

## “Passage of the Month”

Drawn from the draft chapter on Ministry & Counsel by the Yearly Meeting Faith & Practice Revision Committee

### **October**

“Friends affirm the vital experience of a Spirit which illumines our lives, an Inward Guide whose nature is made manifest in our lives when we heed its promptings. We understand this Spirit to be invitational, to be challenging, to be inclusive, and to call us into community. In attending to this Guide, Ministry & Counsel members learn to be alert to the ways in which the community may need to be renewed, disciplined, refreshed, or enlivened. The authority of Ministry & Counsel lies in its ability to discern and articulate God’s invitation into a Spirit-guided life.” (¶1)

### **November**

“In Friends’ worship there is an interplay between gathered silence and vocal ministry. M&C encourages spiritually-grounded ministry and engages with Friends in whom it is a consistent gift. It may need to offer loving personal reminders to Friends of the purpose of space between messages, the importance of silence to Quaker practice, or of too-frequent speaking or singing by an individual. Ministry & Counsel can guide the community in becoming sensitive to cues that an offering of sung ministry may or may not be an invitation for other worshippers to join in. It also encourages Friends who may be reticent to speak to respond to the Spirit’s prompting to offer vocal ministry.” (¶12)

### **December**

“Friends believe that the Quaker message has the power to be transformative for people of all backgrounds, identities and abilities. Ministry & Counsel works with the meeting to counter prejudice in all its manifestations, overt and subtle, and to notice and address examples and patterns of oppression that may hold meetings back from the fullness of inclusion. M&C holds loving concern for those who may be hesitant to visit a meeting because of their race, age, financial condition, family configuration, ableness, sexual orientation or gender identity. In a spiritually hospitable and inclusive meeting, it is clear to all who enter the meetinghouse doors or visit its website or other online presence that they are welcome.” (¶14)

## **January**

“In some circumstances the meeting itself is seeking clearness about its role in a prospective mutual and covenant relationship. This is the case when M&C forms a clearness committee for membership or for marriage under the care of the meeting. It also applies when Ministry & Counsel forms a clearness committee to consider taking a person’s ministry under its care. These clearness processes are two-way streets. Those asking for clearness are looking for the committee’s assistance in determining their readiness for membership, marriage, or ministry and for helping in their preparation for these new roles. The meeting is coming to its own clearness about taking the Friend into membership at this point, or holding a wedding under its care, or supporting a ministry.” (¶26)

## **February**

“Ministry & Counsel also has a significant community pastoral care role. It is important for the health of the meeting that it be sensitive to conflict, whether it is between a few individuals in meeting or one of wider concern, and promptly explore the sources. Such engagement requires an atmosphere of trust, respect, and truthfulness. Addressing conflicts is an opportunity for growth.” (¶37)

## **March**

“It is of vital importance that Ministry & Counsel remains aware of the spiritual state of the meeting. It also has a responsibility to help the meeting itself understand its strengths and challenges as a community. Any meeting—monthly, quarterly or yearly—benefits from a process of sitting together with queries, including ones that may lead to uncomfortable truths. Corporate discernment on its spiritual condition helps the community see how it has been led, how faithfully it has responded to challenges, and where it might need to focus its attention in the future. It helps bind the community and renew its sense of commitment.” (¶43)

## **April**

It can happen that a Friend, or Friends, find themselves out of unity with a sense of the meeting. At these times Ministry & Counsel may exercise its pastoral care responsibility to meet with these Friends and, holding them in the Light, listen lovingly to their concerns, assuring them that they are heard. Quakers understand that Friends out of

unity with the sense of the meeting may be a voice for a truth that has not yet been heard by the meeting.

With time and grace, there is sometimes a transformative process as the meeting settles into life after a decision that has been difficult. When hard feelings on the part of both sides of an issue fester instead of abate, however, a rift may form in the meeting that becomes a long-standing divide. Nothing is more humbling for peaceable Quakers than to face their own failings in getting along with each other. The process of dealing with conflict, whether resolved or not, may leave meetings themselves in need of pastoral care from the quarterly or Yearly Meeting. (¶40-41)

## May

“Both confidentiality and openness are important in the life of a meeting, yet there is a potential conflict between them. These two issues are often not openly addressed in many meetings. Here are some queries that may encourage discussion and discernment.

1. Do we listen to God’s voice for the right balance between confidentiality and openness?
2. How can we create places of safety within the meeting family where tender emotional and spiritual needs can be met?
3. Is each one of us careful of the reputation of others?
4. In applying the expectation of confidentiality that is needed to protect privacy, do we avoid unnecessary secrecy that would hinder appropriate help?
5. When relating an experience or incident, do we tell our own story rather than repeating another’s?
6. Are we aware of the danger of sub-groups gathering in confidentiality and creating pools of secrecy within a meeting?
7. Are we careful when setting up structures or rules of confidentiality that we not exclude people unnecessarily?
8. Are we careful to explain ground rules involving confidentiality and the reasons for them at the beginning of a meeting?
9. Do we cherish openness and vulnerability within the faith community that we may be known to each other as well as by God?
10. Do we consider that openness both in our meetings and in our lives is an aspect of our testimony of integrity?”

(Appendix 5C)

## **June**

“Ministry & Counsel seeks to identify, draw out, and encourage the gifts it sees in its community membership. Friends recognize that “to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7); a person’s spiritual qualities are gifts not only to the individual but to the community as well. Ministry & Counsel reaches out to those friends whose gifts would support service opportunities in the meeting, and may draw Nominating Committee’s attention to its perception of gifts in a Friend. This drawing out of a gift is an affirmation of the spiritual life of the individual and the use of the gift within the meeting strengthens the community.” (¶47)

## **July**

When the meeting takes a Friend with a ministry under its care, it does not imply that the Friend is speaking for the meeting as a whole or that the entire meeting is called to that particular witness. It means the meeting recognizes that the Friend is faithful and Spirit-led and, as an individual, is under the weight of a concern. The meeting is also affirming that it is prepared to provide spiritual and practical support as the Friend grows in faithfulness. (¶53)

## **August**

“A meeting may determine that their community is, or will be, helped to thrive more vigorously by inviting a Friend called by the Spirit to serve as pastor. A Friend who is released to follow such a vocation can provide a meeting with a consistent, intentional pastoral presence.

The pastor’s role overlaps with the work of Ministry & Counsel when it comes to nurture and care of the community as a whole and of the individuals within it, especially in regard to spiritual nurture and accompaniment. It is customary for pastors to serve ex-officio on Ministry & Counsel. In meetings with a pastor, Ministry & Counsel still serves all the same functions and holds the same authority as in any other meeting. Pastors may be appreciated for their individual gifts and insights but do not have special authority within the meeting simply because of their role.” (¶58-59)

## September

Contemporary society has such a strong individualistic bent that persons coming new among Friends, while bringing a strong hunger for community, for spiritual community, have little idea of what that community will look like or how it may affect their personal lives. Even those of us who have been fortunate in growing up in fairly strong Friends communities — and there are fewer and fewer of us — have been influenced by the individualism of the time and need continually to hone our awareness of what the meeting community might ideally be, and continually work towards strengthening it. (The Conservative Friend, 1996) (Extract 5.8)