

Meeting Accompaniment Group

Sessions 2022 approved the creation of the NEYM Meeting Accompaniment Group. Permanent Board approved the clerk in September 2022 and additional members in February 2023. These Friends, together with the clerk of ministry and counsel, and *ex officio* members including the yearly meeting secretary and presiding clerk, come from each of the NEYM states but for Connecticut. We gathered together for the first time in March 2023.

Named qualifications for this service include: spiritual and emotional maturity, being a non-anxious presence, confidentiality, prayerful holding, gifts in oversight, pastoral care, boundary-setting, conflict resolution, communication, administration, and “love for and commitment to the nurture of local meetings as the foundation of Friends life together.”

Together, we strive to uphold these aspects of service. Many of us also carry particular concerns or expertise, for example, for children’s safety and programming, the life cycles of meetings, and stewardship of property. We learn well together and regularly consult with Friends for additional wisdom and support.

When invited by meeting leaders – typically by clerks of monthly meetings or quarters, as well as ministry and counsel clerks – we visit to listen, offering a prayerful “outside ear” to reflect what we hear, nurturing and supporting existing capacities within the meeting. We also offer resources as requested. Engagements have ranged from a single phone call to weekly meetings over a period of months, presence at worship and meetings for business, facilitation of threshing sessions, invitations to potluck discussions and meeting retreats.

In our first ten months, fifteen meetings, one quarter seeking support for care of two meetings, and one committee have sought this accompaniment. Additionally, we regularly listen for concerns named in State of Society reports, in monthly meeting newsletters, news from traveling Friends, participation in the monthly Meeting Leaders calls and other NEYM-sponsored events including Living Faith, the Meeting for Listening and participation in quarterly gatherings.

The work of the group is not to “fix,” but to listen and to connect meetings to resources that might be useful as they find – and are supported in – their own discernment practices grounded in the particular context of their community. Prayerful accompaniment is not “fixing,” but “making” – making perhaps some brokenness visible while also supporting the community’s role in making something new together, integrating the reality of our human brokenness into a common, wiser wholeness. This is spiritual work with administrative components, wrapped in pastoral love. When this works well, we may come to know and love each other even across differences, valuing our rich diversities.

Accompaniment reports regularly to monthly gatherings of Coordinating and Advisory, to raise up where needs exist and where programming or other resources might be useful.

Some themes are emerging as common concerns for accompaniment: behavioral issues and how to establish appropriate and loving boundaries; consideration of when buildings drain rather than enrich community life; and unclear administrative structures and processes, especially around meeting life cycles.

In service,

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Clerk, Accompaniment Group

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<https://neym.org/committees/meeting-accompaniment-group>