

**New England Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice*  
Ministry & Counsel  
Received Preliminary Approval August 8, 2023**

INTRODUCTION.....	3
I. The Life of the Spirit in Community.....	3
II. Friends who Serve on Ministry & Counsel.....	3
III. Structuring the Work of Ministry & Counsel.....	4
THE WORK OF MINISTRY & COUNSEL.....	4
I. Spiritual Foundations.....	4
II. Concerns of Ministry & Counsel.....	5
II.a. Care of Worship.....	5
II.b. Support of the Meeting for Business.....	7
II.c. Spiritual Nurture & Religious Education.....	7
II.d. Clearness.....	8
II.e. M&C and Membership.....	9
II.f. M&C and Marriages in the Meeting.....	10
II.g. M&C’s Role in Pastoral Care and Conflict Transformation.....	10
II.h. The Spiritual Condition of the Meeting and the State of Society Report.....	12
II.i. Recognizing & Nurturing Gifts, Leadings & Ministry.....	13
II.j. Ministry & Counsel’s Relationship with a Pastor.....	16
II.k. When the meeting is an Employer.....	17
EXTRACTS.....	18
ADVICES AND QUERIES FOR MINISTRY & COUNSEL.....	21
I. Advices for Ministry & Counsel.....	21
II. Queries for Ministry & Counsel.....	22
APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 5.....	25
5A. Care of Worship Tools.....	25
5B. Safety in the Meeting Community.....	25
5C. The Welcoming Meeting.....	26
5D. Supporting Spiritual Nurture and Religious Life.....	26
5E. Queries on Confidentiality and Openness.....	27
5F. Conflict Transformation in the Meeting Community.....	29
Informational Session.....	29
Listening Session.....	29
Threshing Session.....	30
Minutes of Exercise.....	30
5G. Guidance for a Clearness Committee for Personal Discernment.....	30
Organizing the Clearness Committee.....	31
Conducting the Clearness Committee.....	31
5H. Advices and Queries for Those Who Serve on Clearness Committees.....	32
Advices for those who serve on Clearness Committees.....	32
Queries for those who serve on Clearness Committees.....	32

5I. Support Committees.....	33
5J. Advices and Queries for Those Who Serve on Support Committees.....	33
Advices for Those Who Serve on Support Committees.....	33
Queries for Those Who Serve on Support Committees.....	33
5K. Care & Accountability Committees.....	33
5L. Advices and Queries for Those who Serve on Care and Accountability Committees.....	34
Advices for Those Who Serve on Care and Accountability Committees.....	34
Queries for Those Who Serve on Care and Accountability Committees.....	34
Queries for the Friend who is the focus of the Care and Accountability Committee.....	34
5M. Letters and Minutes for Travel and Service.....	35
Letter of Introduction.....	35
Minutes for Travel Under a Concern or in the Ministry.....	36
Denominational Endorsement.....	38
Minutes of Religious Service.....	40
Minute for a Released Friend.....	42
Recording Gifts in Ministry.....	43
Rescinding Recording of a Gift.....	43
5N. The Search for a Pastor.....	44
EXTRACT CITATIONS.....	44

# Ministry and Counsel

## INTRODUCTION

### I. THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT IN COMMUNITY

1) 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 (M&C) members learn to be alert to the ways in which the community may need to be renewed, guided, refreshed, or enlivened. The authority of M&C lies in its ability to discern and articulate God's invitation into a Spirit-guided life.

2) Early Friends began a practice of having a smaller body within the meeting community who met separately to worship together, discuss the emerging Quaker approach to faith, and hold the meeting and its members in prayer. The Friends in these smaller bodies who were known for the power of their vocal ministry were named as ministers; some traveled extensively to spread the Quaker message. Friends who were "most grown in the Power and the life, in the pure discerning in the Truth" (Dewsbury, *Works*, 1689) were named as elders. These Friends were alert to the spiritual and physical needs of the community, and nurtured its life, organization, and business practices; some also provided spiritual accompaniment to traveling ministers.

3) In New England these bodies of ministers and elders evolved into what is usually called Ministry & Counsel. All Friends have responsibility for ministry and for caring for one another as members of a meeting. M&C, however, is charged with giving particular attention to insuring that the many important aspects of the life of the community are not forgotten. These include:

- Being alert to the spiritual life and physical needs of the entire meeting community
- Caring for the vitality of worship and pastoral care
- Fostering ministry
- Encouraging spiritual nurture of the meeting community
- Facilitating clearness committees for personal discernment, marriage and membership
- Addressing conflict resolution

All these forms of care are loving manifestations of a functioning Ministry & Counsel.

### II. FRIENDS WHO SERVE ON MINISTRY & COUNSEL

4) Meetings look to appoint to Ministry & Counsel Friends with deeply-rooted commitment and experience of paying attention to the Inward Guide, whose lives give evidence of spiritual wisdom, discretion and compassion. They are faithful in attendance at meetings for worship and for business. Their own active spiritual lives and grounding in Quaker tradition are resources that inform their decision-making. Some meetings refer to Friends with these qualities as elders. The meeting may turn often to these "weighty" Friends for service on M&C but a particular Friend does not need to be actively part of M&C for individuals or the meeting to seek them out for

good listening, nurturing, and discernment. A turnover of membership on M&C is encouraged as a means of sharing the responsibility, of developing spiritual leadership within the membership, and of revitalizing the body with fresh vision. In addition to appointed members of M&C, it is customary for the meeting clerk to serve *ex officio*. In a few New England meetings, the work is upheld and supported by a pastor who also serves *ex officio* on M&C. (*Friends considering service on M&C are advised to read all of the appendices. See \*to be written\* the Community Life chapter and appendix ... for more on elders and eldering.*)

### III. STRUCTURING THE WORK OF MINISTRY & COUNSEL

*This chapter addresses M&C's responsibilities as tasks. They may not necessarily be implemented by a body named M&C.*

5) Monthly meetings in New England vary in the ways they cover the responsibilities of Ministry & Counsel. In most meetings the work is under one designated body named Ministry & Counsel. In large meetings the work is often distributed among several smaller bodies or committees which are named for their function, such as Ministry & Worship, Pastoral Care, and Membership & Clearness. In this chapter we refer to the responsibilities as belonging to M&C no matter how the particular monthly meeting divides them. Whatever structure a meeting uses, it is a task of M&C to be alert to the work of the committees. Structures may need to be reordered as the size, demographics or concerns of the meeting change.

6) In some meetings Ministry & Counsel is a “committee of the whole,” a gathering of the entire monthly meeting at appointed times to consider the spiritual health of the meeting and to carry out responsibilities generally assigned to M&C. As with any M&C meeting, those present take time to hold the meeting in the Light, returning to the center in prayer as often as needed to support their spiritual discernment. The meeting clerk and appointed M&C clerk(s) ensure that the distinction between M&C and business meeting is maintained, reminding those present that some actions require business meeting approval. (*See \*to be written\* for terms, officers, regularity of meetings, relationships to meeting committees and to the quarterly and Yearly Meeting.*)

## The Work of Ministry & Counsel

### I. SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS

7) Loving attentiveness and discernment are central to the spiritual nurture of a meeting and of its individual members. Ministry & Counsel holds the community in prayer, seeking to discern where the meeting is in need of guidance, encouragement, or fresh vision, and offering ways to support these concerns. M&C relies on faith, trust, openness, and humility in its work. In times of conflict, these spiritual disciplines can encourage members to listen attentively to others and to stay in community, waiting on the leadings of the Spirit. M&C takes care that the

meetinghouse is an accessible and inclusive space that enables full participation for each person. It promotes an environment that encourages diversity of expression and open exploration. In such a community, Friends are able to express spiritual concerns knowing they will be lovingly held. It is important for members to remain alert to the condition of individuals within the meeting who may be in distress, in need of guidance or support, or whose spiritual gifts and ministry could benefit from recognition and encouragement.

## II. CONCERNS OF MINISTRY & COUNSEL

8) Ministry & Counsel agendas are often complex, involving long-term work on challenging issues and collaboration with meeting committees. M&C is often asked to consider items that have no committee 'home' elsewhere in the meeting. At times M&C may find the scope of its work has become too large to allow it to attend to its central purposes. Time in worship can help ground the group and help it discern its priorities. Business meeting may assist by forming short-term working groups to handle specific tasks. If the overload is ongoing, it may be time for the meeting to try a new committee structure for handling some of the work. The meeting may have multiple committees devoted to aspects of the work of M&C. Not all are under the direct care of M&C.

9) Some Ministry & Counsel deliberations need to be confidential. Keeping open communications with the meeting as much as possible invites the community to trust the work being done. Friends need to know M&C is available to hear any concern while maintaining confidentiality although there are circumstances in which confidentiality is not possible, for example in an instance of child abuse. (*See Pastoral Care paragraphs X and XX, and Appendix 5E on confidentiality.*)

### II.a. Care of Worship

10) Ministry & Counsel attends to the quality and the depth of worship with both an awareness of Friend's traditions and sensitivity to the Spirit behind those traditions. It calls on all Friends to be aware of the movement of the Spirit in their own lives and in the life and ministry of their meeting communities. M&C holds particular responsibility for establishing a climate of respect for the many ways individual Friends express their experience of the Light.

11) Ministry & Counsel provides care of all meetings for worship, including memorial meetings, weddings, and other specially called meetings. It ensures that meetings are held in good order. It is responsible for the appropriate closing of worship and for developing a practice at the rise of meeting that welcomes visitors and builds community, among all who participate in the worship.

#### Protecting the integrity of worship

12) Friends' corporate worship is an interplay between gathered silence and vocal ministry. Faithfully tending the quality of worship is one of Ministry & Counsel's primary responsibilities. M&C can nurture worship by:

- Encouraging spiritually grounded ministry and engaging with Friends in whom it is a consistent gift
- Taking note of Friends who may be reticent to speak in response to the Spirit's prompting, and encouraging them to offer vocal ministry
- When called for, offering loving personal reminders to Friends of the purpose of space between messages, and the importance of silence to Quaker practice
- Guiding 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

13) Ministry & Counsel is alert to dynamics or actions which are disruptive to the integrity of worship. Each meeting needs a clear and widely understood plan for how to deal with such behavior immediately and respectfully should it occur. When a message is clearly not spiritually led, members of M&C are prepared to talk privately, promptly, and tenderly with the speaker. If a message represents bigoted sentiments, M&C and other seasoned Friends in the meeting must be ready to respond in the moment and make it clear that such words or actions won't be tolerated. *(See Appendix 5A.)*

#### **Safety in the Meeting Community**

14) Not everyone in a meeting will be comfortable in our interactions with one another. There are times we need to learn to live with our differences. However, a Friend's behavior may reach a point at which it creates a physically or emotionally unsafe environment during worship, fellowship, or meeting events. Friends may not feel willing to share their reactions to the behavior and may begin staying away. M&C must be alert to these situations and be prepared to take on challenging conversations and action. This will require ongoing pastoral care for all involved. Tender situations can arise when the behavior of a Friend with emotional or mental challenges is at the heart of a concern. Referral to a mental health professional may be appropriate.

15) Most meetings have a child safety policy, and the yearly meeting has a child safety policy available to any meeting. Fewer meetings have guidance for the meeting's leadership in the event of sexual harassment, bigotry, bullying behavior, and other serious concerns. Sometimes the harm is unintentional, but it causes pain and must be addressed. An M&C facing an issue for which no widely-available policy exists can seek help from the quarter, the yearly meeting and from other meetings with similar experience. *(These concerns are addressed more fully in Appendix 5B and in the section in this chapter on conflict transformation, paragraphs 39-45.)*

#### **Welcome and inclusion in worship**

16) Friends believe 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 their meeting back from the fullness of inclusion. M&C holds loving concern for those who may be hesitant to visit a meeting because of their ethnicity, 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 or visit its website or other online presence that they are welcome.

