

Threshing, Consultation and Discernment: course held at Woodbrooke 21-23rd June 2016.

Rachel Muers and Rhiannon Grant with 10 participants

How can we make the meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome? Seek to know one another in the things which are eternal, bear the burden of each other's failings and pray for one another. As we enter with tender sympathy into the joys and sorrows of each other's lives, ready to give help and to receive it, our meeting can be a channel for God's love and forgiveness.

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Our exploration of Quaker processes for threshing, consultation and discernment has reminded us that we are all special and that our whole selves contribute to our meetings for worship and business. Good processes can help us to deal with complex and difficult issues, but processes cannot replace personal relationships. Any decision-making process should be the action of a loving community.

Consultation can be an important stage in the preparation for a decision. It can be Quaker when it

involves open-hearted listening and discernment at every stage.

Threshing is a specifically Quaker process which helps us to prepare for a decision-making Meeting for Worship for Business. It is a space in which we raise and let go of our thoughts and feelings, knowing that they have been heard by the community, so that we are free to let God lead us into the next steps.

Threshing is not quick or easy and carries risks, especially if the issue is unclear, unseasoned or becomes focussed on an individual. Having ground rules agreed in advance is helpful to a threshing process but love, care, clarity and honesty matter more than the specifics of rules.

Threshing, like other Quaker processes, can be joyful and fun. It can build community, helping us to get to know one another in the things which are eternal. It is a stage in the harvest: after gathering grain, the chaff must be separated from the nourishing seed and this process requires noisy and energetic action.

Experimentation is also part of Quaker process.

Threshing is currently happening in many different ways in BYM. We hope that new methods and directions will continue to evolve and that Friends will share their experiences with each other. How can we extend the repertoire of methods available to Friends preparing to make Spirit-led decisions, especially where the issues are contentious and/or complex?