

Compiled Supplements  
to the  
2014 Interim Faith & Practice  
New England Yearly Meeting

all texts approved since the  
2014 printing



**Introduction**  
**Given Preliminary Approval**  
**New England Yearly Meeting, August 6, 2024**

1) This book is an account of how the faith of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is experienced and practiced in New England Yearly Meeting today. It is intended both for those who are new to Quakerism and for those who are long-time Friends.

2) For generations, Quakers have written and revised books to articulate fresh understandings of our faith and the practices that support and express that faith. This revision is also a response to requests from within New England Yearly Meeting for a more comprehensive description of the structure and spiritual underpinning of Friends' practices.

3) Books of Faith & Practice provide guidance and counsel to Friends about a Spirit-centered personal life, and to meetings as they worship, conduct business, learn together, and share fellowship and mutual support. They encourage reflection through queries, advices, and extracts from the writings of both contemporary and historical Friends; many Quakers use them for devotional reading. We invite you to engage with this book on your own and with other Friends.

**I. The Quaker Path**

4) New England Friends trust a loving, dynamic spiritual presence which is available to everyone. It is both within us and beyond us – a presence in which “we live and move and have our being” (*Acts 17:28*) We have no set creed. Descriptions of our spiritual experience are diverse, yet we find a unity that binds us together. However named, the Spirit is experienced as full of grace, eternal, not belonging to the self but at the self's center. We can remind ourselves of this when we doubt, or when God seems absent. It is a spiritual presence which is our guide in life, one that cannot be extinguished. Nothing else speaks to us with the same power.

5) Our faith is nurtured by the simple outward practice of gathering in worship and waiting for movement of the Spirit among us. In the silence of waiting worship, we may come to know a profound connection with each other and with God. This sense of communion is nothing we can schedule or willfully bring about. We may become aware of a quiet, steady presence of the Inward Light in our own lives, or come to a point of feeling broken open—filled with new understanding. Any of these experiences has the power to transform our hearts and minds, redirecting our lives and bringing us into



harmony with the Spirit. Friends claim that any aspect of life is potentially sacramental - a visible sign of invisible grace. When we recognize Quaker faith and practice as our own path, we say we have become convinced.

6) Quakerism invites much freedom for personal inquiry, reflecting the experience of God's availability to teach, comfort, and minister to each person directly as well as to the community as a whole. This means living as seekers, always ready for new openings as God's truth continues to unfold. We encourage others to join us and rejoice when they, too, can affirm, *This I know from my own experience*.

7) Our religious life encompasses both individual faith and corporate discernment. We are supported by historical witness as well as Scripture and other inspirational writings, but our direct experience of the Divine -- tested in community -- is our ultimate authority. The same Spirit that inspired the written words of Scripture continues to reveal itself. Scripture provides an important window into the workings of the Spirit but is not an authority in itself.

## **II. The Corporate Experience of Friends**

### **A. In worship.**

8) Our practice of expectant waiting worship is one of the ways we stand apart from most Christian worshiping communities. We wait together, trusting the Spirit that has led others throughout history to guide us now. Worship may contain messages prompted by the Spirit, or the entire time may pass without vocal ministry. The shared silence may be as powerful as any words.

9) In New England Yearly Meeting some find the encouragement and guidance of a pastor is helpful for their own and their spiritual meeting's life. Worship in a programmed meeting includes a prepared message and usually music, spoken prayer, and readings, as well as a period of waiting worship. Whether programmed or unprogrammed, our time in worship invites us into an openness to the Spirit and an experience of communion with each other and with God.

10) Friends are not unique in our faith in the possibility of direct communication with God—all the great mystical traditions share this. Our more unusual understanding is that this capacity in every human being is best nurtured, tested, and seasoned in group worship. Friends' communal worship can be tender, requiring great trust among the worshippers. This experience may be of great comfort, or may challenge us with difficult and uncomfortable truths. At its best, our worship allows the Spirit to enter our hearts and transform our lives.



## **B. In meeting for business.**

11) Corporate discernment is Friends' essential and unique practice for reaching decisions. We do not base our business practice upon majority rule; we recognize that the majority is not necessarily correct. Instead, as we humbly seek to discern divine will, we find that by listening together in the spirit of worship we can see beyond our different understandings and be open to Truth. We trust that attentiveness to the Presence in our midst and willingness to [come into unity](#) under the Spirit's guidance [can lead](#) us to right action.