17) Meetings embrace people of all ages in meetings for worship, believing one can access the Divine and be a channel for ministry from a young age. To that end M&C pays attention to the varying needs of children, young adults, parents, and older people. It is a common practice for children to spend some time in worship with the whole meeting, either at the beginning or the end, and be offered appropriate opportunities for spiritual nurture outside the meeting. Some meetings offer intergenerational worship programs on a regular basis. *(See the Appendices 5A on Care of Worship, Appendix 5C on the Welcoming Meeting, and 5D for suggestions on intergenerational worship and offering an inclusive, welcoming and accommodating meeting.)*

18) Ministry & Counsel engages with newcomers to welcome and guide them towards materials and opportunities that will help them learn more about Quakerism. Mindful of visitors who return and show an interest in Quaker faith and practice, M&C seeks ways to invite them into further engagement with the meeting.

19) For meetings that include worship via an online platform, Ministry & Counsel looks for ways to promote and maintain a sense of community among those who worship online and the rest of the meeting. Some who would like to participate in online meetings may need technical help or other support.

## **II.b. Support of the Meeting for Business**

20) Though distinct from meetings for worship, Quaker business meetings require spiritual grounding, a worshipful attitude, and the readiness to enter into silent worship at times. Friends' experience of God's guidance of the gathered community depends on the commitment of all present to pay heed to the Inward Guide, and to trust in an underlying unity in the Spirit even when there is strong disagreement. In some meetings, Ministry & Counsel routinely appoints Friends to serve as elders to hold the meeting in prayer while it conducts its business, especially when taking up a challenging or controversial matter. *(See the Corporate Discernment Chapter and Appendix 5F.)*

21) The presence of the meeting clerk - and the pastor in pastored meetings - at Ministry & Counsel facilitates communication about meeting concerns. M&C's support can provide spiritual attention, counsel and a sounding board for the meeting clerk and pastor. M&C may be asked to season an important agenda item with the clerk before it is brought to business meeting. The clerk, however, maintains responsibility for setting the agenda and facilitating meeting for business.

## **II.c. Spiritual Nurture & Religious Education**

22) Ministry & Counsel members are faithful in their own spiritual practice and growth and in helping promote spiritual preparation and practice in the meeting community. They are

attentive to the movement of the Spirit in meeting, and provide for opportunities and programming that support and vitalize spiritual growth.

23) Through attentive listening to the meeting, Ministry & Counsel may become aware of possible divine leadings for corporate witness. If so, they may bring their discernment as a proposal to business meeting, testing whether there is unity and leadership for committed social action, which might include collaboration with local ecumenical or interfaith communities. A Peace and Social Justice Committee may also initiate and carry this work if the meeting has one.

24) Ministry & Counsel is alert to the quality of ministry in meetings for worship and considers what kind of forum or other opportunity may nurture the community. This work is often carried out by a religious education committee. Times of joint study can open the opportunity for more extensive sharing of life and faith journeys than may happen during worship or social times. Ministry & Counsel, or a religious education committee, is also attentive to ways to more fully integrate newcomers into the meeting, and may offer programs to help them learn about Quaker faith and practice.

25) In many meetings nurturing the spiritual growth of children is under the care of religious education committees. Regardless, of what body in the meeting provides age appropriate programming for children, M&C seeks to involve children and young people in the meeting's community life through intergenerational gatherings and family worship opportunities. (*See Appendices 5A and 5D for activities supporting this work.*)

## II.d. Clearness

26) Central to the religious practice of Friends are dependence on the Inward Guide and the ability to help each other discern God's will. Friends bring to the clearness process questions about personal and vocational direction as well as about marriage, membership, and leadings of the Spirit. Quakers trust Truth can be revealed to those who earnestly seek it. Reminding the meeting occasionally of the availability of clearness committees for personal discernment can lead to more Friends participating in this unique gift of the Quaker tradition.

27) When a Friend is struggling with a decision or exploring possibilities in some area of their personal or professional life, they may initiate their own clearness committee for personal discernment without asking for the meeting's involvement, or they may ask for the meeting's help. M&C responds by arranging a clearness committee for personal discernment. In either case, after careful listening to the Friend's concern, clearness committee members offer questions intended to help the individual bring the issue and its spiritual dimensions into greater clarity, and under the guidance of the Spirit.

28) In some circumstances the meeting itself is seeking clearness about its role in a prospective mutual and covenant relationship. This is the case when Ministry & Counsel forms a clearness committee for membership or for marriage under the care of the meeting. It also applies when M&C forms a clearness committee to consider taking a person's ministry under its care. These clearness processes work in two directions. Those asking for clearness are looking for the



committee's assistance in determining their readiness for membership, marriage, or ministry and for help 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.

29) Different considerations come into the organization of these committees. Membership clearness committees are composed of meeting members, for example, and a marriage clearness committee needs representation from Friends with experience of marriage. Ministry & Counsel is advised to consider including participation from other monthly meetings for committees exploring leadings and ministries. This inclusion allows the meeting to bring in Friends whose expertise could be helpful to discernment, and reflects the fact that the ministry may extend beyond the meeting. It is advisable for any clearness committee to bring fresh vision and objectivity to the process by including one or more people who are not close personal friends of the person seeking clearness. Individuals or couples, however, need to feel comfortable with everyone on the committee so they can feel safe to discuss tender emotional and spiritual topics.

30) Clearness is a searching and intimate process, often requiring more than one meeting. Rather than supplying the person seeking clearness with answers, the committee's role is to help the Friend become clear through listening to their own Inward Guide. At times the process brings forward unanticipated discoveries and questions. A prospective member may receive guidance on further spiritual study and exposure to Quaker practice before continuing the membership process. A couple may recognize there are matters they need to resolve before moving ahead with their marriage. A Friend's leading may need more time to mature before M&C is clear to recommend corporate support. Occasions such as these can feel like setbacks, but actually are faithful steps forward in the shared process of a loving and spiritually-grounded clearness practice. *(See chapters on Membership and Marriage. For more about M&C's support for leadings, see Section RECOGNIZING & NURTURING GIFTS, LEADINGS & MINISTRY, below, and the Promptings of the Spirit (not yet written). For clearness committees for personal discernment, see Appendices 5G and 5H.)*

## **II.e. M&C and Membership**

31) Ministry & Counsel encourages membership by reaching out to faithful attenders who are involved in the life of the meeting and inviting them into a conversation about membership. M&C or another appointed body in the meeting forms a clearness committee composed of meeting members to respond to an adult request concerning membership or transfer of membership. If clearness is found, M&C or the designated committee brings a recommendation for membership approval to meeting for business. All new memberships in the meeting, including transfers and associate memberships for children by parental request, are cause for the meeting to plan a welcoming event.

32) The work of Ministry & Counsel includes outreach to its meeting members. It actively engages with young associate members as they emerge into adulthood, exploring the importance of Quakerism in their lives and helping them discern whether adult membership is

M&C Preliminary Approval August 8, 2023

their path. M&C maintains contact with members of all ages who are local but no longer involved with the meeting, and with all members living at a distance. Depending on the response (or lack of it), these conversations may include returning to active engagement with the meeting, sojourning or transferring to another meeting, or possibly laying down the membership. *(For more detailed discussions on these topics, see section on Clearness, above, the chapter on Membership, and Appendix 4.)*

## **II.f. M&C and Marriages in the Meeting**

33) As with a request for membership, Ministry & Counsel responds to a request for a wedding held under the care of the meeting by forming a clearness committee. If the committee and the couple are clear to proceed, M&C brings a recommendation to meeting for business for approval. When the meeting for business approves the recommendation, it authorizes the formation of a committee for care of the wedding.

34) The responsibilities of any clearness for marriage or care of wedding committee conclude after the couple has married. The meeting's support for the marriage continues through its ordinary process of pastoral care. When a divorce occurs in the meeting, pastoral care is offered to those who wish for it. Ministry & Counsel remains alert to dynamics within the meeting which may be divisive. *(See section on Clearness, above, and the chapter on Marriage and Appendix 6. For the pastoral care of Friends considering separation and divorce, see the section on Divorce \*to be written\*)*

## **II.g. M&C's Role in Pastoral Care and Conflict Transformation**

### **Pastoral Care of Individuals and Families**

35) Attention and care may be offered to anyone in meeting in either brief or extended ways. An individual or family is encouraged to seek help from the meeting with personal or family concerns, emotional struggles, or challenges arising from medical issues. Ministry & Counsel, or a committee devoted to pastoral care, fosters a spirit of community awareness and response to the needs of those in their midst who might benefit from support. M&C frequently reminds the community how to reach out for help. In a pastored meeting, much of this work is carried by the pastor with support from Friends in the meeting.

36) Pastoral care is a ministry of presence. Friends carrying out pastoral care make visits, provide prayerful support, and arrange for practical assistance such as transportation, meals and childcare where it may be needed. They also consider individual needs for guidance and personal counsel, by arranging clearness committees and, where appropriate, recommending a support committee or professionally trained help. It is important to realize the limits of what the meeting can offer in terms of time or expertise in counseling. When it is clear that professional help is needed, the meeting may still offer support through prayer and practical assistance.

37) Pastoral care providers are concerned with the welfare of any who may be ill or experiencing other physical or emotional distress. They may check in with Friends who are not attending

meeting, and encourage them to return. They might offer help with transportation, or suggest they worship with the meeting via an online platform if it is available.

38) Spiritually accompanying a terminally ill Friend and supporting their family through death and bereavement is an especially tender time for those giving or receiving pastoral care. In addition to supporting the Friend and family, Ministry & Counsel takes into account the impact this loss will have on the meeting. If there is to be a memorial minute, M&C or meeting for business arranges for that to be written. (*See chapters on Pastoral Care and Dying, Death & Bereavement for a fuller explanation, and Appendices 5I and 5J.*)

### **Conflict Transformation in the Meeting Community**

39) For the health of the Meeting, Ministry & Counsel is sensitive to conflict. Whether the tension is between a few individuals in meeting or one of wider concern, M&C has a responsibility to promptly explore the sources. Such engagement requires courage and an atmosphere of trust, respect, and truthfulness so Friends can hear the words of others in an open-hearted way. Addressing conflicts in this way provides an opportunity for growth. It is to be pursued, not avoided. Unresolved differences are detrimental to the health of the meeting and may lead Friends to disengage or leave the meeting entirely.

### **Interpersonal Conflict**

40) When individuals in an interpersonal conflict are unable to resolve the difficulty privately, Ministry & Counsel arranges for a Friend or small group of Friends to facilitate listening sessions. These sessions may need to be held separately depending on the vulnerability of any of the participants. Each person in the conflict has an opportunity to be heard, and is supported in hearing the concerns of the other. It is essential that all individuals involved in the conflict and its resolution be willing to engage in the process and to stay open to finding unity in the Spirit. If that is not true, M&C should step in and set boundaries. (See Appendix 5E.)

### **Addressing Tensions in the Meeting Community**

41) The same willingness to engage in spiritually grounded dialogue applies to groups within the meeting that are at odds with each other for any reason. If tension over differences continues for a prolonged period of time despite efforts to reach unity, and is widely known within the meeting community, it may be time for the meeting clerk or Ministry & Counsel to step forward. They may make a broad statement that describes the problem, and may ask for the meeting's respectful, loving attention to the search for common ground.

Informational presentations can help the meeting clarify the issue.

- Listening sessions and threshing sessions can offer opportunities for the community to hear each other without the pressure to reach unity
- A minute of exercise can lay out the range of viewpoints and concerns raised in a threshing session and summarize where the meeting finds itself on an issue. (See Extract 3.11)
- An elder can be asked to hold the meeting and the facilitator in prayer

42) If these efforts do not lead to unity, M&C might reach out to the quarterly meeting or ask a trusted Friend from another meeting to clerk a listening session for the meeting. If the quarterly

meeting does not have an active M&C, the monthly meeting M&C may reach out to Yearly Meeting's Ministry & Counsel or staff for suggestions or support. The same resources may be sought when an individual's issue is with the local M&C itself. *(See Appendix 5F for Listening Sessions, Threshing Sessions, and Minutes of Exercise.)*

43) It can happen that a Friend, or Friends, find themselves out of unity with a sense of the meeting. At these times Ministry & Counsel, which includes the meeting clerk, may exercise their pastoral care responsibility to meet with these Friends and listen lovingly to their concerns. Quakers understand that Friends who are out of unity with the meeting may in some cases be leading the group toward a fuller understanding of divine guidance.

