

## Guidelines for Offering Spoken Ministry in Quaker Meetings

### General guidelines:

- “It is no light matter to break the living silence.”
- Messages that arise come “from the depth of the soul” and seem intended for the gathering as a whole, not just for the individual speaker.
- There is a sense of urgency or burden until it is spoken... “quaking.”
- “Though a message may seem intellectually fitting, it should not be given unless it glows with life.”
- No one should enter meeting for worship either expecting to be used for a message or not to be used.
- Time should be left between messages that worshippers may absorb what has been spoken.

**“The following characteristics of an acceptable spoken message are suggested as possibly valid in most cases. Seldom does a speaker achieve them all, but, fortunately, God is willing to use very imperfect instruments to accomplish (Divine) purposes.”**

### Spoken ministry should be:

- **Religious/spiritual...** not intellectual presentations, political analyses, or current events. There are other opportunities for such matters.
- **Non-personal...** speakers are instruments of God’s words to us which flow through them.
- **Non-argumentative...** state the message simply and directly without reference to agreeing or disagreeing with another message or point of view. Often, spoken messages build on one another, but that sense can be achieved without mentioning the names of prior speakers as reference points.
- **Simple...** nothing in our tradition of vocal ministry requires great intellectual elaboration or oratorical flourishes.
- **Brief...** messages may be single sentences or last a few minutes. “The ability to cease when the message, however brief, has been delivered is a valued accomplishment.”
- **Often unified...** several messages may bear some relation to one another, but should not be offered by naming a previous speaker or a position of agreement with a previous message.

## **Guidelines for Receiving Spoken Ministry**

### **General Guidelines**

- Enter meeting for worship in a timely manner, as relaxed as possible.
- Allow a good space of time for oneself and others to center, open to increasing the awareness of the Presence among us.
- When spoken ministry is offered, listen with a compassionate open heart. An offered message may be intended by the Spirit for thee, or for us all, or for another unknown to us. Messages may be expressed skillfully or awkwardly, by one trembling with the newness of the experience of speaking, or by one experienced in spoken ministry. God can and does use all open to receive Truth.
- Always listen for the work of the Spirit in the voice and life of those who offer spoken ministry.
- If a message has brought Truth to some part of your life or experience, at the rise of meeting you may choose to approach the speaker and thank him or her “for being well used” by the Spirit. “Thee spoke to my condition” is an old Quaker phrase also used.

**Finally... if a particular message or series of messages offend or disturb you, you may mention this to a member of Ministry and Counsel. Oversight of meetings for worship, including Spirit-led eldering, is a part of their responsibility. If it seems more appropriate, you may speak gently with the person who offered the message.**

**Adapted and Abbreviated from *Guide to Quaker Practice* by Howard Brinton (PHP #20)**