12) We understand Truth cannot be held without love - in attempting to hold just one we lose both. We learn not to be dismissive of the views of those with whom we disagree, but to take the time to listen and wait together for clarity. It is not our aim to get things done quickly. Our meetings for business are to discern God's will. The process can be long, but in patiently seeking the Spirit's guidance we also build up the community of faith. As we find a way forward together, we know a sense of joy and love in living in right order.

## **III. Our Life is Our Testimony**

13) Friends trust in continuing revelation—the awareness that Truth is continually unfolding to us. Our experience of the Presence, both individually and corporately, has led us to what are sometimes considered traditional Friends' testimonies, such as integrity, peace, simplicity, equality, community, stewardship, and justice. These are qualities of spirit and ways of life toward which we find ourselves moved at different times by the influence of the Divine. Some Friends use a list of testimonies as queries to remind themselves of the call to put their faith into action. Responding to the promptings of the Spirit in our everyday actions is how we live faithful lives.

14) An individual's—or a community's—perception of the Light can grow, necessitating changes in order to live into the new insights we have been given. While we may deeply regret our past missteps and those of our religious society, we rejoice in the openings of new light and the reassurance that more will be given. Each generation faces its own challenges; no one can foresee what testimonies to Truth will arise in the future. We are aware of how easily we can be distracted by the individualism, materialism, and busyness of the culture in which we live. Yet, when we are able to live by the Spirit's guidance we find peace. We are grateful for the ways our spiritual community and our worship can move us toward living out the Quaker message together. The ultimate test of faithfulness is how we live. Our life is our testimony.







# Membership

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## Introduction

The personal decision to request membership in a monthly meeting in New England Yearly Meeting of Friends represents a marker in a person's relationship to their spiritual community and in their relationship to the Divine presence. This section is addressed both to attenders who are considering applying for membership and to those who have been members for many years, or a lifetime. It also provides guidance to monthly meetings. Appendix 4 includes templates and other information concerning practical aspects of the membership process.

## General Considerations

There was no formal membership in the Religious Society of Friends for the first 85 years. Individuals were considered Quakers if they participated in meetings for worship, had experienced the Living Christ or Inward Light, felt themselves in unity with Friends, and were prepared to make public witness to their faith. Commitment to how Friends lived their faith was a defining trait and Quakers took care to know, keep in touch with, and support one another. Today the commitment and intention of a person to live according to the faith and practice of Friends is recorded as membership in a monthly meeting following the discernment process of a meeting's clearness committee on membership.

Friends trust that there is an underlying Truth that can unify all our individual perceptions when we open ourselves to direct and unmediated encounters with God. In New England Yearly Meeting we do not ask that all who come into membership name this encounter in the same way. New England Friends name this experience variously, including God, Christ Jesus, Spirit, Inward Light, Truth, and Love. Trust in the possibility of Divine guidance that transcends our individual will is crucial because on this rests unity and spiritual authority within the Religious Society of Friends. Experience of the Inward Light gives us the basis for spoken ministry during worship, for how we do business, and for how we "let our lives speak" as we live our testimony in the world. The Society holds the faith that we can witness with transformed lives to the power of the Spirit, known to us individually and collectively. The meeting holds us accountable for our willingness to seek Truth, and the actions that arise from that search.

When entering into membership, we ask individuals to describe their spiritual experience and understanding from a place of openness and to hear the experience of others with openness and respect. The life of the Spirit is released and vitalized when we use our own authentic spiritual language and voice. Yet it is also true that the words used to convey spiritual mysteries and understandings that are life-affirming to one person may be distressing for another. The Society will not ask its members, and members should not expect to ask others, to change authentic descriptions of spiritual experience to accommodate another member's discomfort with that language or way of encountering the Divine. Each member's perception and attunement to the Spirit of Truth is valuable and needs to be offered and received with humility, knowing that we each perceive Truth only in part. We continually seek through honest and sensitive exploration of our differences to uncover our spiritual unity.



*“The Society of Friends might be thought of as a prism through which the Divine Light passes, to become visible in a spectrum of many colours; many more, in their richness, than words alone can express.”*

**Christian Faith and Practice in the experience of the Society of Friends, London Yearly Meeting  
1960, Introduction to Chapter 1.**

It is important for meetings to articulate clearly the expectations and understandings that go along with membership. Uncertainty, vagueness, or a superficial membership process can inadvertently result in dilution of Quaker faith and practice.

