

friendly eights

A very popular community-building strategy in Quaker meetings in the USA are **friendly eights**, which I heard about some years ago whilst staying at Pendle Hill. Subsequently, when researching I told the meetings about this form of development and I know some of them tried it out with great or lesser success. On an occasion when I revisited one of the meetings concerned I was informed by an elderly male member, "Have you heard about **friendly eights** – they are marvellous". It was then pointed out to him that I was the one to introduce the idea!

The basic procedure for **friendly eights** is that groups of eight people agree to meet together on eight occasions. I have gathered that in the States it is usually for a *Pot-luck Supper*. However, my version is that it can be for anything chosen by the group. The important thing is that all members of the group agree to do their best to attend every session. Some people have questioned why 'eight' and not four or six? I can only respond that eight is perceived by experienced group work specialists as the ideal number for a group to be effective (but in Quaker circles rules of this kind are often perceived as out of order).

In addition the way groups are formed can vary. In some meetings it is a directive where folks are allocated, in others people are left to choose. The hope is that when groups have run their course they disband and reform with new people if possible, so that everyone in the meeting will get to know each other over time.

The meeting I mentioned above did extremely well. They managed to encourage some of those 'never or only rarely seen' to participate, which was very gratifying for all concerned. The sessions embraced by the various eights included eating together at homes and elsewhere, theatre visits (including Shakespeare at Stratford on Avon – a long journey), visits to museums and art galleries, et cetera. As I understand it people were directed into groups but it had the approval of everyone and so the idea flourished.

Naturally this is an idea that will vary in expectation when considering the size of meetings. However, it encourages meetings to be adventurous. So often we are reluctant to initiate such a venture because we are not sure how it might be received. In the instance I have quoted it was bold as well as positive and it worked.

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