44) 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 persist, 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 a meeting itself in need of pastoral care from the quarterly or Yearly Meeting.

#### **The Balance of Individual and Community Needs in the Meeting**

45) Within a meeting the needs and desires of individuals are held in balance with the needs and integrity of the whole. While it is important to provide space for individual insight and community growth, it is a work of love for the meeting to ensure that no individual's needs, behavior, or assertiveness dominate the meeting community. Sometimes it is the individual and sometimes it is the meeting that needs to move to a new understanding. Just as being aware of opportunities to provide pastoral care for individuals is a shared responsibility of every person in the community, so too is being alert to the pastoral care needs of the community as a whole.

#### **II.h. The Spiritual Condition of the Meeting and the State of Society Report**

46) It is of vital importance for Ministry & Counsel to remain aware of the spiritual state of the meeting. M&C 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. This process helps bind the community and renew its sense of commitment.

47) Yearly Meeting may send queries to meetings to serve as prompts for this process, or a meeting may explore the way the Spirit is moving in its midst as it feels led. Traditionally New England meetings have articulated their spiritual condition in an annual State of Society Report. Ministry & Counsel, or meeting members appointed by them, create the report, which is approved by M&C and presented for approval at the monthly meeting for business. Approved reports go to quarterly and Yearly Meeting Ministry & Counsel.

48) Reports may cover the full range of interests and concerns, but typically emphasize those indicative of the spiritual health of the meeting. A thorough report covers both that which is thriving and that which is challenging and needs strengthening, such as:

- The quality of worship and vocal ministry
- The strength of the meeting community
- Efforts to foster spiritual growth and evidence of growth
- Possible tensions in the meeting, and how Friends are responding to those challenges
- Significant events or activities in the meeting's year together
- Social justice concerns of the meeting and stands taken based on Friends' religious principles
- Participation in activities with Friends beyond the local meeting
- Relations with the community and other religious groups

49) The practice of local meetings reporting to their yearly meeting began early in England and was adopted by NEYM in the 18th century. Originally these reports were a response to questions, mainly factual, such as the number of Friends who had been imprisoned for their faith and died there, but there were also spiritual queries for meetings ("How has Truth prospered amongst you? Are Friends in peace and unity?"). NEYM has maintained a version of this tradition through two separate reports: a) the annual statistics report detailing membership changes and attendance at meetings, which is usually handled by the meeting's Recorder; b) Ministry & Counsel's State of Society report, which focuses on the spiritual condition of the meeting.

## **II.i. Recognizing & Nurturing Gifts, Leadings & Ministry**

50) Ministry & Counsel seeks to identify, draw out, and encourage the abilities and spiritual qualities it sees in its community members. Friends recognize that "to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7) A gift may be in service to the meeting itself, or to the Society of Friends or the broader society. When a Friend's spiritual strengths could support service opportunities in the meeting, M&C may draw Nominating Committee's attention to that Friend's potential. This drawing out of a gift is an affirmation of the spiritual life of the individual; its use within the meeting strengthens the community.

### **Clearness & Support for Leadings and Ministries**

51) The development of a leading into a ministry requires seasoning, reflection, considered action, and ongoing individual and corporate discernment. Friends often experience being called by the Spirit to make choices that impact how they live, both in their homes and in wider communities. While most inward promptings to action do not require the support of the meeting, Friends are always free to request the help of a clearness committee. Sometimes a Friend senses a leading that leaves them unsettled how to proceed, especially if the leading takes them beyond the meeting itself to represent Quakers to a broader community. Then it is essential to ask Ministry & Counsel to set up a clearness committee to help explore next steps. This committee helps the Friend explore the spiritual grounding of the leading and identify

possible next steps. The work within the clearness committee may bring the leading and the way forward into focus. Over time it may become clear the leading is to a ministry, either within the Yearly Meeting, in wider Quaker circles, or beyond the Quaker world. Work with the clearness committee continues until clarity is reached.

52) A meeting can offer both spiritual and practical support for a Friend carrying an individual ministry, holding a particular role in the meeting, or working in wider Quaker service. The meeting may encourage the Friend to form a relationship with a particular elder or spiritual companion. Ministry & Counsel may establish a committee to offer consistent, structured support. In some instances, M&C might name committee members from beyond the meeting's membership, which broadens the range of Quaker experience in the group and reflects that the ministry extends beyond one meeting. The committee meets regularly to hold the Friend in the Light, listening with prayerful attention and supporting the Friend as led. The committee clerk communicates regularly with M&C about the committee's work.

53) Traditionally these committees were called oversight committees. Some meetings have kept this term, but increasingly they are known as spiritual care, care & accountability, support, or anchor committees. Whatever the name, the purpose is the same: to help Friends be faithful to the leadings of the Spirit. *(See Appendix 5K for more on Care and Accountability Committees; Some meetings have a standing support committee for their meeting clerks, which may or may not be under the care of M&C. Support committees may also be helpful for others in service roles. See Appendix 5I and 5J for information, and advices and queries related to Support Committees.)*

54) Ministry is a gift of God, an expression of the Spirit in the life of the Friend, to be carried humbly and cheerfully in an attitude of service. Quakers understand that ministry can potentially come through any individual, not just those whose work is under the care of Ministry & Counsel. M&C affirms that truth, and seeks ways to express respect and value for all the ways members of the community serve the meeting, the Religious Society of Friends, and the wider society.

#### **Public Ministry and the Released Friend**

55) When the ministry is public, beyond the life of the monthly meeting, Ministry & Counsel brings the care of the ministry to the business meeting. The calling to the ministry and the work of the clearness and care and accountability committees are laid before the meeting. If the meeting affirms this calling and takes the ministry under its care, the ministry comes into the embrace of Friends as part of the life of the meeting. M&C makes regular reports to the meeting concerning the ministry. The meeting may assist the Friend with practical needs and funding. When the meeting provides financial support for a ministry so the Friend is freed from the need to earn a living, the Friend is referred to as a released Friend. *(See appendix 5M for more on Released Friends.)*

56) 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 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.

57) A monthly meeting's process of recognizing a ministry takes time and does not always go smoothly. Often a meeting needs background information about Quaker practice in supporting a ministry in order to proceed. Ministry & Counsel may need to articulate for the meeting the way in which a ministry furthers the meeting's work in the world. There may be concerns about the Friend's personality or fitness for the tasks involved. A concern for financial support for the work introduces another layer for community discernment. A meeting that unites behind corporate support of a Friend and the work carried may be comfortable with one form of support and not others. It may, for example, approve a minute of religious service or a travel minute rather than release the Friend financially or record the gift in the ministry. Every meeting needs to develop its own approach to supporting leadings and ministries.

58) Members and attenders alike are encouraged to seek clearness about a potential leading, and may receive informal support by Ministry & Counsel. When M&C takes an individual and their ministry under its care, however, it is expected that the individual be a member of the Religious Society of Friends.

#### **Travel Minutes, Minutes of Denominational Support, and Minutes of Religious Service**

59) It is often helpful for a Friend who is carrying a ministry to have a letter or a minute from their meeting expressing their standing in the meeting and the meeting's support. These minutes of affirmation and support serve different needs and are time-limited.

- **Travel minutes** are written for a Friend's travel in the ministry beyond the geographical bounds of the meeting for a specific occasion or set of visits. These minutes ask for receiving meetings' hospitality, opportunity to share ministry, and response to the ministry.
- **Letters or Minutes of Denominational Endorsement** provide qualifying credentials for chaplains and others who need religious certification for their work; they are time-limited and renewable.
- **Minutes of Religious Service** affirm and describe a ministry carried by a Friend and name the ways the meeting is supporting the Friend and their work. Minutes of Religious Service are revisited by Ministry & Counsel at specified intervals, at which time they may be renewed, revised or laid down. They are held by a particular monthly meeting and are not transferable; if the Friend moves, the new meeting takes up its own consideration of the Friend's ministry.

*(See Appendix 5M for details and samples. Note: Friends are often confused between travel minutes and letters of introduction for Friends visiting other meetings as part of their travels. 5M also covers Letters of Introduction and their use.)*

#### **Recording of Gifts in Ministry**

60) A Friend with knowledge of Quaker tradition and a gift for consistently sharing Truth in a way that speaks meaningfully to others may be recorded as having a gift in ministry. Recording has traditionally been used for Friends who have sustained gifts in vocal ministry. It is an affirmation, initiated by the monthly meeting and taken up by the quarterly meeting, that the individual's gift is not only locally helpful but also can be trusted to represent the Religious

Society of Friends to the wider community. (*For recognition of other sustained forms of ministry in NEYM, see "Minutes of Religious Service," above.*)

61) A recorded minister may serve on the meeting's Ministry & Counsel through the same nominating process as any member of the meeting. With rare exception, the recording is held by the individual for their lifetime. In a case where a Friend no longer appears to manifest this gift, M&C discerns whether it is appropriate to recommend the quarterly meeting rescind the recording. Some monthly and quarterly meeting in New England do not engage with the recording of ministries. All meetings, however, seek to encourage such gifts when they appear.

62) Initiating the potential recording of a gift in ministry is a serious undertaking. Recording carries the weight of clerical accreditation in other denominations and grants authority to officiate at weddings and visit prisons and hospitals as clergy. The status of a recorded minister is transferable with a certificate of membership from one monthly meeting to another and from one yearly meeting to another. (*See Appendix 5M for details on procedure for recording.*)

## **II.j. Ministry & Counsel's Relationship with a Pastor**

63) A meeting may determine 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.

64) The pastor's role overlaps with the work of Ministry & Counsel with respect to nurture and care of the community as a whole and of the individuals within it, especially regarding spiritual nurture and accompaniment. It is customary for pastors to serve *ex-officio* on M&C. In meetings with a pastor, M&C 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 their role does not give them special authority within the meeting.

65) The relationship between pastor and Ministry & Counsel is one of mutual support and communication. Together they prayerfully discern the condition and needs of the meeting and of its members and arrange for those needs to be addressed. Such discernment will often inform the messages the pastor prepares for meetings for worship. Since part of the pastoral call is to teach, M&C may ask the pastor (or youth or family minister) to prepare or locate study materials and arrange programs relevant to the meeting. The pastor usually attends or keeps in close communication with all the committees of the meeting and is able to bring this comprehensive knowledge to M&C's deliberations, thereby helping maintain connections among the various parts of the meeting.

66) It is usually the pastor who takes the lead in public ministry such as memorial meetings and weddings and in situations where a pastoral role is helpful, such as times of crisis and serious illness. It is also common for them to be a representative of the meeting to wider bodies of Friends, to ecumenical groups, and to the community at large.

