

Guidance for Pastoral Care

on behalf of

New England Yearly Meeting of Friends

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand, if there has been any slip or fall; and waiting till the Lord gives sense and repentance, if sense and repentance in any be wanting ... So watch your hearts and ways; and watch one over another, in that which is gentle and tender, and knows it can neither preserve itself, nor help another out of the snare; but the Lord must be waited upon, to do this in and for us all. - Isaac Pennington, 1667

Purpose of this document

Among Friends and ecumenically, there are diverse understandings, practices, assumptions, and ways of approaching the work of loving accompaniment, nurture, guidance, and boundary-setting in spiritual relationship, which is sometimes referred to generally as “pastoral care.”

Rather than seeking to offer a comprehensive definition, this document seeks to reflect and describe current discernment, learning, and experience of Friends carrying responsibility for pastoral care on behalf of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends—in its aspects as both an organization and a spiritual body—over many years.

It is organized into 1) a series of *advices for pastoral care* undertaken on behalf of the Yearly Meeting, 2) a description of processes and roles for sharing and responding to pastoral concerns on behalf of the Yearly Meeting, and 3) specific practices and process for pastoral care in the context of events directly sponsored by the Yearly Meeting.

This is a living document. It has been developed through the attention, insights, and prayerful service of many Friends over several years, formally from at least 2013 to the present, in various iterations. Friends involved in this discernment and creation have included, but not been limited to, Friends serving as part of NEYM Ministry & Counsel (including both previous Clerks of Ministry & Counsel and members of successive working groups focused on pastoral care), Friends providing pastoral care at Yearly Meeting-sponsored events, Friends serving in other appointed YM leadership roles, Friends with particular concerns for inclusion and removing barriers to participation and service, legal counsel, and Yearly Meeting staff with pastoral care responsibilities for both youth and adults.

Questions, reflections, and suggestions on this document may be shared with the Yearly Meeting Secretary, who in keeping with their role and responsibilities makes changes to this document, at ymsec@neym.org. The approaches and guidance reflected in the document will be regularly reviewed and informed by guidance from the Coordinating & Advisory Committee.

Advices for pastoral care on behalf of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends

1. Trust and affirm that God is at work in the person or group's life: Honor the Spirit as the primary "pastor" in "pastoral care". Remember that you are not God.
2. Remember that, as pastoral caregivers, we cannot fully know or understand what is right or best for another person. We can practice discernment and care, acting with humility and prayerfulness, knowing that ultimately we are not in control.
3. Cultivate and continually return to a grounding in prayer.
4. Affirm this moment—in all its messiness, confusion, pain, anxiety, and possibility—as part of an ongoing arc of discovery, grace, and coming into wholeness, accompanied by and journeying with the unending loving Presence.
5. Encourage the expression of this care through ongoing trusted relationships over time; take a long view of accompaniment that honors the arc of life. Take care to avoid unnecessarily creating a sense of urgency or crisis.
6. Be informed as appropriate by clinical or professional insights and experience, including awareness of how the impacts of personality disorders, abuse, or other mental health concerns often go unrecognized or unaddressed in faith communities. Be open to encouraging a person to seek support from professional resources. Remember that pastoral care in this context is not—and *should not be attempted as*—clinical care.
7. Nurture spiritual and emotional resilience in the person and those around them. Encourage awareness of and reliance on the person's internal and relational resources, both existing and potential.
8. Be informed by an appreciation of "antifragility"—the understanding that humans thrive and grow in significant ways through encountering, accepting the reality of, surviving, and finding meaning and fruitful engagement with what might often be experienced as adverse or challenging events and conditions. Affirm the value of ongoing exploration, learning, forgiveness, and growth as a spiritual discipline for living.
9. Wherever possible, affirm the primary role of the local meeting and its members in pastoral care and related spiritual formation. Seek to act in ways that reflect this understanding.
10. Remember that in nearly all cases pastoral care and accompaniment happens quietly, without wider knowledge or awareness. Encourage Friends to bear this reality in mind when there is a perception that nothing is being done, or that no one is caring for concerns. If questions arise related to an active concern, it is often helpful to affirm that a concern is being tended without sharing details.
11. Be attentive to the "family system" (as described in *family systems theory*), and how these dynamics are transposed to, and play out in, the context of group dynamics in

faith communities.