Membership is held in a monthly meeting, and by virtue of that membership one also holds membership in a quarterly meeting and in New England Yearly Meeting, our ultimate denominational body. But it should also be recognized that membership is in the Religious Society of Friends as a whole; that we are a part of something larger than the Quakers in the six states of New England. The Yearly Meeting holds membership in and supports several national and international groups: Friends General Conference (FGC), Friends United Meeting (FUM), and Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). These cover a diversity of Quaker practice, experience, theology, history, and cultural background. Awareness of this implies acknowledgment that not all Friends meetings are alike and that we sometimes struggle with those whose beliefs, language, or practices differ from our own, in some way.

## **To Those Considering Membership**

It is through experience that a person grows in the Spirit. The journey may begin with powerful experiences of Divine presence and guidance, a pressing need to be in relationship with God, or a feeling of discomfort with other religious paths. At some point a person may become convinced that the Quaker path is where they can best serve others or that their way of seeking and following Divine guidance is Quaker. For other individuals the journey begins through participation in social justice activities and witness of Friends, where they encounter the spiritual impulse that lies at the heart of this work. The most transformative values and actions of Friends arise as an outgrowth of obedient listening to the Inward Teacher.

Becoming a member is an outward sign of an inward reality. Membership shows an individual's commitment to the Friends' faith community, as well as the commitment of the Society to the individual member. While no act of joining imparts any special sanctity or favor, membership is of value and importance because it unites Friends in a shared commitment to a well-traveled path and its disciplines. Friends welcome fellow travelers to walk alongside them on their journeys, but not all fellow travelers seek or are taken into membership. When seasoned members of a meeting discern that a faithful attender may be ready to explore membership, it can be very helpful to gently suggest it to them. The consideration of membership can clarify the attender's relationship to the meeting and bring increased vitality to their spiritual journey. Joining the Religious Society of Friends affirms to the outside world that a person wishes to be counted as a Quaker. It is a public acknowledgment, a statement of faith, and a commitment to the local meeting and to the Religious Society of Friends as a whole.

An understanding of all Quaker ways is not a requirement for membership. The patient accumulation of experience with other Friends and participation in the meeting's life has been shown to be the most useful teacher. For those who are feeling called into membership, participation in meetings for worship and for business is essential. The essence of being a member is the relationship among the member, the meeting, and the Divine. A careful reading of NEYM's *Faith and Practice* will help



the applicant gain an understanding of Friends' ways of worship, the transaction of business, and the responsibilities of membership. Friends come together to learn—to learn from one another, certainly, but most importantly to learn from the Inward Guide.

*Queries for those considering membership are found at the end of this chapter following “Membership Advices and Queries.”*

## **The Member and the Meeting Community: A Covenant Relationship**

Membership is a mutual commitment between the individual and the Religious Society of Friends, within the framework of a particular monthly meeting. In accepting someone into membership the meeting's commitment is to offer opportunities for, and assistance in, spiritual growth; to help individuals discover and use their gifts; and to offer pastoral care as needed. Members commit to living their daily life in accordance with the faith and practice of Friends, to encouraging and cherishing other individuals in the meeting, and to being supportive of the spiritual and temporal well being of others. Members commit to participation in the life of the meeting as they are able: regularly attending meetings for worship and business; contributing their time and energy; and, according to their means, contributing financially. Being a member of the Religious Society of Friends is a relationship of mutual trust before God, and like other intimate, trust-based human relationships it is not always easy or risk-free.

## **Responsibilities of Membership**

Membership comes with different expectations than those held for attenders. With membership comes the privilege and challenge to participate fully in the life of the Society, to be stretched and sometimes made uncomfortable.

Some long-term attenders have become valued parts of the common life of their meetings without seeking membership. Some Friends see only afterward that they became inward members long before formally seeking membership, drawn by the bonds of relationship and responsibility that occur naturally in a religious community. In a welcoming meeting, all persons are nurtured by participation in activities and responsibilities at any level of involvement. Yet meetings should discern carefully who has the authority to make decisions important to the life of the meeting. It is the members of a meeting who bear the burden of spiritual and societal accountability for acts of conscience and for decisions that have legal ramifications. For this reason, trustees, treasurer, clerk, and recording clerk of a meeting; members of Ministry and Counsel; members of the Membership committee; and representatives to the quarterly and yearly meeting Ministry and Counsel should be members of the meeting. In small meetings with few members, care should be taken that all legal documents are signed by a member or an individual given such authority by the meeting.