### **Finding and Hiring a Pastor**



67) On occasion a meeting might see gifts for pastoral ministry developing in one of its members and help draw out those gifts by inviting the member to serve as their pastor. No particular training or background is required for pastoral ministry, nor is it expected that the pastor be a recorded minister. In most cases, however, a pastoral search committee is needed to find a pastor from outside the meeting, and this search originates in Ministry & Counsel. The search committee may seek input from the Yearly Meeting on potential candidates. Because it is unlikely that a candidate will be equally gifted in all aspects of pastoral ministry (vocal ministry, teaching, administration, pastoral care, conflict transformation skills, loving presence and spiritual accompaniment), the search committee's discernment involves considering the best match for the meeting based on the meeting's needs and the gifts carried by other members. The search committee also considers the meeting's ability and willingness to support a particular pastor and the fullness of the ministry to which they are called. It is a weighty decision for all involved, requiring prayer and surrender to the guidance of the Spirit. On occasion a meeting may call someone who is not a Friend to be their pastor. When this is the case, the meeting needs to undertake careful discernment of that person's knowledge and embrace of Quakerism. *(See Appendix 5N for guidance on the pastoral search process.)*

### II.k. When the Meeting is an Employer

68) At both the monthly and yearly meeting levels, interactions with employees can be experienced as a testimony to living in right relationship. Whenever a monthly meeting employs a Friend to work in any role, be it pastor, youth minister, administrator, care coordinator, facilities manager or resident Friend, Ministry & Counsel is closely involved in both support for their ministry and supervision of their work. These are two separate functions which are best served by different people or groups of people. The support committee for a remunerated ministry is the same as the support for other ministries in the meeting. Naming those who carry the supervisory task is important for keeping a clear understanding of the appropriate place for meeting members to bring suggestions, concerns, and requests. Where there is a supervisory committee, it is recommended that the committee clerk be the person who speaks with the employee on behalf of the committee.

69) A pastor is both a minister and an employee of the meeting, needing structures for support and for accountability. It may be advisable for the support committee to be formed from the wider Friends' community rather than just from within the meeting. Since there are few pastors within NEYM, ecumenical and interfaith ministerial associations can also be a vital source of support.

70) The supervisor or supervisory committee and Ministry & Counsel draw up and review contracts in consultation with employees. Together they agree upon duties and a fair compensation package. Contracts should include clear, detailed expectations for both employee and meeting. Any contract should express an understanding of the spiritual covenant involved, name practical considerations, and acknowledge mutual accountability between the meeting and its employees.

71) The Finance Committee is asked to determine the financial impact of Ministry & Counsel's recommendations and bring this information to the decision-making process. Recommendations for hiring, for the terms of a contract, or for terminating a contract are brought to the business meeting for a decision.

## EXTRACTS

5.1) "A Quaker meeting is endowed with a transcendent and prophetic purpose: it is gathered by God to strengthen the faithfulness of its members through worship, living in right relation, celebration and nurture. It is through grace, intention and surrender that we are drawn into unity with God's will for us: to recognize our kinship to each other, the world and to live in loving accord as full members of the beloved community, which is our inheritance. Whatever our diversity may be, our unity is the evidence that God is present and working among us."

Becky Phipps, 2008

5.2) 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. Oh! wait to feel this spirit, and to be guided to walk in this spirit, that ye may enjoy the Lord in sweetness, and walk sweetly, meekly, tenderly, peaceably, and lovingly one with another.

Isaac Pennington, 1667

5.3) 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.

Frances Taber, 1996

5.4) In each of our Friends Meetings—regardless of the form of our worship—there are Friends to whom God has given a heart for this particular people; this particular community. Such Friends feel called to walk lovingly alongside individuals and encourage them in their spiritual development. They also hold a particular concern for the wellbeing of the Meeting as a body. Each Friend brings gifts to the ecosystem of the Meeting. Those with specifically pastoral gifts find laid upon their hearts the health of the whole, and they express this calling in a variety of ways which may include vocal ministry, spiritual accompaniment and encouragement, pastoral care, teaching, conflict resolution and facilitating the ongoing connectedness of the Meeting community. They hold "the big picture".

Maggie Edmondson, 2018

5.5) The nurturing aspects of eldering as truth speaking lie in the recognition that one can be definite without being dogmatic. Elders should stand ready to state definitely and with candor their experience of things, without needing to insist that others conform their thinking and behavior to their views. In all cases of truth speaking, the first motion must be love. It is the power and integrity of love as it shows through one's life that must do the convincing in the end.

Sam Caldwell, 1983

5.6) To "listen" another's soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another. But in this scrutiny of the business of listening, is that all that has emerged? Is it blasphemous to suggest that over the shoulder of the human listener, there is never absent the silent presence of the Eternal Listener, the living God? For in penetrating to what is involved in listening, do we not disclose the thinness of the filament that separates person listening openly to one another, and that of God intently listening to each soul?

from GLEANINGS by Douglas V. Steere

5.7) "Our aged Friend, Joseph Hoag, with his companion, --- Battey, in the course of a religious visit, was at my house, and I remember a remark having been made, that there was some danger even to rightly anointed ministers, of preaching too much; and an instance was related of that valuable Friend, Daniel Haviland, in illustration of this danger, as follows:

"Daniel having felt a concern to attend a neighboring meeting, took his daughter, the late Hannah Wanzer, with him, who was then a child of about nine years of age. In this meeting he was largely engaged in the ministry, and apparently to his own satisfaction; but on their way home, he observed that his child seemed deeply and sorrowfully affected, and as she sighed heavily, and shed many tears, Daniel asked her what affected her so much. She looked up into his face and said, 'Oh, father, I do fear thee preached too much this morning!' Her father in surprise, exclaimed, 'Why, Hannah, what dost thou mean?' To which the child replied, 'I was very much comforted with what thou told us in the first part of thy discourse; my heart went along with thee, and I seemed even to know what thee was going to say, and I was very glad I went to meeting with thee; but when thee changed the subject, I could not go with thee, my heart became dark and sad, and the more thee preached the more sad I felt, and my mind became so troubled that I could not help weeping, and could scarcely keep my seat on the bench, and Oh! Father, it does seem to me that thee ought to have stopped when thee got through that first subject.' Daniel rode on in solemn silence, beside the sorrowing child, for a long time, and then laying his hand on the little girl's head, he said, "My daughter, flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven! I am now favored to see that I missed my Guide, and that I ought to have stopped where thou pointed out."

Joseph Hoag, 1909

5.8) Over a period of time when our meeting was discussing a controversial matter, business sessions became increasingly contentious, featuring rude exchanges between some outspoken members. The clerk attempted to address the issue in a general way during business meeting by reading relevant advices and queries, and reminding those present of the worshipful attitude

with which we are called to conduct our business. The Friends were also approached by Ministry & Counsel with direct and respectful requests for a change in tone. Nothing seemed to work. Finally M&C reached out to the Yearly Meeting staff for advice. Rather than counsel, however, we received an unexpected form of support. For the next two months of business meetings, the Field Secretary worshipped with us in the morning and sat through our business meetings in the afternoon, never saying a word. His centered, silent presence was what we needed: our meeting returned to civility and regard for the experience of others as we wrestled with the issue together.

Carolyn Hilles-Pilant, 2020

5.9) Let each be tender of the reputation of his brother; let every one be earnest to possess the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit. Watch over one another for good, but not for evil; and whilst not blind to the faults or false views of others, be especially careful not to make them a topic of common conversation. And even in cases in which occasion may require that the failings of others should be disclosed, be well satisfied, before they are made the subject of confidential communication, either verbally or by letter, that your own motives are sufficiently pure.

London Yearly Meeting Epistle, 1834

5.10) Fellowship in a common faith has often brought a religious society into being before it was in any way organized into an institution. It was so with the primitive Church and with the Society of Friends. Organization is a good servant but a bad master; the living fellowship within the Church must remain free to mould organization into the fresh forms demanded by its own growth and the changing needs of the time. Where there is not this freedom the Church has its life cramped by ill-assorted clothes, and its service for the world becomes dwarfed or paralyzed.

W. C. Braithwaite, 1905

5.11) A welcoming space for me is one where we meet people where they are and bring them into whatever is happening. An inclusive space recognizes the intrinsic worth of each of the members. We have to recognize the things that we are doing that create barriers to people bringing their whole selves.

Mary Linda McKinney, 2021

5.12) I've come to understand that when I arrive at Quaker worship, I bring my whole self, both the fullness of my identity and my life experiences. As a person who identifies as Black and a woman, largely operating in the dominant White culture of Quakerism in Philadelphia, I've become aware of the unwritten norms that underlie Quaker faith and practice – and worship in particular....

There are times in a meeting for worship (and elsewhere) when I feel downright rageful: triggered by someone's good intentions that either fall flat on me, leave me scratching my head in curiosity, or shaking in the heat of my anger.... Not only do we need to learn skills to care for ourselves and our emotions in the moment, but we also need to understand that those good intentions, even when Spirit-led, are not a license to ignore their unintended impact on others. Even as we gather for meeting for worship and offer Spirit-led vocal ministry, this too is within a

broader societal context of structures, systems, and institutions that further oppression and radicalization.

A reframe for Quakers would be to take a deeper exploration of our good intentions. How do our intentions affect others, either intentionally or unintentionally? How might we look deeper at our intentions and align them with our values? What do we do individually and as a corporate body when this happens? How might our good intentions further support our own implicit bias?

Valerie Brown, 2020

5.13) We need to recapture the sense that we are indeed working with God and to keep our hearts and minds open to his leadings – for he careth for us all and not one of us is in need but he knows. If we keep this attitude of receptive dependence we shall be ready to obey his promptings, we shall become aware of the needs of our fellow members and be prepared in his strength to play our part in helping all our members to find their right place in the life of our Meeting.

Stephen J. Thorne, 1959

5.14) *This minute is a report to Wellesley Friends at Meeting for Business from Ministry and Counsel on Fifth Month 10, 2018.*

At our meeting this month Ministry and Counsel cluster minuted the following as part of our discussion of how we might help the meeting become a whole and healed community:

“It seems our purpose is to work to clear the conduits to enable love to flow between and among us. It would help if we create a culture in which we all give each other credit for being in good faith. We need to love one another so much that each feels safe enough to let go, and open, and grow. It is laid upon the members of Ministry and Counsel to begin living more overt love with one another.”

We bring this to the entire meeting in the hope that you will also take this charge seriously. We ask that every one of you support the members of M&C as we strive to be leaders in the work of love in the meeting, and we ask further that you join us out on this limb and see whether we can't make some progress toward more profound love for each other in the Spirit. It is only in this way that we will be able to put aside irritations, forgive injuries, and come together to live into our radical mission to embody the Divine community.

Wellesley Friends at Meeting for Business from Ministry & Counsel, 2018

## **ADVICES AND QUERIES FOR MINISTRY & COUNSEL**

### **I. ADVICES FOR MINISTRY & COUNSEL**

1. Be faithful in gathering together, encouraging, supporting and watching over one another in love. Pay attention to the meeting community as a whole and to individuals within it, including those who worship via electronic platforms.
2. Maintain an active spiritual life, staying grounded in God.

3. The responsibilities of Ministry & Counsel are the same no matter what the size of the meeting. Discern how to structure those responsibilities in a way that will best serve your meeting.
4. Regularly introduce members of Ministry & Counsel after meeting for worship. Let those present know its members are available to answer questions, to assist, or to hear concerns.
5. Maintain transparent communication with the meeting community so members may feel confident in the work of their Ministry & Counsel.
6. Be mindful of the quality of worship. Be prepared to intervene and provide guidance when necessary.
7. Be willing to maintain the meeting's integrity by setting boundaries when necessary and confronting behavior that makes the meeting feel unsafe.
8. Remember that welcome is not conveyed simply by words, nor is it only the work of a particular committee; welcome is a culture of hospitality that permeates all aspects of a meeting's life. Explore practical solutions that will help make the meeting welcoming for all who come among us.
9. Listen for movement of the Spirit in the community and provide opportunities to support spiritual growth.
10. Be prompt in arranging clearness and support committees as need arises.
11. Be alert to tension or disruptive behavior. Seek to resolve conflict sooner rather than later, remembering that conflict can be an opportunity for growth and transformation.
12. Be mindful of the value of listening and threshing sessions.

## **II. QUERIES FOR MINISTRY & COUNSEL** *(These queries are grouped according to the headings within the chapter.)*

### **Introduction**

1. Have we kept Friends' faith experience and the reasons for our practices clearly before our members? How?

### **Friends Who Serve on Ministry & Counsel**

2. What is each of us doing to deepen our own spiritual understanding and sensitivity?
3. How do we help each other listen for and ground our lives in divine guidance?
4. What are we doing to identify and nurture spiritual gifts for God's work?
5. Do all M&C members regularly attend meetings for worship and business?
6. Do members of Ministry & Counsel discern how much they can take on? How do we support each other in these choices? Do the members of M&C regularly take time for refreshment?
7. Do we admit errors and learn from them? Are we avoiding dealing with difficult issues in the hope they will resolve themselves?

