NOTE TO FRIENDS: This is a revised draft for a new appendix to NPYM’s *Faith and Practice*, in response to requests for advice about “staying Quakerly” in the use of certain communication technologies.

**Appendix:**
**Friendly Use of Communication Technology**

Technology can bridge geographic distance and can simplify time and travel considerations in our widespread Yearly Meeting. Emails, conference calls, and video connections can provide access for people who have difficulties with mobility, hearing, or vision. We usefully remain patient and tender with each other during continuing changes in media, also with using the devices themselves, and the uneven rate of adoption. We also practice using the technology in advance, so that the equipment itself does not hinder our Friendly communication.

The focus of this appendix is on how Quaker groups use conference technology and email, not on individual Friends’ use of rapidly-evolving electronic media.

**Conference Technologies**

Conference technologies may be used for several purposes, including committee meetings and consultations, worship-sharing, and clearness processes. They are media through which Spirit can move and connect Friends together. Not every Friends group has found such technologies suitable for careful discernment of the sense of the meeting. The following suggestions may be helpful in using conference technologies in a Spirit-led way.

*For the clerk:*

- Arrange a time for the meeting in advance.
- Send the agenda, related materials, and contact numbers out several days ahead.
- As appropriate, arrange for minutes to be written and distributed.
- Encourage Friends to center themselves before joining the conference.
- Encourage Friends to begin by greeting one another. Then open with silent worship before turning to the meeting agenda.
- When the group is large or not familiar with each other, ask people to say their names each time they speak.
- Remind Friends to pause between comments.
- Keep track of who has spoken and invite those who have been quieter to speak.
- If a decision is being made, ask if all are united in it. Give plenty of opportunity for any participant to voice hesitations.
- Ask for silence if Friends need to re-center in the Spirit.
- Conclude the conversation within the agreed-upon time (typically no more than 90 minutes).
- Finish the time together with an opportunity for silent worship, or suggest that Friends continue in worship afterward.

*For the participants:*

- If possible, enter into worship before joining the conference.
Enter the conference on time with materials and agenda close at hand.
• If the clerk requests it, state your name each time you speak.
• Be concise in your comments.
• Take care not to interrupt or talk over anyone.
• State when you become lost or confused. Ask for silence when needed.
• Remain in a location with good reception.
• Use a quiet space away from disruptive noise and activity, and used the “mute” function.

Queries for Friends using conference technologies

• Have we determined whether a conference technology is appropriate to the task at hand and the group involved? For this work, does the group need to hear each other, see each other, have access to shared documents, or be in the same room together?
• How do we accommodate Deaf and hard-of-hearing Friends? How do we accommodate blind and sight-impaired Friends?
• Do we conduct our conferences in a spirit of worship?
• How do we interpret a Friend’s silence during a conference?

Email

Email, when used carefully and thoughtfully, can support good Quaker process in business and decision making. Quaker meetings and committees may use email extensively to disseminate information, minutes, and agendas, and to attend to logistics. Some committee work seems to lend itself to email communication. Email may not be suitable for deep listening and group discernment.

We attend to email messages as carefully as when speaking with someone face to face. Because an email can be sent quickly, caution is helpful. Choose words carefully; we cannot depend on tone of voice to carry our meaning. Take time to respond with care. If the matter is complicated, let the reply season for a while. Always review everything before sending.

When agreeing to conduct business by email, we make a commitment to check messages regularly and we respond to messages in a timely manner to ensure others of our continuing engagement.

Email can work well when a group needs to gather information and a central person is collecting feedback. When many are in a discussion on a topic, the process takes special attentiveness. Participants treat the email conversation as they would a face-to-face conversation with Friends. Read all prior messages first, pay attention to where the discussion is going before responding, and consider carefully what—and when—to contribute.

When decisions are being made by email, someone acts as clerk, and the group follows the good order of Friends. If the the conversation is moving too quickly or carelessly, if the conversation is splintering or losing direction, or if some people are not being heard, the clerk ends the email conversation and suggests a face-to-face meeting.

Group Email Lists and Listservs

Listservs or email groups allow Friends to direct messages easily to a whole meeting or to an interest group. A listserv or email group for a whole meeting is a valuable tool for cultivating and nurturing community and allows Friends to share important Quaker-related announcements relevant to the meeting, such as agendas and reports for an upcoming meeting for business. To ensure beneficial use of these tools, it may be helpful for the meeting to establish guidelines, for example:
- Reminding Friends that emails are best written and read with respect, tolerance, and love.
- Asking that emails be directed to the whole group, not an individual person.
- Separating functions between announcement-only groups and ongoing discussion groups.
- Asking that Friends use informative subject lines and indicate whether a message is of a secular nature, for example, when a Friend is advertising an apartment for rent, etc.
- Advising that the group email list or listserv is not intended as a means to resolve interpersonal conflicts.

Sometimes it may be necessary for a host to caution a Friend who uses the listserv or group email list inappropriately. If after a reminder or two the Friend continues to make inappropriate posts, the meeting may wish to explore ways to preserve Friendly communication.

**Queries for Friends using listservs and group email lists**

- Is use of the listserv or group email list appropriate to the task at hand and the group involved?
- How do we accommodate Friends who do not use electronic media?
- Is a clerk or facilitator needed for this email discussion?
- How do we interpret a Friend’s unresponsiveness in an email exchange?
- Do we remember that there is that of God in every person who will ever read this message?