## **Types of Membership**

The process of becoming a member of a monthly meeting is always initiated by a request. A child becomes an associate member by parental or guardian request. An individual becomes an adult member by personal request. Both types of membership are a formal recognition that the person is a valued part of the life of the meeting and that the meeting has accepted responsibility for their pastoral care. It is hoped that children who are associate members will eventually choose to request membership in their own right. NEYM no longer grants “birthright” membership. Any member in NEYM who was granted birthright membership in the past retains their membership. Ultimately, all



membership that embraces responsibility for full participation in the life of the meeting is through personal request of the individual.

### *Adult Membership*

When a person feels moved to apply for membership, an application should be made in writing to the monthly meeting, addressed to the clerk of the meeting. The details of the membership process are laid out in Appendix 4.

### *Membership of Children by Parental Request*

Adult members may request that their children be accepted as associate members. Such a request for membership is made in writing to the clerk of the monthly meeting. Associate membership is granted by the monthly meeting if both parents are adult members of the meeting or if one parent is an adult-member of the meeting and the non-member parent consents. Children are not expected to take on the responsibilities of adults but are in every other way regarded as members of the meeting whose spiritual lives are valued and encouraged. Associate membership is an interim membership lasting until the individual has grown in the spiritual life to conviction when they may request membership based on their own personal choice. See Appendix 4 for the details of this process.

Embracing young children as members in this way is an expression of the understanding that children and young people have a unique and valued role and relationship within the meeting community. It is a part of the meeting's covenant to actively nurture the spiritual well-being and growth of its children and to provide spiritual and practical support to their parents in this endeavor. As spiritual maturity develops in parallel with an understanding of the Quaker faith, Friends hope that the young person will embrace this path as their own. At that time the young person writes a letter to the clerk of the monthly meeting stating their readiness for adult membership. The meeting takes up the request as in the case of any applicant for adult membership. The purpose of the clearness process at this time is to provide the meeting and the young friend an opportunity to clarify their relationship and to recognize that its nature has changed. When young adults apply for membership care should be taken to acknowledge that many young people relocate frequently and that this is not a barrier to membership. Some form of regular, reciprocal contact is, however, necessary to maintain the integrity of the membership relationship. Being received into adult membership acknowledges that Quakerism is the member's spiritual path even though their attendance may be sporadic.

Some young adults may choose to postpone adult membership until they are settled and can fully engage with a meeting community. Many have active spiritual lives where they live their witness. The home meeting of such an associate member should inquire whether they would welcome the meeting's regular contact and continued concern for their spiritual well-being. If the answer is affirmative, the meeting should make a commitment to the care of these Friends, maintaining regular contact with them as an encouragement to continue to stay engaged with their Quaker community.

### *Sojourning*

A member who is temporarily living away from their home meeting may become a sojourning member of the meeting they are attending without giving up membership in their home meeting. (See Appendix 4F)

### *Non-Resident Members*

It is important for meetings to keep in touch with members who live at a distance, including those sojourning in another meeting or who spend part of the year in another location. For those living full-time in another location a personal letter at least yearly is suggested, with a message of kindly interest and inquiry into the Friend's religious life and activities. When appropriate, members should



be advised of the advantages of transferring membership to a meeting in their immediate neighborhood or, if their absence is temporary, of becoming sojourning members in such a meeting. If, following outreach, no information is forthcoming from a member for a number of years, the monthly meeting may consider the membership to have lapsed.

For some non-resident members, attending a meeting is not possible due to distance, transportation limitations, or other extenuating circumstances. In these cases, it is especially important for the meeting to maintain regular contact with the absent member so that their spiritual connection with, and support from, the home meeting can be maintained.

### *Dual Membership*

New England Yearly Meeting recommends against a Friend holding membership in two different faith communities.

Membership in the Religious Society of Friends, at its best, expresses a settled recognition that this is the best framework to allow one's spiritual and temporal life to flourish. It is a commitment to God and to the other members of the Meeting, in covenant relationship.

If an individual requests membership in the Religious Society of Friends, and at the same time wishes to retain membership in another tradition, to have dual membership, it is important for their clearness committee to explore with them their reasons for this and its implications. The same is true when a member of the Religious Society of Friends wishes to join another church and wants to retain their meeting membership. It is essential in each of these situations for a clearness committee to question whether the individual's desire to be in a formal membership relationship with two faith traditions indicates a lack of clarity regarding their spiritual path and its expression. The clearness committee may well inquire if there are creedal aspects of the other faith which conflicts with Friends' understanding of continuing revelation. In addition, there may be obligatory outward sacraments that contradict Friends witness that the sacraments are not a necessary vehicle to access the inward spiritual reality. Dual membership implies that an individual intends to commit fully and formally to the covenant responsibilities and spiritual understandings of two different religious traditions. Through membership, one is taking on the commitment of contributing to the life of the religious community not only through attendance at worship, committee work, and financial support, but also in the care, concern and responsibility for the other members and the children of the community.

