

Beacon Hill Monthly Meeting

Support for Leadings and Ministry

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Approved by BHFM June 2021

This document can be shared as led. Please reach out to BHFM Ministry & Counsel with questions or comments at www.beaconhillfriends.org or welcome@beaconhillfriends.org

Introduction

This document is to help Ministry & Counsel (M&C) and others within the meeting understand how we currently support our community through the process of nurturing and supporting leadings and ministry from the moment there are stirrings to the time when they might need to be laid down.

Nurturing leadings is part of our work as a spiritual community. A leading is a powerful inner prompting, a message from the Spirit, that moves a Friend to take action. Often a Friend follows a leading, working to be faithful to it, through words and actions. A sustained and well-developed leading may grow into a ministry. Leadings and ministries arise out of a relationship with the Divine. Friends describe the experience as “being unable to do otherwise.”

M&C and other Friends in the meeting are responsible not only for nurturing these promptings of the Spirit in our midst but for recognizing them as we see them manifested around us. Such encouragement can be as simple as asking, *“Friend, have you considered that this work might be a leading?”*

The language of this document largely addresses individual Friends exploring and being supported in following leadings. However, we hold the support of leadings expansively and understand there to be many other possibilities. Sometimes more than one Friend is prompted to do the work of the Spirit together — for example, a group of Friends acting collaboratively or a couple who share a joint ministry, might consider that their work could benefit from a clearness process and support structure.

Beacon Hill Meeting has operated experientially in its support of leadings and ministries for about 25 years, and during that time our approach has evolved. Any meeting that formally supports ministries needs to find a structure that is sustainable over time. Balancing the support and oversight of these individuals and committees with the care for the spiritual needs of the entire meeting community is part of the ongoing work and discernment for M&C.

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Clearness

An important starting place is for Friends to sit with the questions they may be holding, including: “Have you considered that this work might be a leading?” or “What is the right way forward?”

At these early stages, clearness processes and discernment can be immensely helpful, both for the individual and the community. Here are the ways we currently support clearness around leadings and ministry.

Informal Discernment

One very common way that a Friend might choose to discern whether a stirring is a leading or potential ministry — especially in the early stages of exploration — is to call together an informal support group for discernment. To do this, Friends should reach out to other members of the Beacon Hill Monthly Meeting community, or other people who can provide wisdom or insight.

The person who wants the informal support group doesn't necessarily need to be the person who convenes this group. They can ask a F/friend to take the lead on helping them do this, without needing to go through a larger body or committee.

Ministry and Counsel encourages members of our community to support each other in this way.

Clearness & Membership Committees

Our Clearness & Membership Committee (C&M) is also readily available to those in our community who ask for a clearness committee for discernment in support of a leading. A clearness committee is the Quaker process for helping Friends in our community discern and season what their leading might be, to help them put language to their leadings, and figure out their right next steps.

To initiate this, a Friend can reach out to the clerk or another member of C&M to begin a conversation. This process is almost always slower than informal support, but it can often lead to rich discernment, including with people that the Friend might not have thought to reach out to on their own.

Furthermore, C&M takes care to connect with Ministry & Counsel on these committees if they relate to potential ministry, so they can hold the next steps of this work together.

Support

If, after a clearness process, a Friend is experiencing a leading as a call to action, the Friend might seek ongoing support to follow that leading. Here are the ways that we currently support leadings and ministry in our meeting.

Leadings Accompanied by Companions or Elders

Not every Friend who labors under a concern or senses a leading feels the need for a committee framework either in the short or long term. Some prefer to work independently, seeking assistance or support as needed. That might mean asking a Friend or Friends to sit with them on occasion. Sometimes these Friends are referred to as *elders* — experienced Quakers who have gifts of nurturing the ministry of others, vocal or otherwise. Or the relationship might be a more personal one, that of a spiritual companion who acts as a sounding board and prayerful, active listener or adviser. In whatever way the Friend chooses to proceed, returning to the step of asking for a clearness committee is always an option for further discernment.

Informally-Created Support Committees

Support committees can be informally-established groups operating independently, deciding among themselves how often to meet and how to best work to foster the work of the Friend. They listen to the Friend, assist the Friend's work in whatever ways the committee determines appropriate, hold the Friend and the work in prayer, encourage and advise, and typically explore the spiritual journey of the Friend being supported. Members of these committees may choose to step off at any point. Any replacements are handled by the Friend or the committee.

To establish this sort of committee, there are a few ways forward: The Friend themselves can initiate the process, find the members and convene these meetings. A member of the Friend's clearness committee might take on the work of creating this informal committee as a step of further support.

Whatever path the Friend may take to establish an informal support committee, it is good to keep someone from Ministry and Counsel informed.