12. Cultivate and bring a “non-anxious presence”. Remember that a settled nervous system and a stable presence, by themselves, can often help quiet restless minds and hearts. (the work of Edwin Friedman and Brene Brown, among others, may be helpful resources in this regard).
13. Be willing to affirm and assert clear boundaries and expectations for behavior, when needed to protect those who may be vulnerable, and for the good of the whole community.
14. Bring an awareness that people who have been through different kinds of traumatic experiences may react differently to many circumstances and events. We who have been through these kinds of experiences may experience efforts at “care” differently than others, and may benefit from different or particular kinds of awareness, attention, or accompaniment. Do not assume that one approach will be helpful for everyone.
15. Keep watch for, and take care not to foster or exacerbate, unhealthy power imbalances or dependency—this work is *not for us*, we should never *need* to be needed or involved, or to be *seen as* giving care. Affirm the essential need for differentiation and detachment with love; be watchful to resist dynamics of relationship abuse and codependency (the false belief that one person is responsible for the feelings or actions of another). Take care that responses to pastoral care concerns do not become “performative” (being *seen as* doing something important); be watchful not to offer a temptation to melodrama or deepening anxiety in the wider body.
16. Hold whatever is shared in “sacred trust”. This is not complete confidentiality, as consultation with trusted elders in the same spirit may be needed, and Friends must be mindful of mandated reporting requirements and other legal and ethical responsibilities.
17. As invited, walk with. Wait. Listen. Be a witnessing presence. Do not seek to “fix”.
18. Emphasize attention to the observable presence (or absence) of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) as signs of spiritual well being, both in the person and in the community.
19. Be attentive to, and offer reminders of, Friends’ discipline of gospel order (Matthew 18), in hope to avoid gossip and talebearing. At times, concerns for abusive or other exacerbating dynamics may prevent this, but the spirit of this guidance should be followed whenever possible.
20. Remember that reference to existing resources may be helpful, including the yearly meeting website on [“Care for One Another”](#) and [NEYM Faith & Practice draft texts on pastoral care](#) and on [Ministry & Counsel](#).

Process for sharing and responding to concerns

- When a Friend is aware of a pastoral care concern which they feel may require a more formal or significant response from the “Yearly Meeting”, Friends are asked to communicate this to the Clerk of Ministry & Counsel (mc-clerk@neym.org), the Presiding Clerk (clerk@neym.org), the Clerk of the Meeting Accompaniment Group (accompaniment@neym.org), or the Yearly Meeting Secretary (ymsec@neym.org), who will consult on a response as needed.
- After prayerful reflection, one of these Friends may then identify and invite a resource person to assist with a response. When one of these Friends learns of a concern of this kind, they will promptly inform the others (with care to only share needed detail), and will provide periodic updates to this group as appropriate.
- These Friends (the Presiding Clerk, Clerk of Ministry & Counsel, Clerk of Meeting Accompaniment, and Secretary) will regularly reflect together on the scope of pastoral care concerns that have arisen or are ongoing, and consider confidentially what additional support, resources, or actions may be needed.

As they discern it may be helpful, these Friends may bring matters to the Coordinating & Advisory Committee or other bodies for awareness, discernment, or potential action.