### **Structuring the Work of Ministry & Counsel**

8. How might the meeting best arrange its committee structure to help carry out the functions of M&C?

### **The Work of Ministry & Counsel**

9. Has the Inward Teacher been leading M&C in its work?

10. Does M&C take on too much? Does any of their work belong elsewhere?

### **Care of Worship**

11. As the meeting for worship begins, is the meeting centered, with hearts joined together in the stillness?
12. Is the vocal ministry under the guidance of the Spirit?
13. After a message, is there space left to receive and reflect on it, and to return to waiting worship?
14. Are we being faithful to the work of nurturing the meeting's worship and encouraging personal devotions?
15. How do we encourage faithful vocal ministry and an understanding of its practice?
16. Does Ministry & Counsel hold the worshiping community in prayer?
17. Do we follow up with Friends whose vocal ministry we have felt to be from the prompting of the Spirit, encouraging them to continue to be faithful?
18. Do we engage sensitively with Friends whose vocal ministry does not seem centered in the Spirit? Do we have a plan for addressing disruptive messages during worship?
19. What have we each done to encourage people new to our meeting to know, love, and experience the centering peace and power of the Inward Guide and to embrace its challenges?
20. Are we careful to use accessible language, avoiding terms that assume everyone is from a similar background and familiar with Quaker terminology? Are we careful to explain Quaker terms and acronyms if necessary? Do we make sure Friends introduce themselves and share their role as they make announcements after meeting?
21. Do we follow up with inquiries about, and visitors to, our meetings either online or in person? What else might we do so visitors feel welcome?
22. How can we use technology to foster a more inclusive and welcoming community?
23. Have we offered spiritual and practical support to those new to the meeting? How have we encouraged their acceptance into the fabric of the meeting? Where have we fallen short?

### **Support of Corporate Discernment**

24. How has Ministry & Counsel supported the meeting's corporate discernment? Are meetings for business and committee meetings spiritually centered and focused on discerning God's will?

### **Spiritual Nurture & Religious Education**

25. Does the community need to be renewed, refreshed, or enlivened? How can these needs be addressed?
26. How is M&C nurturing the spiritual life of individuals? Is there evidence of growth among members of all ages?
27. How can we integrate children and young people fully in the life of the meeting? Do we appreciate their contributions to the community?
28. Is our meeting aware of the needs of the wider community? What are we doing to help address them?
29. Does our witness in the world inspire seekers to discover a spiritual home with Friends?

### **Clearness**

30. How do we encourage members to bring their lives and decisions into the Light of God's love, seeking Spirit-led guidance?

### **Membership**

31. Are there attenders we might encourage to consider membership?
32. Have we engaged with members who live locally but do not regularly attend meeting and encouraged them to participate in our community?
33. Have we offered spiritual support to members who live far away?
34. What have we learned from reaching out to absent members and how have we responded?
35. When an individual leaves the meeting or lays down their membership, do we reflect on their reasons and what we can learn from the experience?

### **Pastoral Care**

36. Have we organized our meeting structure to assure that pastoral care will be available to members of our community when it is needed?
37. Do we celebrate joys as well as help with difficulties?
38. How do we make ourselves available to members and attenders of all ages who wish to talk with us? Do we protect the confidentiality of those who speak privately with us as far as legally possible?

### **Conflict Transformation**

39. Do we find ourselves paralyzed by the fear of conflict in our Meetings? Can we recognize that conflict may open a path to transformation?
40. Are we aware of how respectful disagreement and understanding can deepen our individual and corporate growth in the Spirit?
41. When significant disagreements arise, do we engage in careful discernment and do we have the courage to act on that discernment in a timely manner?
42. When facing difficult issues, how are we present to one another in a loving spirit?
43. Do we focus on divine guidance rather than worldly expediency and trust God to support us in uncomfortable places?
44. When there is conflict or difficulty, do we protect the integrity of the meeting for worship, support individuals, and take care of the fabric of the meeting community?
45. How do we balance care for the individual with care for the meeting community? How do we respond when an individual's calling or need dominates the life of the meeting?

### **Recognizing and Nurturing Gifts, Leadings & Ministry**

46. Have we sensed and encouraged a developing gift of spoken ministry, eldering, or pastoral care in any of our meetings' members? How do we encourage the development of those gifts?

### **Ministry & Counsel's Relationship with a Pastor or Other Employee**

47. Might the meeting benefit from a consistent pastoral presence? Why might the meeting want to employ a Friend for a particular ministry and why not?



48. If the meeting has a pastor or other employee, is that Friend provided with spiritual and practical support? Are expectations clear, and is there a Friend designated to communicate officially as supervisor with any employee? Is Ministry & Counsel represented on committees charged with care or oversight of the pastor or other employee?
49. Have you considered what it means to be in right relationship with anyone employed by your meeting?

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **5A. Care of Worship Tools**

1. A few members of M&C may arrive early to sit quietly in the meeting room so others can enter into a worshipful silence.
2. At times of particular stress in the meeting community or in the wider world, opening worship with words of comfort and assurance may be helpful.
3. If the vocal ministry in meeting becomes discursive, with little space between speakers, a member of M&C may rise and stand in silence to return the meeting to waiting worship.
4. If there is a singer whose frequent sung messages cause confusion about whether others are invited to join in, bring the topic up with that Friend, and hold a discussion with the meeting about sung ministry.
5. Constructive, healthy eldering takes spiritual preparation. Good communication skills are necessary for addressing inappropriate messages or behavior in the meeting. M&C members can strengthen their skills by discussing and practicing ways to respond to such situations. They can also seek out training through Quaker organizations and through Quaker publications and online sources.
6. If a serious concern arises about the vocal ministry or other actions of someone in the meeting, it is good practice to check with another member of M&C or a trusted and experienced member of the meeting to discern next steps together.
7. Meetings may invite specific prayers, joys, or holding people in the Light either during or at the close of worship.
8. Each meeting has its own style for ending worship. Most meetings have a time for announcements and introductions at the rise of meeting. Some also invite those present to share briefly thoughts that did not rise to the level of a message during the silence. Or, there may be a time and place set aside for people who want to talk about their worship experience.
9. Meetings may wish to consider programs bringing adults and children together in worship. Such programs may have songs, a story or presentation, a query for all attenders to speak to, or worship sharing on a topic, along with times of silent worship.

### **5B. Safety in the Meeting Community**

1. M&C can foster ongoing conversations about how to create a climate in the meeting that encourages people to raise their concerns for physical, emotional and spiritual safety. If a concern arises, carefully consider all aspects before taking action.

2. When a concern centers on an individual, one or two members of Ministry & Counsel listen to the individual's perspective and share the meeting's concerns with them. If this step does not help, M&C or the meeting clerk can write them a letter that names clearly the behavior that needs to change and how the meeting will respond if it does not.
3. On rare occasions an individual is suspended or expelled from a meeting. While this is a difficult step, it may be necessary for the health of the meeting.
4. Also see 5D #6 about child safety.

## **5C. The Welcoming Meeting**

1. M&C ensures the meetinghouse is well-lit, easily accessible, offers gender-neutral bathrooms, and provides appropriate spaces for children's activities. Care should be taken that the meeting room is well set up for people who have hearing or visual loss. Even if hearing assistance is available, it is important to encourage those giving messages to stand as able, to project their voices, and to speak as clearly as they can.
2. Many meetings in New England are located in areas accessible only by cars or in prosperous or predominantly white neighborhoods, which might be a barrier to some visitors. It is especially important that the homepages of such meetings signal that all are welcome.
3. Some meetings have a reception area where a greeter can meet visitors and extend welcome and assistance to them before meeting for worship, as well as speak with parents of young children about child care or First Day School. Some visitors may prefer to go directly into the worship space.
4. Readily available written materials in the entryway introduce newcomers to Quaker worship, to the meeting community, and its child care programs. The greeter might direct visitors to the meeting library for more in-depth information on Quakerism.
5. Images displayed on meeting house walls should be sensitively reviewed for what impact they may have on members, attenders, and guests.

## **5D. Supporting Spiritual Nurture and Religious Life**

Working on its own or with other committees in the meeting, Ministry & Counsel considers what kind of activities might enrich the spiritual life of the community or support it in addressing concerns carried by meeting members.

1. In conjunction with Adult Religious Education, M&C may organize study groups, faithfulness groups, public meetings, retreats, film showings, circulation of relevant literature, etc., and promote gatherings and online programs being offered throughout the quarterly or yearly meeting.
2. If the meeting has a Hospitality Committee, M&C can work with them to celebrate and honor community milestones, joys, concerns, and other community-building events. They may coordinate ways to integrate newcomers into the meeting and help them learn about Quaker faith and practice.
3. M&C may become aware of possible leadings for corporate witness. They might act on their own, or confer with the Peace & Social Justice committee before bringing it to meeting for business to see if there is unity and leadership for a committed social action.

Nurturing the spiritual growth and religious education of young people from infants and toddlers needing child care through teens getting ready to fly the nest is often in the hands of a Youth Religious Education committee. M&C supports the work of involving young people in the meeting's community life in a number of other ways.

4. The committee may support intergenerational gatherings such as picnics, game nights, weekend retreats, work days, and community service projects to bring Friends together in settings outside of Sunday morning.
5. Under the guidance of M&C some meetings schedule periodic intergenerational worship, which is likely to include singing, reading, dramatizing a story, etc., and perhaps reflecting together on the experience.
6. The safety of the meeting's children is always of urgent importance. The meeting's child safety policy needs to be widely known and rigorously observed. The Yearly Meeting's child safety policy is available on its website.

M&C or a youth education committee keeps families in the meeting informed about Yearly Meeting programs such as youth programs at quarterly and yearly meetings, Friends Camp (a Quaker camp in China, Maine), youth weekend retreats, and other activities.

## **5E. Confidentiality and Openness in group sharing**

Both confidentiality and openness are valuable in the meeting community, yet there is a potential conflict between them. Both are important in their place, and Friends need a shared clarity about which situations require confidentiality and which thrive on openness.

In a pastoral care situation, a small group participates in a conversation where the purpose is to help one or a few people better understand and cope with something in their lives. Usually, this work is carried out with an understanding that the intimate details discussed will not be shared beyond the small conversation. This aspect of pastoral care is discussed in detail in Chapter xx. (*See Advices A, below.*)

Sometimes Ministry & Counsel handles other concerns affecting the larger meeting community that may need to remain within a small and discreet group. Determining how much to share with the meeting is an important part of their deliberations, as openness, when possible, benefits the community. (*See Advices B, below.*)

Conflict transformation may also be part of Ministry & Counsel's work. When people are in conflict, it is hoped that they might meet each other with openness, listen closely and tenderly to each other, and find acceptance and compassion for one another. They are expected to try to resolve their differences between themselves as Friends in a community (Matthew 18:15). If that fails, however, these Friends are advised to ask M&C for help. One or both people may need a separate elder or support committee. At times, the issue may be so deeply personal that the need for openness involves pain and a sense of invasion of privacy; it is important that each person feel heard and supported by the meeting members involved. If the needed support and trust is not in place, a Friend may be unable to

participate in the process with a feeling of safety and with openness. When trust is able to be established, we can ground ourselves in the Spirit. (*See Advices C and D, below.*)

In gatherings that involve a larger number of people, the need for openness based on trust becomes imperative. These gatherings are usually meetings to discuss a topic or to work together towards a decision, or worship-sharing groups in which the focus is on better understanding one another as individuals. Meetings for worship and for business are also open to the community and have community-building as one of their aims. In these situations, the meeting members who are not present are still involved. They may hear about what took place and ask for details of what was said. Later conversations with them are often part of the process and a meaningful way to participate in a spiritual community. Confidentiality is not an expectation in these circumstances. The conversation in these gatherings is limited to what people are willing to share with the entire community. There does need to be an understanding and expectation that we will be gentle with each other. Truthful, but gentle. (*See Advices E, below.*)

### **Advices on Confidentiality and Openness**

*Let worship be the core of your time together*

A.) The following advices are offered to individuals in a pastoral care setting in which tender concerns and vulnerabilities need to be addressed by a small group of Friends-- with an expectation of privacy and confidentiality when possible:

1. Explain ground rules involving confidentiality and the reasons for them at the beginning of a meeting.
2. Know that a pastoral care committee is free to call on any support or counsel needed in order to provide care with more confidence. Let the Friend know you may seek such help as long as confidentiality will be maintained.
3. Respect an individual's desire for privacy while at the same time making sure they know the meeting is ready to offer further support.
4. Know there are times when confidentiality must be broken to ensure the safety of those involved, for example in cases of child abuse.

