

SEASONING AND TESTING A CONCERN IN NPYM

A concern is defined in the Glossary of our Faith & Practice as "an interest deeply rooted in the Holy Spirit; one that can move both the individual and a Meeting to action." The seasoning of concerns is a critical Friends' practice. The discernment starts with the individual asking whether the concern is genuinely from God and whether it is in keeping with Friends' testimonies. Friends usually test their concern informally with others who are knowledgeable or with small groups of Friends. Our Faith & Practice states that "The concern should come to the Meeting for Business in mature form with a clear, concise, written statement of its purpose, means and the support requested from the Meeting."

The seasoning process tests both the spiritual leading and its practical form. Changes in wording, emphasis and perhaps even direction may result from an open search for Divine guidance. The result may be support for the individual; it may be that the Meeting takes on the concern as a group; it may be a decision that the concern is not in keeping with our testimonies or that the individual has misinterpreted a leading or it is not appropriate at this time; it may be that the Meeting feels the concern should be addressed by a larger group of Friends. In the last case, the concern is forwarded to Quarterly and/or Yearly Meeting.

Friends, individually and/or in a group, bringing a concern to Yearly Meeting by any route, are encouraged to consider the following queries:

1. Are you sure of your facts and background information?
2. Have you seasoned your concern, formally and informally?
3. Do you have a clear idea of the response you seek from Yearly Meeting? Some possibilities include:
 - a) Advice and counsel from the Yearly Meeting.
 - b) A position to be taken by Yearly Meeting.
 - c) Yearly Meeting "blessing" of a Quarterly or Monthly Meeting position or activity.
 - d) Corporate action by the Yearly Meeting.
 - e) Further reflection and discernment throughout the Yearly Meeting during the year (e.g., consideration of queries on racism).
4. Why is this action particularly appropriate or unique for Yearly Meeting as opposed to monthly meetings, preparative meetings and worship groups?
5. Do we have the capacity to carry out the proposed action?
6. Are you open to the leading of the Spirit in the consideration of your concern?

If the concern arises at Annual Session, the above questions should be addressed by the group which seasons the concern. In addition, the following queries are also important:

1. Why is it critical that Yearly Meeting act RIGHT NOW?
2. Did this arise from a powerful spiritual experience at Annual Session?
3. Do we have the appropriate information and background to consider this?

The concern then needs to be presented to the Presiding Clerk, who decides whether and how the concern will be considered at the Annual Session. The Clerk may confer with Steering Committee about this decision.

February, 2000