

GLOSSARY (excerpts)

from *Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God's Way Forward in Decision Making*
Lon Fendall, Jan Wood, & Bruce Bishop. Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2007.

Clearness: Early Quakers had “meetings for clearness”; some still follow this practice today. On one level, the meaning of clearness is the same as clarity, but there is a richer meaning that indicates the absence of any hindrance to discernment, inwardly or outwardly. Individually and in groups, we come to clearness by the patient process of discernment of the Holy Spirit’s leading.

Clerk, Clerking: All sorts of words are used for those who lead groups and are in charge of decision-making meetings—e.g., *president*, *chair*, and *moderator*. We have taken the term *clerk* from the traditional Quaker word for the presiding officer. As expressed in this book, the leadership of the clerk is a spiritual exercise, a very different process from serving as chairman.

Consensus: This term means a process of coming to agreement in a group about an issue, usually by discussing, listening, and shaping an acceptable agreement. We have chosen not to use the term, preferring the stronger spiritual content of the word *discernment*. We are convinced that consensus is not an adequate process for groups of Christian believers, whose great challenge and opportunity is to discern God’s leading.

Gathered Meeting: This is a term that was used among early Quakers. It means more than a group of people meeting together for worship or business. The *gathering* term refers to a keen consciousness of being gathered into the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is acknowledging that the Holy Spirit has moved in the meeting and thus the decisions arrived at aren’t subject to political pressure from people not gathered (participating).

Listening Meeting: The purpose of a listening meeting is to listen carefully to the members of the group and to the Holy Spirit speaking through them. Some have called this a *threshing meeting*, referring to the threshing process from biblical times, in which grain was separated from chaff. It is made clear that no decision is to be made at the meeting. Members are invited to speak about their thoughts, feelings, fears, desires, and hopes without needing to defend the validity of these expressions.

Listen Under: This refers to seeking to discern what is “under” the words, emotions, and conflicts that others are expressing. The assumption is that under these things is to be found God’s voice, ready to be uncovered and understood. It also means that one can listen to the heart and intent of another person rather than be limited by the language used.

Minute: Most organized groups that have business meetings designate a secretary to record the minutes of the discussion and action. The singular word *minute* is not normally used, but some Quakers speak of a minute as the individual statement capturing the discussion and the action that follows the discernment process.

Prayer of *Examen*: The “prayer of *examen*” mentioned in chapter 2 was originally developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola (see Tad Dunne, *Spiritual Exercises for Today: A Contemporary Presentation of the Classic Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*, San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991). Many spiritual leaders have refined the practice since Loyola first put it into words. The prayer of examen is an exercise in which we reflect on the past and ask Christ to walk with us through our memories and to first identify the “consolations”—the times when we were drawn closer to God. Then we are to identify and reflect on our “desolations”—the times we felt distant from God. Often we find consoling aspects to our experiences of desolation.

Sense of the Meeting: Quakers sometimes use this term in preference to *consensus*, indicating the understanding that emerges from waiting on God for leading. In its appropriate context, it recognizes that people have been meeting with God, not just with each other. A deeper level of spirituality is involved than the term *consensus* can indicate.

Standing Aside: Although sometimes misused as a way of trying to block action, at its best standing aside is a position taken by someone not yet in unity with the proposed action of the group. Standing aside acknowledges one’s own misgivings about the action, but invites the group to proceed in the direction they are being led.

Unable to Unite: This is an option to be used carefully when a person feels very strongly that the group is in error in its proposed action and does not feel clear about standing aside. The person with this conviction presents his or her concern, gives the reasons, and asks that the group not move forward on this action. If the group feels led to continue forward in spite of the objections expressed, the one unable to unite may ask that his or her position be noted in the meeting minutes. In this situation, the dissenting individual has been unable to trust the discernment of the group. This broken trust causes a rift—a wound that must be healed before the dissenting individual will once again be spiritually and emotionally free to participate in group discernment.

Way Forward: This term points to the central process of discerning a position around which the group can unite and proceed in faithfulness. Important ingredients of this process are clarity about being led by God and coming to unity about that leading.

Weightiness: Spiritual maturity and experience provide particular strength to the voice of some people. This might be a general quality of wisdom that applies to most issues and may also apply to particular issues in which a weighty person has unusually helpful experience and sensitivity.