B.) The following advices apply more generally to building a tender and open life in the community to the extent that, when necessary, privacy is protected:

1. Respect requests for privacy, while also inviting openness and vulnerability.
2. Seek an appropriate balance between confidentiality and openness, listening in each case for the Spirit's guidance.
3. Be aware of the danger of groups meeting in unnecessary confidentiality and creating pools of secrecy within the meeting.
4. Hold in your heart openness and vulnerability, so you may know each other in the life of the Spirit.

C.) Advices for Friends working through a tension or conflict:

1. Listen with openness and hold what is shared in confidence; you are working to build a place of trust with the other.

2. Honor the difficulties the other person is facing.
3. Share openly, as non-defensively as you are able.

D.) Advices for Friends supporting those resolving issues:

1. Be aware of the special need for tenderness if the conflict brings up other painful issues.
2. Listen openly to each of the people involved, without judgment.
3. Know that the clerk may need to ask for support from inside or outside of the meeting, or for an elder. This support will honor confidentiality.
4. Remember to hold Friends and the situation in love and tenderness. This caring support may be remembered in the future, even if no resolution is reached at the current time.
5. Be aware of the difficult truth that support efforts may end without a clear resolution to the conflict. Each person may continue to need pastoral care.

E.) The following advices are addressed to individuals involved in meeting-wide conversations:

1. If you are responsible for clerking a discussion or worship-sharing occasion, explain that what is said will not be held in confidence by those attending.
2. Share only what you are comfortable having repeated.
3. When telling others about a meeting you have attended, tell how you understood what was said. Remember that your understanding of another's sharing is always partial.
4. Be careful of one another's reputations.

## **5F. Conflict Transformation in the Meeting Community**

When a meeting is faced with a complex or potentially contentious matter, the meeting may want to hold called meetings at which issues are raised without any pressure to make a decision.

Such called meetings may take several different forms, as described below. These types of meetings can give Friends the time they need to reach as clear a vision of the issue as possible and can create the opportunity for Friends to listen to each other and to the Spirit. Ministry & Counsel may not be responsible for an issue under discernment by the meeting, but it has spiritual care of the meeting throughout the process, prayerfully helping to keep the meeting centered through what may be a challenging time.

### **Informational Session**

The meeting will need a clear and balanced overview of the facts related to the issue at hand. Usually, a committee or working group is responsible for presenting a topic for consideration or for drafting a proposal. The issue is presented neutrally, along with all relevant information, possible options, and known ramifications. The meeting has an opportunity to ask clarifying questions.

### **Listening Session**

A listening session may be called after informational opportunities have taken place, or after the meeting has had a chance to read any relevant documentation. It is a time for each Friend to

Speak from the heart and for the community to listen with open hearts and open minds. Friends do not discuss or argue for their points of view, or rebut other's contributions. Each Friend present is given an opportunity to speak before anyone speaks a second time.

No formal record is kept of what is said. The meeting ends with Friends having heard each other. Sometimes one Listening Session is all that is needed on a topic. If there appears to be no emerging unity about a proposal at this time, Friends know they have time to hold and season what they have heard, and that there will be other opportunities to explore the topic together.

### **Threshing Session**

A threshing session is focused on determining how the meeting can move forward on a sensitive topic about which the meeting has been learning and listening to each other over a period of time. All relevant information is current and options are laid out clearly. If needed, an experienced Friend from another meeting may be invited to clerk the threshing session.

After a straightforward presentation of the question at hand, the meeting hears all the concerns about the issue that Friends are carrying. The clerk listens for what the meeting can say in unity and identifies where Friends hold divergent points of view. This time a record may be kept of some of what has been said (without giving names of Friends), especially if Friends appear to be getting clearer about how to proceed. Again, no decision is made at this time, but the recording clerk for the session writes a minute, in neutral terms, that records the main ideas that were raised, aspects of the issue that will need to be explored further, and places of unity. The threshing session may recommend to the business meeting that it create a minute of exercise based on the minute created at the threshing session.

### **Minute of Exercise** (sometimes called a Process Minute)

The meeting may wish to approve a minute of exercise in the absence of full unity. A minute of exercise is intended to mark a point along the way towards a decision. Such a minute records points on which the meeting has reached clear unity and states plainly the concerns that are still under discernment. It acknowledges that the meeting is under the burden of a concern, has not yet reached a decision, and is continuing to seek a way forward. It should state the issue and the range of responses to it in neutral terms. It gives the meeting a record of the issue, the date(s) it was discussed, and the various approaches or objections. Such an articulation may prove transformational to Friends as they continue to discern God's will.

## **5G. Guidance for a Clearness Committee for Personal Discernment**

A clearness committee for personal discernment meets with an individual, a couple, or a group of people questioning how to proceed in a keenly felt concern or dilemma. The clearness committee clerk facilitates the meeting. Trusting that each individual can access the Inner Teacher for guidance, the Friends on the clearness committee seek to draw out the Spirit's guidance from and for that person. The committee members' purpose is not to give advice or to "fix" the situation. Their task is to set aside their own prejudices to listen, to ask open-ended questions, and to provide emotional space for an individual to seek the truth and recognize the

right course of action. The clearness committee works best when everyone prayerfully approaches this time of searching, which need not exclude an element of playfulness. (Reminder: not all clearness or support committees go through M&C if no action or attention is required by the meeting.)

### **Organizing the clearness committee**

1. The person seeking clearness always initiates the request to form a committee, though a Friend may ask, "Would a clearness committee be helpful?" The request is brought to Ministry & Counsel, which forms a clearness committee. Usually, at least one member of M&C serves on such a committee. The person may be invited to suggest people they feel believe may be helpful on the committee. M&C appoints a convener of the first meeting. It is strongly advised that the clearness committee name a clerk and a scribe before the first meeting.
2. In advance of the meeting, the person seeking clearness may describe the matter in writing, articulating the question as clearly as they are able and giving relevant background information. This information is shared with the committee members ahead of time, or read or voiced at the beginning of the meeting.

### **Conducting the clearness committee**

The clerk opens the meeting, and affirms the guidelines to be followed. The clerk is also responsible for keeping a right sense of order and for closing the meeting. Any member of the committee may intervene if necessary to ensure the guidelines are followed. The scribe writes down the questions asked and perhaps some of the responses and after the meeting gives this record to the person seeking clearness.

1. The clerk reminds everyone of the guidelines and makes sure there is a common understanding of the meeting's degree of confidentiality.
2. All settle into a period of centering silence.
3. When ready, the person seeking clearness begins with a brief summary of the question or concern.
4. Members of the clearness committee hold to a discipline of asking brief, evoking questions as led by the Spirit, resisting urges to present solutions, give advice, or ask leading questions. The pace of questions is kept deliberately gentle and relaxed to encourage reflection. Committee members should trust their intuitions. Even if a question seems odd, if it feels insistent it should be asked.
5. The person seeking clearness normally answers the questions in front of the group and the responses generate more questions. It is always the person's absolute right not to answer. The more questions a person can answer, the more they and the committee have to work with, but this should never be done at the expense of the person's privacy or need to protect vulnerable feelings. It is a good idea for the person seeking clearness to keep answers fairly brief so time remains for further discernment.
6. Do not be anxious if there are extended periods of silence. It does not mean that nothing is happening; in fact, the Spirit may be powerfully at work within the person seeking clearness and in the committee members.

7. Well before the end of the session, following at least half an hour of questions and answers, the clerk pauses to ask the person how they wish to proceed. This is an opportunity for the person to choose, if it feels appropriate, additional modes of seeking clarity. The scribe may continue to record during this time. Possibilities include:
  - Gathering into silence out of which anyone may speak
  - People sharing images that have risen up for them
  - Continued questions from the committee
  - Questions to the committee from the person seeking clearness
  - Reflection on what has been said
  - Appreciation for the Friend bringing their concern forward
8. Before the session ends the person may choose to share any clarity that has come to them. There should also be an opportunity to hear whether all hearts are clear and settled in the matter, or if any feel a stop—a strong “no” to some aspect of the proceeding. The person and the committee consider together whether another meeting is advisable, and, if so, schedule it at this time. The person may not need to meet with the committee again. Or, if recommended, M&C may appoint an anchor committee to help the person remain clear and/or be accountable to their discernment. Members of the clearness committee may offer to serve on such committees.
9. The clearness committee reports back to the committee that appointed it saying they have met and the work is complete or is still in process.

With gratitude for the pamphlet *Clearness Committees and Their Use in Personal Discernment* by Jan Hoffman, 1996.

## **5H. Advices and Queries for Those Who Serve on Clearness Committees**

### **Advices for Those Who Serve on Clearness Committees**

1. Remember that each member of the committee shares responsibility for maintaining a prayerful presence, asking for times of silence when needed, and asking questions as led by the Spirit. A clearness committee is not an occasion to provide counseling but a spiritual exercise which aims to help the person or people requesting clearness to hear the Spirit’s guidance for themselves. Don’t offer solutions or advice but ask honest, probing questions to assist them in this process. Listen deeply to all that is said.
2. Give equal attention to each person seeking clearness when the meeting is for more than one person.
3. Focus on the situation that is prompting the need for discernment.
4. Remember that people are capable of change and growth.

### **Queries for Those Who have been asked to Serve on a Clearness Committees**

1. Is this your work to do at this time?
2. Can you devote sufficient time and energy to this committee, knowing it may take several meetings?



3. Do you feel sufficiently at ease with the person seeking clearness and with the other members of the committee to work with them? Can you engage with them to provide an atmosphere in which divine guidance can be sought?
4. If clearness is being sought by two or more people, can you set aside your own prejudice or bias as you listen to each person involved?
5. Are you ready to keep the committee discussions confidential unless those requesting the help of the committee are comfortable with a wider sharing?
6. Can you keep an open mind and an open heart about the outcome?

## **5I. Support Committees**

Support committees are formed to provide practical, emotional and/or spiritual care, and serve as long as needed. Committees may be formed to support a couple, a family, an individual, or a Friend serving in a particular role in the meeting or in other Quaker service. Mental or emotional difficulties, a life transition, the process of dying or bereavement are some reasons Friends ask for meeting care. The size and composition of the committee varies according to need. Sometimes the committee's existence is confidential and in other cases it is known to the community. When confidentiality is not a concern, the committee might coordinate assistance from others in the meeting, such as preparing meals for a family after the birth or adoption of a baby, or providing rides for a Friend undergoing medical treatment. Usually, one Friend is designated as the coordinator for managing the schedule. If no member of Ministry & Counsel is serving on a support committee, one committee member is named as the liaison to M&C. Support committees are intended to be time limited. Any serious concerns, including the belief that professional help is needed, may be taken to M&C for discernment.

## **5J. Advices and Queries for Those Who Serve on Support Committees**

### **Advices for Those Who Serve on Support Committees**

1. Respect and be present to the person in need without imposing your own judgment.
2. Listen with compassion to the Friend's account of the situation and the Friend's deepest concerns and needs.
3. Be supportive without creating inappropriate dependence.