- The Secretary, the Presiding Clerk, the Clerk of Ministry & Counsel, and the Clerk of the Meeting Accompaniment Group, in consultation with others as they wish, will maintain an awareness of Friends who demonstrate needed gifts, skills, and qualities, who are committed to the guiding approach expressed above, and who are willing to receive a request to support a significant pastoral care issue.
- When concerns in need of pastoral care attention by the Yearly Meeting arise, the Clerk of Ministry & Counsel, the Presiding Clerk, the YM Secretary, and the Clerk of the Meeting Accompaniment Group will confer together (as necessary and able) about which of the them will take primary responsibility for attending to a particular concern. That Friend will discern either how they will follow up on the concern, or to whom (a resource person or elder) they may refer the concern for attention and response.

Recalling the tradition of traveling in pairs, and the value of spiritual accompaniment in discernment and action, these Friends will listen for a sense of when more than one resource person or elder is needed to respond to a particular situation.

- Wherever possible, an effort toward pastoral care on behalf of the Yearly Meeting will work in partnership with the local meeting, and seek to strengthen relationships and capacities within the meeting. Likewise, care should be taken that the actions of the Yearly Meeting do not interfere with or undermine ongoing care, accompaniment, or oversight relationships with or between local meetings.

- Consistent with the centrality and essential role of the local meeting in Friends pastoral care, the Yearly Meeting should regularly support the availability of accompaniment, training, peer group sharing opportunities, and other resources and opportunities to help local meetings strengthen these capacities.
- In some cases, requests for prayers and updates on matters of wider concern to many Friends across New England (such as the illness or death of a widely-known Friend, or an update on a larger event affecting communities in our region) may be shared through a “pastoral care and prayer” email distribution list maintained for this purpose.

Ongoing guidance and discernment for use of and subscription to this email list will be under the primary care of the Clerks of Ministry & Counsel and of the Meeting Accompaniment Group, in consultation with the Presiding Clerk and Yearly Meeting Secretary.

- When considering especially challenging situations, Friends charged with these responsibilities should be aware of the wider dynamics in which the particular behaviors, concerns, or actions are expressed. The following questions may be helpful in illuminating a need for new approaches or more assertive boundary-setting in order to address concerns more globally:
 - Does the immediately presenting situation seem to form part of a wider pattern of concerning behavior over time, or in multiple contexts?
 - Are the experiences of other Friends involved, especially those with less institutional access, power, or privilege, acknowledged and held in discerning awareness?
 - Does ongoing response to one person’s actions or concerns consume a substantial amount of time and attention for many Friends, in ways that impact the wellbeing of the whole?
 - Do some involved in ongoing concerns seem to be energized by conflict and confrontation? Do efforts to respond with care in one area frequently appear to generate new activity, or result in further demands for attention, or greater confusion, turbulence, or chaos?
- In some cases, the Yearly Meeting Secretary, Presiding Clerk, or Clerk of the Permanent Board (often in consultation with the relevant coordinators of specific programs or other responsible parties) consistent with their legal, pastoral, and organizational roles and responsibilities for the Yearly Meeting as a whole, may discern in consultation and discernment with one another the need to require a Friend or Friends to abide by limitations or defined plans for their involvement. This may include asking a person to refrain from participation in activities sponsored or supported by the Yearly Meeting for a time, or for the foreseeable future.

It should be remembered that service on behalf of the wider body of Friends through the Yearly Meeting, and participation in events beyond the local meeting offered through the Yearly Meeting, are both responsibilities and privileges.

Great care and tenderness should be taken in any exercise of this boundary-setting, mindful of the weight of this responsibility, and that Friends appointed to serve in these roles are accountable to the Yearly Meeting for the service with which they have been charged.

The role of a pastoral care resource person

A Friend serving as a pastoral care resource for the Yearly Meeting agrees to receive requests or referrals from one of the Friends serving in roles listed above regarding significant pastoral care issues.

Friends serving as resource people for pastoral care will not be asked to formally meet together or have any other charge beyond being willing to be asked to respond to a specific need. This document will be shared with each of these Friends to inform and guide their service.

