

## HOW TO BE A YEARLY MEETING REPRESENTATIVE

BY A. J. Ellis

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*Does a yearly meeting representative really matter? A. J. Ellis, presiding clerk of Rocky Mountain Yearly Meeting the past nine years, thinks so. He is also regional field supervisor with the Colorado State Department of Education in Denver, as well as a dedicated Christian in his home meeting.*

HISTORICALLY, both theocratic and democratic principles of government have characterized the decision making of Friends. These two concepts of governance, when fully understood, carry strong ramifications for the spiritual and mental preparation for business sessions.

At the local meeting level, democracy is total participation, with all members having decision-making responsibility. At the yearly meeting level, democracy is generally practiced through (a variation on) representative government. The strength of representative government lies in the difference between informed decision making and extemporaneous decision making.

Not every member of a local meeting has the time to prepare properly for decision making at the yearly meeting level. Seeking out the best information available regarding approaching decisions and spending time in prayer on these items will permit the Holy Spirit to direct thinking to a sense of unity. Sometimes such unity evades a "body" in session because of failure to be informed and failure to seek God's guidance prior to the meeting.

A local meeting that selects from its midst a representative to be informed and directed of God places a sacred responsibility upon that individual. Because of that representative's preparation for the business sessions, the local meeting will be better represented in those sessions than if each member participated. Herein lies the effectiveness of representative government.

Upon arrival at the yearly meeting site (however), representation and principles of democracy begin to acquiesce to the theocratic principles characterizing Friends' decision making. The transition from democratic governance to theocratic governance has personal application to the yearly meeting representative through the following rule: "You are chosen to capably represent your local meeting, but dedicated to joining a single yearly meeting body seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance as to God's ministry for that total body."

Representatives of local meetings come to the yearly meeting sessions as separate parts of a body. Some of these parts may hardly know each other. Most of these parts are and should be well-instructed in the viewpoint of their local meeting regarding the questions to be considered.

As these separate parts join together in prayerful unity, they form a single body in search for God's will regarding their common mission. This mission is the unified ministry of the yearly meeting. As regional and local interests submerge and a sense of mission for the yearly meeting emerges, the Holy Spirit can enter and His work of unity begins.

The business sessions will seek to hear every viewpoint. The best information available will be sought so that the decision making might be well-informed. Positions on issues may be explained with fervor. Then when all have been heard, this united body seeks through the guidance of the Holy Spirit to arrive at agreement.

Sometimes the answer is immediately apparent and full agreement is quick. Sometimes members of this group will realize that the preferred solution in their mind will not be acceptable to others in the group. Often the best solution for the body as a whole will not be the best solution in the mind of any single participant. It is in this setting where sensitivity to the guidance of the Holy Spirit is so critical.

Following is a checklist that might well guide preparation for yearly meeting business sessions:

1. The local meeting will choose representatives who accept the time and responsibility to do their homework, who will be informed of the business to be considered, the local meeting's viewpoint on each item, and in prayer will explore with God their role in the coming sessions.
2. As the representatives join in the oneness of the yearly meeting body, all local interests will be superseded by the mission of the yearly meeting and the Holy Spirit's guidance as to the direction of that mission
3. After every viewpoint has been heard and vigorously defined, explained, and/or defended, the number one priority is seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance toward a unified decision