

Evanston Monthly Meeting of Friends

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COMMUNICATING IN THE SPIRIT IN THE ETHER

In this age of greater communication possibilities, new opportunities for miscommunication have arisen, at both the personal and committee levels. In an attempt to help us all avoid this hazard, we bring forth the following thoughts for consideration. Problems arise when people use email to approach issues or concerns which they feel hesitant about raising in person. The promise is not, however, "Where two or three of you are gathered in email, I am there also." We all know how our relationships are nurtured by the Spirit when we meet face-to-face in trust and love. While typing is useful to organize one's thoughts, the ease of hitting the send key leaves no room for second thoughts. Email does not even ask one to lick a stamp, much less walk a block to the mailbox.

Consider offering to meet in person or by telephone if an email dialogue appears to lack clarity of understanding or goes on tangents or expresses annoyance or simply is becoming confusing. Within committees it may be useful to restrict use of email to logistical matters, however tempting it can be to slip into substantive areas. Using email to schedule committee meetings or disseminate agendas and supporting documents for preview by committee members is helpful. Using email then to request clarification on specific points is helpful. Using email to offer suggestions, concerns, opinions, or other material input, however, may not be helpful, as we've learned from experience.

In a very practical vein, three things come to mind:

- The business of committees that deal with confidential information and concerns is best handled by each member having his or her own distinct email address. Be aware that all internet service providers can offer several addresses for each household at no extra cost.
- Be mindful of any members without email access. Keeping a stash of pre-stamped, pre-addressed postcards and envelopes ensures that all committee business reaches these members in a timely manner.
- Consider including the text of attachments also within the body of the email, to accommodate all computer systems.

Please accept these thoughts as intended, in the spirit of nurturing smooth and Friendly communication.

Peace