If the invited resource person agrees to follow up on the issue, they will address that concern and remain in ongoing communications with the Friend who referred it to them, either to confirm the concern has been resolved, or to provide an update and ask for additional support, discernment, or guidance.

Gifts, skills, and qualities needed for Friends serving as a pastoral care resource

Friends serving in this way should demonstrate spiritual maturity, and bring experience in aspects of pastoral care—chaplaincy, counseling, eldership, prayer, accompaniment and presence, hospice, gifts of oversight, conflict management/resolution/transformation, experience responding to violence or emotional and psychological (including identity-based) trauma, managing mental health concerns, cross-cultural competency, and differentiated boundary-setting.

This Friend should be an active member of their local meeting, and be recommended by at least one other Friend who has observed the fruits of their service. The group as a whole should as possible reflect a diversity of identities and competencies (race and ethnicity, sexual and gender identity, class and educational background, personal history, rural/urban geographical context).

They should be committed to confidentiality in the course of their work (consulting with the referring person if any questions about expectations arise), collaborate well with those serving in related roles, and bring ethical care and prayerful diligence to the weighty responsibilities they are asked to carry.

Pastoral care at events directly sponsored by the Yearly Meeting

In the event that pastoral care concerns arise in the context of Yearly Meeting-sponsored events, they should be raised with the coordinator or host for the event, clerk of the relevant planning group, Program Director, or the Yearly Meeting Secretary. These Friends will consult about any needed response or follow up, prioritizing discernment and the agency of those

most affected. Care should be taken to ensure direct communication wherever possible, mindful of the risk of hearsay and misunderstandings that can arise in tender and emotionally charged environments.

An Annual Sessions Pastoral Care Team is organized each year under the oversight of the YM Secretary, in consultation with the Sessions Planning Clerk and (wherever possible) the continuing Sessions Pastoral Care Coordinator and/or Sessions Pastoral Counselor, and with other experienced and trusted Friends as the Secretary discerns. Gifts, skills, and experiences present in the pastoral care team should seek to reflect a diversity of needs, experiences, and conditions that may be present among Sessions participants.

Based on their responsibility for pastoral care and safety overall, the Secretary, working with event planners, may discern a need for a pastoral counselor, care team, or other pastoral care resources in connection with other activities or programs of the Yearly Meeting (e.g. youth retreats, Living Faith gatherings). In such cases, learning and experience in pastoral care, including guidance reflected in this document, should inform those efforts.

In each situation in which the Yearly Meeting is offering some forms of organized pastoral care, participants should be informed what forms of care are being offered, what the approach of the Yearly Meeting is to pastoral care, and what might be beyond the scope of this care and support. This can be done through referral to an existing policy (such as the *policy on addressing dangerous or disruptive behavior at Annual Sessions*), or through communication with participants in advance or upon arrival.

Limitations in Scope

Some examples of care or response beyond the Yearly Meeting's scope, capacity, and intentions for pastoral care as described here, which would more appropriately and necessarily be addressed through other means (either by the YM or another entity) might be:

- o providing clinical care;
- o addressing an immediate risk of violence to oneself or others;
- o providing treatment for substance abuse;
- o offering material or financial support, such as for ongoing household needs;
- o responding to reports of sexual abuse of minors and other vulnerable persons, or of harassment of YM employees¹;
- o engaging in long-term interpersonal conflict resolution; or
- o creating ongoing mechanisms or structures as vehicles to support individuals carrying personal concerns or calls to ministry.

Referral or Involvement After an Event

Generally, substantive involvement of a pastoral care team with a Friend seeking pastoral care should not continue following a particular event, beyond possible referral to Friends in the local meeting. Concerns arising in relation to a person's involvement in multiple distinct events or contexts over time may indicate that a different approach or response is needed.

¹ Specific procedures for responding to reports of sexual abuse, and for harassment of employees, are outlined separately as part of relevant YM child safety and personnel policies: see <https://neym.org/who/governance/policies>