### **Queries for Those Who Serve on Support Committees**

1. Do you remain mindful of the spiritual nature of a support committee, whether offering pastoral or practical care?
2. Are you prepared to assist the person in finding professional help, if this seems to be required?
3. Are you clear how much support you can reasonably offer?

## **5K. Care & Accountability Committees**

These committees are appointed by Ministry & Counsel to support Friends the meeting has recognized as engaged in a ministry or who are pursuing a leading. Members of Care &

Accountability committees are selected by M&C in consultation with the individual being supported. It is helpful, when possible, to have at least one member of the committee experienced in this kind of service. Members new to the work will likely benefit from mentoring by more experienced Friends or from M&C.

The purpose of the committee is twofold:

- To provide sustained support, loving guidance, and accountability for a Friend who carries a leading.
- To help the faith community fulfill its responsibility to develop and support spiritual growth in its membership and to honor the gifts God gives the community.

The form of support should be determined by the needs of the Friend. Since the gift is given to the meeting, through the Friend, the meeting is responsible for supporting the faithfulness and spiritual health of that Friend and for helping them discern what they need in the way of preparation, refreshment and counsel. The committee and the individual consider together how best the work and service of the Friend can be supported.

## **5L. Advices and Queries for Those Who Serve on Care and Accountability Committees**

### **Advices for Those Who Serve on Care and Accountability Committees**

1. Be grounded in God and open to further learning and spiritual development, both for the Friend and for yourself.
2. Have faith in the Divine-human relationship. Keep in mind that committee members need to have sufficient shared faith understandings to be able to work together and communicate successfully.
3. Be able to accept where the Friend is in the present moment. Maintain appropriate confidentiality, recognizing the Friend's views and concerns may be in considerable flux during the journey.
4. Be willing and able to devote the time necessary to prepare yourself to carry out the committee's tasks and to attend regular meetings with the Friend.

### **Queries for Those Who Serve on Care and Accountability Committees**

1. Do you articulate for the Friend the ways you see God acting, speaking, and serving through them?
2. Are you able to accompany the Friend in personal places of spiritual desolation and fear?
3. Can you lovingly challenge the Friend to live more deeply into their ministry and gifts so they may grow in faithfulness? Are you clear in your own mind that "being more faithful" does not in itself mean "doing more" and sometimes calls for doing less?
4. Are you participating in evaluating the process and the function of the committee with some regularity?

### **Queries for the Friend who is the focus of the Care and Accountability Committee**

1. Do you continually submit your gift for its use under the authority of divine guidance?

2. Do you humbly consider the possibility that the wisdom and guidance of other Friends may be needed to develop and enrich the fullest expression of the gift entrusted to you for the benefit of the community?
3. How are you being formed for this ministry? Reflect upon your inner life, and your struggles and joys in this work, both spiritual and emotional. Are you seeking the support you need to sustain your service?

(Appendices 5I and 5J: With gratitude for the pamphlet *The Spiritual Care Committee*, The School of the Spirit, 2012.)

## 5M. Letters and Minutes for Travel and Service

### Letter of Introduction

Friends planning to visit other Quaker meetings may ask the monthly meeting clerk for a letter of introduction. The letter introduces the Friend, telling a bit about them and their relationship with their home meeting. The letter may apply to either a single trip or, in the case of a Friend who travels frequently, several journeys. It does not request hospitality or need endorsement from the host meeting. The clerk of the home meeting signs it without bringing it to meeting for business. As a courtesy the clerk may inform the meeting that a letter has been written.

A letter of introduction states: (along with other detail that may be added)

- The name of the traveling Friend
- The Friend's status as a member or attender of the meeting providing the letter
- The signature of the clerk

### Sample letter of introduction

[Meeting letterhead and date]

Dear Friends,

We send you warm greetings with our member \_\_\_(Name) \_\_.

\_\_\_(Name)\_\_\_ spent many years in Ramallah, and has recently written a book about her experience there. We find the combination of her global perspective on life and her in-depth knowledge of Quakerism a wonderful asset to our meeting. We are confident you will enjoy her presence at the annual session of your yearly meeting.

We look forward to hearing from her about how the Spirit is moving among Friends in your yearly meeting.

In Peace,

\_\_\_\_\_(Signature)\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk, \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting (date)

### **Minutes for Travel Under a Concern or in the Ministry**

When a Friend is called to travel in the ministry, their home meeting writes a travel minute commending them to the physical and spiritual care of whatever meetings they visit. Travel minutes are rooted in the history of early Friends, who often visited rural areas where accommodations were an uncertainty. The minute attests to the good character of the Friend and the quality of their ministry, and requests hospitality for the visitor as well as opportunities for them to share their ministry. The minute is approved in meeting for business by the home meeting. At the conclusion of the visit the clerk of the host meeting endorses it with a letter or note offering a sense of how their guest's ministry benefitted their meeting. A travel minute may be directed to one specific visit or event, or written to cover a period of time.

Often travel under a 'concern' or 'ministry' are correctly used interchangeably (See 'Sample minute for travel under a concern', below.) Concerns tend to refer to specific issues, such as right relationship with Indigenous Peoples, or environmental justice. The ministry is embodied in words and actions as the Friend addresses the concern. Traditional ministry is broader in what it includes, and is usually involved with the spiritual development of Friends and meetings.

1. The Friend seeking a travel minute requests such from the clerk of Ministry & Counsel or directly from the monthly meeting clerk, depending on the practice of the particular meeting.
2. A clearness process is required if the Friend is not already in the care of a committee where such discernment takes place. How the clearness committee is formed and by whom varies from meeting to meeting, but it is typically either Ministry & Counsel or the meeting for business. The clearness committee may report first to M&C or directly to the meeting for business, again depending on the practice of the particular meeting.
3. Monthly meeting discerns whether to approve a travel minute, which is typically written by the traveling Friend's clearness or anchor committee or by the meeting clerk. The clerk signs all travel minutes.
4. The minute includes:
  - The name of the Friend traveling
  - An expression of the meeting's endorsement of the travel under concern or in ministry
  - The date and signature of the monthly meeting clerk and, if applicable, the endorsement of the quarterly meeting and Permanent Board
5. If the Friend requesting a minute plans to travel outside their quarter, the minute must also be endorsed by the quarterly meeting. In the case of travel outside the Yearly Meeting, the minute must be further endorsed by the Permanent Board.
6. A travel minute is presented for endorsement to each meeting visited. When appropriate, the traveling Friend will report back to Ministry & Counsel any pertinent details of the visit and any return greetings or information. The minute is returned to the monthly meeting upon the Friend's return. A copy of the travel minute is made part of the minutes of the meeting when the Friend returns. As with all such attachments, it is included in the copy of the minutes sent to the Yearly Meeting archives.

7. When a Friend is traveling outside the Yearly Meeting with a travel minute endorsed by Permanent Board, the Yearly Meeting Ministry & Counsel contacts the Friend to find out what support they are receiving from their local meeting. The Yearly Meeting M&C contact person may offer suggestions, counsel, and more formal support where it is beneficial. Annually, and when the travel is complete, the traveling Friend will send Permanent Board a brief, written report concerning their travel, with any endorsements that have been added to the travel minute by groups visited. The M&C contact person will receive copies of annual and final reports from the traveling Friend and work with the office staff to get the relevant information entered into the appropriate database.

### **Sample minute for travel under a concern**

[Meeting letterhead and date of the meeting at which it was approved]

Dear Friends,

\_\_\_\_\_(Name)\_\_\_\_, a beloved member of \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting of New England Yearly Meeting, is traveling under a concern for environmental justice. Our Meeting has participated in several of his workshop presentations and has worshipfully considered his leading to travel among Friends with the purpose of sharing his concern and seeking the Light among Friends. We believe him to be genuinely called to this work and trust you will benefit, as we have, from his insights and from the experience of faithful prayer together.

Friend \_\_\_\_\_(Name)\_\_\_\_\_ plans to travel in this ministry between (date) and (date). We commend him to your care and hospitality.

Approved and minuted at \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting for Business, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_(Signature)\_\_\_\_, Clerk

Endorsed by \_\_\_\_\_ Quarterly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_(Signature)\_\_\_\_, Clerk *(For travel outside the quarter)*

Endorsed by Permanent Board of New England Yearly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_(Signature)\_\_\_\_, Clerk *(For travel outside NEYM)*

### **Sample minute for travel in the ministry**

[Meeting letterhead and date]

Dear Friends,

\_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting of Friends is united in recommending \_\_\_ (Name) \_\_\_ to your care during her travels among Friends in Bolivia’s yearly meetings. We have tested her leading to travel in a ministry of spiritual nurture and recognize her call to travel among Friends as the Spirit leads, to join them in fellowship, worship and prayer.

\_\_\_\_\_ (Name) \_\_\_\_\_ is an experienced and grounded member of our meeting and active in New England Yearly Meeting. She has faithfully served on and been clerk of various committees within our own Monthly Meeting. She also served as a member of New England Yearly Meeting Ministry & Counsel where her particular work focused on spiritual nurture and eldering.

Through her call, she has traveled under a minute to Ohio Yearly Meeting Conservative to better understand the office of elder in a yearly meeting that recognizes such gifts. Her own gift of eldering has assisted \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting during times of conflict and provided spiritual nurture to individuals.

We commit Friend \_\_\_\_\_ (Name) \_\_\_\_\_ to your prayerful care and nurture during her time among you.

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Signature) \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk

Endorsed by \_\_\_\_\_ Quarterly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Signature) \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk *(For travel outside the quarter)*

Endorsed by Permanent Board of New England Yearly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Signature) \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk *(For travel outside of NEYM)*

### **Sample endorsement of travel minute from visited meeting**

We have been blessed by the presence of \_\_\_ (Name) \_\_\_ among us. Her message was moving and inspiring for us. She quietly and capably pointed out places in which our procedures might be able to be improved while not burdening us with specific suggestions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Signature) \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk

### **Denominational Endorsement.**

A minute of denominational endorsement is given to an individual seeking professional accreditation for a specific calling; for example, a Friend who wishes to serve as a hospital chaplain or a pastoral counselor. It affirms the individual’s membership in the Religious Society of Friends and states that the meeting will assume the necessary supervision for the process.

Since recognition of ministry in NEYM has historically occurred at the quarterly meeting level, not at the yearly meeting level, quarterly meeting endorsement is accepted as “denominational

endorsement” by the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. It is also accepted for certification by the Association of Professional Chaplains.

1. The Friend seeking endorsement should approach the monthly meeting clerk or Ministry & Counsel, who will appoint a clearness committee to meet with the Friend to discern the appropriateness of the endorsement and the meeting’s readiness to give such endorsement.
2. The clearness committee may report back to Ministry & Counsel or directly to the meeting for business, according to the practice of the monthly meeting.
3. The minute of denominational endorsement must be approved by both the monthly meeting and the quarterly meeting.
4. The monthly meeting often appoints a committee to support the Friend’s work and to provide any required reports.
5. The minute of denominational endorsement is in effect for as long as needed. It is not endorsed by the receiving body or returned to the monthly meeting.
6. The minute of endorsement includes:
  - The name of the Friend receiving endorsement
  - A statement that the Friend is a member in good standing
  - An expression of the monthly meeting’s endorsement of the specific ministry
  - The date approved and the signature of the monthly meeting clerk
  - The date approved and the signature of the quarterly meeting clerk

### Sample minute of endorsement

[Meeting letterhead and date]

Minute of Endorsement for \_\_\_\_\_ (Name)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Name) is a member in good standing of \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of monthly meeting). We endorse his ministry as a pastoral counselor and have approved a committee which will meet with him once a year and be available as otherwise needed. This committee will provide accountability for his ministry by seeking clarity with \_\_\_\_\_ (Name) about the nature and form this ministry takes. It will also assure an ongoing connection with his faith community.

Signed at the direction of \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_(Signature)\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk

Further endorsed by \_\_\_\_\_ Quarterly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_(Signature)\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk

(In this case the monthly meeting is appointing a committee for the Friend receiving endorsement in order to fulfill the requirements of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors.)