Support Committees Under the Care of M&C

If a leading proves to be persistent and deep, it may become recognized by the individual and their clearness or informal support committee as being a *ministry* that would be better served with more corporate support from M&C. At this point a Friend might ask M&C to consider taking the committee under its care. Membership in the meeting is an expectation for this care.

M&C considers this step carefully: Is the Friend a member of the meeting and active in meeting life? Is there ample reason to believe this leading is of the Spirit,

well-discerned, and sustained? What was the prior process of discernment like? Do the Friend and the support committee understand what “under the care of M&C” means, and are they in unity with the request? Is it clear to M&C that the Friend and the support committee would benefit from the nurture of its involvement?

It is a commitment of time and energy for M&C to provide formal and consistent care for a committee, and therefore there should be unity on M&C's part about proceeding with this step. M&C should have no hesitation or concern about the Friend's or the support committee's readiness, or its own faith in the nature and promise of the ministry, or its unity and ability to care well for a committee. It is possible that the right next step would be to ask the committee to consider some suggestions and meet for more time before coming under M&C's care.

If M&C is in unity to move forward, they will collaborate with the Friend to determine who might be appropriate to approach about serving on a support committee. Members of the meeting community should be considered for these committees, as well as Quakers from nearby meetings who are familiar with the Friend and the work. A designated M&C liaison checks in regularly with the Friend and the committee clerk to be sure the committee is meeting and functioning with weight and depth, in good order, and reports concerns to M&C. It may send a member of M&C to visit the committee on occasion. It may ask the Friend and committee to offer opportunities to the meeting to learn about the Friend's work. It may ask the Friend and committee to make formal reports to M&C, and possibly to business meeting. As changes arise in the support committee's composition, M&C assists in identifying and calling new committee members.

While this ministry and support committee may continue for years, at some point the Friend and the committee or M&C, may discern that it is time to change the formal support or lay down the work. This may happen when there is a substantial change to the Friend's work or ministry, or if the Friend moves out of the area, in which case they are encouraged to find support locally. M&C should discuss with the Friend if another form of support would be helpful.

Oversight Committees

After a Friend has acted on a leading with the help of a support committee and that Friend's work has become well-understood by the meeting, M&C might discern that the Friend's work is a sustained ministry that would be furthered by being held accountable and under the discipline of the meeting. At that point, M&C may discuss with the Friend and the support committee the idea of transitioning to an *oversight* role, working to ensure greater accountability. This change relies on the understanding that the Friend is ready for a more challenging and directed relationship with M&C, and that M&C is prepared to take on this work. M&C listens carefully for the movement of the Spirit in the life of the Friend and how the Friend and their ministry might benefit from delving deep into the challenging questions of oversight.

Oversight committees create formal written reports to M&C and report to business meeting annually. An oversight committee is charged with examining a Friend's

motivations, work and distractions. The Friend carrying the ministry is expected to bring all prospective work and engagements to the oversight committee for discussion. The oversight committee may decline to approve everything the Friend wishes to take on. The oversight committee monitors the Friend's relationship with the meeting. It continuously challenges the Friend to be faithful to the Spirit. Part of the discipline of being under the care of an oversight committee is being willing to answer difficult questions, such as about the role that ego or pride may be playing in the life of the Friend, or the Friend's ability to handle negative feedback. It may encourage the Friend to make changes. It continuously challenges the Friend to be faithful to the Spirit and to carry the work humbly and cheerfully.

If this change seems like the right next step, M&C will bring an item to business meeting requesting approval to form an oversight committee for the Friend. M&C may ask Nominating Committee for help in forming and staffing oversight committees. Often one member of these committees is from another meeting, in recognition that ministry goes beyond the bounds of any particular meeting, and/or to take advantage of expertise elsewhere in New England Yearly Meeting. M&C may feel for various reasons that the Friends who have been helpful on a support committee might not be the same Friends appropriate for the oversight role.

If there is a fund established for the ministry, a line item is created in the meeting's budget, and the committee oversees its use. When oversight of money is part of a committee's work, special care must be taken by M&C to assure that someone on the committee has the gifts and experience to assure that funds are handled in alignment with standard accounting practices. The committee is encouraged to work closely with the Treasurer of the meeting to assure good order.

While this ministry and oversight committee may continue for years, at some point the Friend and the committee or M&C, may discern that it is time to lay down the work. This may happen when there is a substantial change to the Friend's work or ministry, or if the Friend moves out of the area, in which case they are encouraged to find support locally. Since the meeting approves an oversight committee, its laying down must also be brought to business meeting.

