoughtfully, respectfully, and tenderly consider the objection. A threshing session may be called, or a special meeting with those objecting can be arranged to explore alternatives. Praying privately for guidance from the Spirit may be helpful. The person dissenting carries a special responsibility to listen to the group, to seek divine leading, and to work actively with others to seek alternatives.

After further consideration, if the objection remains, the meeting decides whether the weight of the objection will stop approval at this time, or whether the sense of the meeting will allow approval and moving forward despite the objection, or whether there

is another way to proceed. If some members of the meeting are convinced the objection is grounded in a direct perception of God's will, the meeting is warned not to declare a sense of the meeting prematurely. The meeting seeks a balance—respecting the views of the dissenting persons, remembering that the dissenters may have a clearer knowledge of the truth. The meeting considers the weight of the objections and the judgment of the meeting as a whole. It is exceptional for one or a few individuals to block an action agreed upon by most. It is incumbent upon those objecting to listen carefully to the meeting, remembering that it is the leading and discernment of the meeting as a whole, which tests and validates the leading of individuals. Divine love is a binding force, and to experience that love in a meeting for business one must sometimes be willing to be bound by one's community.

On rare occasions, Friends can move forward with decisions which are not unanimous but which still express the sense of the meeting. Major decisions among Friends on issues of abolition of slave holding and women's rights were sometimes minuted despite objection. However, proceeding with a decision over the objection of some risks losing members or even splitting the meeting. Where there is no clear sense of the meeting, the decision can be laid aside or postponed and put on the agenda for another meeting for worship for business. A particular challenge to the meeting community exists when differences exist on an issue where a decision is urgent and cannot be postponed.

### **Threshing Sessions**

For decisions that are controversial or that require additional time, the clerk or the meeting may call for a threshing session. A threshing session is a meeting where everyone is encouraged to express their views but with no intention of coming to a decision. Ultimately unity is best reached if full opportunity is given for differences to be aired and faced, and a threshing session is just such an opportunity. Threshing sessions also give opportunity for background information to be reviewed.

### **A Called Meeting for Business**

At times a decision will be of such importance and will take up such a large amount of time that a special meeting for worship for business will be called devoted to one topic. The purpose of this meeting for worship for business will be to reach a decision if possible. A called meeting for worship for business should be announced and publicized well in advance so that all will have the opportunity to attend.

### **Conclusion**

The Quaker corporate decision-making process is a spiritual discipline needing trust, patience, a willingness to listen, mutual forbearance, a concern for and openness to others with differing views, and the grace of humor. The care with which we conduct our decision-making is often critical to the enduring harmony of the entire meeting. At its best the result reflects the transforming power of the love of God, an exhilarating and joyful experience.

## **Queries**

1. Are meetings in which business is conducted held in a spirit of worship?
2. Do we seek truth and the right course of action, rather than acceptance of a previously formed opinion?
3. Do we maintain a spirit of love, patience, and understanding?
4. Do we help one another in our search for unity by speaking briefly and without repetition?
5. Are we tender and considerate of our differing views?
6. Do we recognize that the will of God can at times be more clearly perceived by an individual or by the minority rather than the majority and that careful attention must be given to minority discernment as a valid channel of the will of God?

## **References:**

1. George Fox, *Epistle 162*, 1658.
2. North Pacific Yearly Meeting, *Faith and Practice*, 1993, p. 56.
3. Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1995, 1.01 "Letter from Friends in Balby": *Letters Etc. of Early Friends*, p. 282.
4. Howard Brinton, *Friends for 300 Years*, "Letter from Friends in Skipton," Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1994, p. 100
5. North Pacific Yearly Meeting, p. 52.

Approved 1999