## Minutes of Religious Service

When ministries are of extended duration and well known to the meeting, Ministry & Counsel may write a minute of religious service for the Friend to express corporate support of the Friend and the ministry. These minutes are brief, usually a page or less. They often recognize a Friend with a specific social justice or service leading but can also be written to recognize Friends whose work is broader in scope. Minutes of Religious Service may be written by meetings that wish to recognize and affirm the work of the Spirit in the lives of their members, including meetings that do not choose to participate in the practice of recording ministers.

1. Monthly meeting Ministry & Counsel discerns that a member has sustained a valuable ministry over time and reports this to the monthly meeting. If the monthly meeting approves, M&C prepares a minute, approved by the monthly meeting, for consideration by the quarterly meeting M&C.
2. Quarterly meeting Ministry & Counsel appoints a committee to review the ministry of the individual under consideration and report their findings at a subsequent session of the quarterly meeting M&C. If the quarterly meeting M&C approves the minute of religious service, it is reported to the Yearly Meeting Ministry & Counsel.
3. When the quarterly meeting has acted favorably on the matter, the minute is complete, and the clerk furnishes a copy to the individual's monthly meeting.
4. The action is also reported to the Yearly Meeting's Ministry & Counsel, together with a copy of the minute.

## Sample Minute of Religious Service

[Meeting letterhead and date]

Minute of Religious Service for the Ministry of (Name)

\_\_\_\_\_ Friends Meeting recognizes that our member (Name) has been called by the Spirit into a ministry of helping Friends deepen their relationship with Scripture and the quality of vocal ministry in their meetings. His ministry includes regularly scheduled online short courses of Bible study and visits to monthly meetings to encourage programs of study and lead discussions of spoken ministry. At times he is asked by meetings to address other topics with them. His presentations are archived and available on his blog, \_\_\_\_\_. Grounded in his personal relationship with God, his ministry is a joyful expression of his experience of the Divine.

We have received the blessing of his ministry among us. Through prayer and a Care & Accountability Committee we support his call to minister to others. (Name) and his committee will report to Ministry & Counsel annually and to the meeting for business at appointed times. At the end every third year, the meeting revisits its commitment to support this ministry; the next review of his ministry is scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_.

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Signature) \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk



Endorsed by \_\_\_\_\_ Quarterly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk (*For travel outside the quarter*)

Endorsed by Permanent Board of New England Yearly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk (*For travel outside of NEYM*)

This sample is written for a Friend whose ministry is broadly defined, but a Minutes of Religious Service may also be approved for Friends who are carrying a more specific concern as their ministry:

**Sample Minute of Religious Service for a Friend’s travel under a concern**

[Meeting letterhead and date]

\_\_\_\_\_ Friends Meeting recognizes that our member \_\_\_\_ (Name) \_\_\_\_ carries a concern for ending the suffering caused by human trafficking. She has been led by the Spirit to lobbying for reform, to fundraising for the needs of those rescued from trafficking, and to providing spiritual and practical support to victims in New England. She has been an active speaker in Quaker and non-Quaker settings and has given plenaries and led workshops at a Friends General Conference Gathering and two yearly meeting sessions. A fund has been established in the meeting budget to support her work and travel in her ministry.

\_\_\_\_ (Name) \_\_\_\_ is also an active member of our meeting and serves on the Peace and Social Justice Committee of the Yearly Meeting. She undertook a long clearness process under the care of our Ministry & Counsel as she discerned the nature and extent of her leading. In (date) the meeting approved taking her ministry under its care; it is brought to business meeting every third year for approval of renewal.

\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_ is now meeting monthly with a Care & Accountability Committee which reports annually to Ministry & Counsel. She gives an eagerly-anticipated report to our meeting for business every September.

We are grateful for \_\_\_\_ (Name)’s \_\_\_\_ commitment and service.

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk

Endorsed by \_\_\_\_\_ Quarterly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk (*For travel outside the quarter*)

Endorsed by Permanent Board of New England Yearly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature) \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk (*For travel outside of NEYM*)

## Minute for a Released Friend

A minute of release recognizes that a Friend has a significant leading the meeting feels called to support in specific ways that release the Friend from various other responsibilities in their life. An example would be helping provide relief from the need to earn a full-time income.

1. A Friend feeling a clear call to an action that requires more than they can sustain individually sends a request for release to Ministry & Counsel or the meeting clerk. An appointed clearness committee then addresses such questions as:
  - Is the calling genuine and clear?
  - Does the meeting, as a body, feel clear that this Friend needs to be released?
  - Is the person equipped to carry out the calling?
  - In what ways is the meeting willing and able to support this calling? (This may include financial or other material support.)
2. Ministry & Counsel or another appropriate committee proposes a minute of release to the monthly meeting. The minute of release includes:
  - A description of the leading and work for which the Friend is released;
  - The time period and review/renewal process for the minute;
  - What specific resources the meeting will provide, including committees of Spiritual Care & Accountability and possible financial support.
3. If the minute of release is approved, the released Friend may carry the minute with them to use in any way that supports their call. It needs no further endorsement.
4. The Care & Accountability committee for the released Friend makes regular reports to Ministry & Counsel, which shares parts or all of the report with meeting for business.

## Sample minute of release

[Meeting letterhead and date]

\_\_\_\_\_(Name)\_\_\_\_ is an active member of \_\_\_\_\_Monthly Meeting. They have shared with us their calling to work with, and on behalf of, survivors of child abuse. Their deep commitment has led them to work with others throughout the state and country to build a supportive network that addresses the needs of people who suffer from childhood trauma, and to advocate for children's rights. This work addresses both the very personal needs for caring and healing and the larger need for social and political change.

Having tested \_\_\_\_\_(Name)'s\_\_\_\_\_ concern, we are convinced this work is a leading and we release them for this service.

This minute of release will be reviewed in three years.

\_\_\_\_\_(Signature)\_\_\_\_, Clerk (date)

The full minute of which the minute of release is a part needs to state the responsibilities of the meeting:

### **Details included in a full minute**

Ministry & Counsel will provide several forms of support for the released Friend's work.

1. Appoint a committee of two or three persons to provide spiritual and practical support for the released Friend to meet with them during the life of the work
2. Manage the disbursement of any financial support
3. Maintain an informed interest in the progress of the work through periodic reports to the committee on Ministry and Counsel
4. Prayerfully consider other forms of support as need arises

### **Recording Gifts in Ministry**

This process has traditionally been used to acknowledge sustained gifts in vocal ministry as exhibited in a particular Friend, and of the Society's trust in the Friend to represent the Religious Society of Friends to the wider community. Not all quarterly meetings in New England continue the practice of recording. (*See Paragraph 50 and Minutes of Religious Service, above, for information on how meetings recognize ministry in other ways.*)

1. Monthly meeting Ministry & Counsel discerns that a member has a sustained gift in vocal ministry and reports this to the monthly meeting. If the monthly meeting approves, M&C prepares a minute for consideration by the quarterly meeting.
2. Quarterly meeting Ministry & Counsel appoints a committee to consider the general fitness of the individual under consideration. Assuming this committee determines the Friend is fit, it reports its findings to a subsequent session of the quarterly meeting M&C. If the quarterly meeting M&C approves the recording, it reports to the Yearly Meeting.
3. When the quarterly meeting acts favorably on the matter, the recording is complete, and the clerk furnishes a copy of the minute to the individual's monthly meeting and to the Yearly Meeting's Ministry & Counsel.
4. The minute remains in effect while the ministry has life.

### **Rescinding Recording of a Gift.**

Gifts of the spirit often lie quiescent for a time, only to emerge again with full vigor. However, if the minister or the meeting finds the gift of ministry appears to have been withdrawn, or if Friends no longer feel comfortable being represented to the world by this individual, the community may consider rescinding the recording. Laboring over the possibility that the gift is no longer present can be painful. As much as possible, it is best to allow the individual to faithfully discern the status of the gift and, if appropriate, request that Ministry & Counsel lay down the recording. In the absence of a request from the Friend, the proposal to rescind originates either in the M&C of the quarterly meeting or in the M&C of the Friend's monthly meeting. In every case final action should rest with the quarterly meeting. The individual concerned, and the monthly meeting to which the Friend belongs should be notified before final action is taken.

1. A committee from the quarter's Ministry and Counsel is appointed to meet with the individual to discern, with that Friend, the life of the ministry, or to explore the question of whether they are still an appropriate representative of the Religious Society of Friends.
2. When laboring over the possibility that the gift is no longer present, it is important to allow the individual, as much as possible, to faithfully discern the status of the gift. In this

light, it is preferable to have the Friend who carries the gift request the laying down of the recording, rather than having the request for rescinding be brought by the committee alone.

3. The committee reports back to the quarterly meeting Ministry & Counsel, which then discerns the committee's recommendation and brings it to the quarterly meeting.
4. The monthly meeting and the Friend with the recorded gift should be notified prior to final action, and Ministry & Counsel of the Yearly Meeting should be notified of the decision to rescind.
5. The final action rests with the quarterly meeting.

## 5N. The Search for a Pastor

A pastoral search committee under the care of Ministry & Counsel reviews applications from candidates and recommends to M&C those they feel are appropriate to invite for interviews. After meeting with the search committee and possibly M&C, promising candidates are invited to attend worship on a Sunday. They are asked to bring a message and perhaps arrange for other program elements for the worship such as prayer, music, readings, and a children's message. It's best for the day to include some fellowship time with the candidate and an opportunity for questions from anyone in the meeting. In this way the whole meeting has a chance to experience the candidate's ministry, talk with them, and offer feedback to the pastoral search committee. The search committee reports their discernment to M&C who brings a recommendation to the meeting for business for approval. Once the selection is approved, M&C and the candidate together work out the terms of the contract to include clear expectations for both the pastor and the meeting. Meetings should expect to offer a fair wage, and contributions to health insurance and retirement. When the contract has been finalized, M&C brings it to the meeting for business for approval.

## EXTRACT CITATIONS

- 1) **Becky Phipps, *Being and Becoming Friends*, Woolman Hill, 2008**
- 2) Isaac Pennington, *Letters*, ed John Barclay, 1828, p 139; 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, 1844, p 138 (Letter LII, to Friends in Amersham, dated Aylesbury, 4 iii [May] 1667).
- 3) Frances Taber, "Applying and Adapting the Tradition of Eldering for Today", 1996, *The Conservative Friend*, 1996, p. 3
- 4) Maggie Edmondson, in NEYM's invitation to "Tending the Flock", a retreat for NEYM and NYYM Friends with gifts in pastoral ministry, 2018.
- 5) Sam Caldwell, "The Nurturing Aspects of Eldering", 1983, *Quaker Life*, Jan-Feb, page 16.
- 6) **Douglas V Steere from *Gleanings***
- 7) Joseph Hoag, *Journal of the Life of Joseph Hoag*, 1909, Press of Wm. H. Pile's Sons, 122 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, pp 332-335.
- 8) Carolyn Hilles-Pilant, anecdote shared during a Faith & Practice Revision Committee discussion, 2020.
- 9) Epistles from the Yearly Meeting of Friends, held in London, 1858, Edward Marsh, *Friends' Book and Tract Depository*, 84, Houndsditch, vol. II, pages 258-259.

- 10) Thomas (Anna L.B.) and Emmott (E.B.): W. C. Braithwaite, Memoir and papers, 1931, p. 118. "The widening of the Quaker fellowship" written 1905.
- 11) Mary Linda McKinney, QuakerSpeak, May 27, 2021.
- 12) Valerie Brown. *How to be an Inclusive Quaker: The unwritten Norms of Speech and Silence*. Friends Journal, March 2020, pages 19 and 20.
- 13) Stephen J. Thorne, Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends, 1965, London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, #348.
- 14) Unpublished, Minute reported to Wellesley Friends at Meeting for Business from Ministry and Counsel on Fifth Month 10, 2018.