Short-Term Oversight Committees

An Oversight Committee might be required of a member or attender receiving a grant, including Friends who do not have a support committee. These are by nature time-limited, possibly only through the time covered by a travel minute. Ministry and Counsel should be clear about the expected timeline when they bring the request for approval to business meeting. In some cases, the terms of the grant may be open-ended, but subject to grantor review. A short-term committee may or may not require the same level of staffing and rigor.

Minutes

A minute is a record of a corporate decision by a Friends body at business meeting.

Travel Minutes

A travel minute is the endorsement a meeting gives to one of its members who is traveling among Friends or in the wider world under the weight of a concern, usually expressed in a letter which accompanies the traveler. A travel minute is endorsed by the clerk with approval of the meeting. If the Friend is traveling outside of the yearly meeting, it is also approved by the quarterly meeting and signed by its clerk, and then by the yearly meeting and signed by its clerk. Minutes of travel usually send greetings to Friends being visited, ask those Friends to give loving care to the visiting Friend, confirm that the visiting Friend is a member of the meeting and has the approval of the meeting to travel in the ministry, introduce the Friend and the reason for the travel, affirm the gifts of the traveling Friend, and close with a prayer that the travel is blessed. A travel minute is different from a letter of introduction, which the meeting may approve for a Friend who plans to visit Friends in the course of travelling.

Minutes of Denominational Service

The meeting issues Minutes of Denominational Service to Friends whose work requires formal documentation, for example, for work as a chaplain or to provide religious credentials for prison visitation. These Minutes have a stated expiration date, determined by M&C in consultation with the requesting Friend. They are usually two-five years in duration, and can be renewed as needed. All Minutes of Denominational Service come before business meeting for approval. M&C encourages Friends with Minutes of Denominational Service to consider if having a support committee would be helpful to them.

Minutes of Religious Service

A Minute of Religious Service is an attestation by the meeting that a Friend carries a ministry that has been carried consistently and faithfully for some time and is recognized by the meeting. The lack of a Minute of Religious Service does not indicate a lack of ministry. For a Minute of Religious Service, a Friend's oversight committee would ask M&C to consider the request. M&C considers the Friend's character, life in the meeting, and faithfulness in their ministry. If there is unity in M&C, that committee asks the business meeting for approval to draft a Minute of Religious Service. M&C drafts this minute in collaboration with the Friend and the oversight committee, and uses any travel minutes that may have been part of the Friend's service as a resource as well.

A Minute of Religious Service is brief (no more than one page) and includes insight into the Friend's spiritual condition as well as describing and endorsing the Friend's ministry. If approved by meeting for business, the Minute is signed by the meeting clerk(s) and forwarded to the Salem Quarter.

While this ministry and minute may continue for years, at some point the Friend and the committee or M&C, may discern that it is time to lay down the work. This may happen when the Friend moves out of the area or there is a substantial change to their work or ministry. Since the meeting approves a Minute of Religious Service, its laying down must also be brought to business meeting and then passed on to Salem Quarter.

Corporate Witness

Corporate witness is a meeting's shared testimony. It is a meeting's long-term and serious commitment to uphold a particular undertaking or practice. An individual Friend's ministry may become a corporate witness if it includes the active involvement and participation of the meeting community over a long period of time. It requires minuting by the meeting after careful discernment and becomes an ongoing item of the meeting's business agenda; it usually requires collaboration with corporate bodies beyond the meeting walls, such as other churches or municipal departments.

It is a great gift to a meeting when it can faithfully and corporately "take on" or "carry" a witness with one of its members. And, M&C and the meeting can support or oversee a Friend carrying a ministry with commitment and enthusiasm without ever taking the unified step of corporate commitment.

When the meeting takes under its care a Friend with a leading, it does not mean that the Friend is speaking for the meeting as a whole or even that the entire meeting fully understands and is in unity with the witness. It means the meeting is recognizing that the Friend is faithful and Spirit-led and, as an individual, is under the weight of a concern:

"Supporting a Friend in response to a leading means that the meeting recognizes the Spirit at work in the minister and is prepared to provide spiritual and practical support as the minister grows in faithfulness. It does not necessarily imply that the meeting as a whole is under the weight of the concern." (Central Philadelphia Meeting, PYM)

Further Reading

The School of the Spirit's booklet "The Spiritual Care Committee," is recommended reading for any support committee that is looking for guidance about how it might operate. It is available as a free download.

<http://schoolofthespirit.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Spiritual-Care-Committee-booklet3-042412.pdf>

Another excellent resource is Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's "Guidelines for a Spiritual Care Committee."

[\(https://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/guidelines-and-procedures/guidelines-care-committees/guidelines-spiritual-care-committee/\)](https://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/guidelines-and-procedures/guidelines-care-committees/guidelines-spiritual-care-committee/).