### *Affiliation with Other Faith Communities*

It is understood, and accepted, that many Friends in New England today have come to Quakerism from other spiritual traditions and often bring with them deep ties to that heritage. These Friends often continue to participate in these traditions when visiting family or at times of specific religious celebrations. The acknowledgment of these gifts from their ethnic or religious heritage, need not disturb their commitment and witness as Friends.

There are also Friends who find ongoing inspiration in the wisdom and devotional practices of various Christian churches, as well as other religions. This enriches their spiritual lives and brings that enlivened spirit to their meeting. Since the early days of the Quaker movement, Friends have recognized the unity of those who witness to the Light within their chosen religious traditions. Friends encourage members to expand their understanding of the spiritual insights of other religions through reading and participation as led and to seek the ways in which Friends can unite with them. Members are also encouraged to bear witness to Friends' distinctive spiritual path and contribute their understanding to the spectrum of religious experience.



### *Lapsed Membership*

Many Friends who have grown up in meetings, or been active members of a meeting, understand themselves to be Quakers long after they have ceased to be active with Friends in any way. It is not a denial of this spiritual identity for a meeting to acknowledge that the individual is no longer a participating member of the Quaker community. Meetings should engage sensitively with such members, letting them know that the meeting believes that their membership has lapsed. In such a case, Ministry and Counsel recommends to the monthly meeting that it remove the name from the membership rolls. The meeting may encourage them to remain in contact with the meeting and with Friends. Such individuals may apply for membership in the future if so led.

If for a number of years the meeting has been unable to sustain a relationship with a member over the age of twenty-five, it may consider the membership to have lapsed.

## **Transfer or Removal of Membership**

### *Transfer*

Membership in good standing is transferable from one monthly meeting to another, unless either meeting has discerned for weighty reasons that transfer is not advisable. Members transferring to and from another yearly meeting should become familiar with the book of *Faith and Practice* of the new yearly meeting. Transfer may be requested for personal reasons after careful consideration, or it may be due to relocation. Transferring membership after one relocates encourages one to engage fully with the new meeting. A letter of transfer from the original meeting is sent to the clerk of the new meeting, recommending the member to the care of the new meeting. When the letter is received, Ministry and Counsel appoints a clearness committee to consider the request for the transfer and to acquaint the member with the spiritual life of the new meeting. There is wide diversity among Friends and care should be taken that both the meeting and the new member are aware of how this diversity might be present in the new relationship. When the membership transfer is accepted by the new meeting the member is formally welcomed into the new meeting. An adult who is a birthright member in another yearly meeting will transfer as a member. A child who is a birthright member will transfer as an associate member. An adult who is a member by parental request may apply for adult membership to their home meeting before transferring or may apply for adult membership in the new meeting. (See Appendix 4D for a full description of the process and a sample transfer certificate.)

### *Resignation of Membership*

Members wishing to resign their membership in the Religious Society of Friends should put the request in writing to the clerk of the meeting. Where appropriate, the meeting may reach out to the individual and offer to convene a committee to visit the member in a spirit of loving care to be clear concerning the cause of the resignation. While a resignation may be a sign of alienation from the meeting, some Friends may simply grow in a direction that makes membership in a different religious body right for them. The meeting may grow from understanding and considering the reasons for a member's resignation. Resignation of membership from the monthly meeting also signifies resignation from the Religious Society of Friends. The meeting drafts a minute accepting the Friend's resignation with a copy of the minute sent to the individual.

### *Discontinuance of Membership*

Discontinuing a Friend's membership may be considered when the conduct or publicly expressed opinions of the member are so much at variance with the principles of the Society that the spiritual



bond has been broken. Friends may find that for this person to continue to be considered a member carries with it a lack of individual and/or corporate integrity.

There may come a time when the meeting community can no longer live with the spiritual or human costs of maintaining a relationship with such a member. While the meeting does have significant responsibility to work with the person via support committees, clearness committees, counseling, and individual personal contact, the meeting cannot sacrifice itself for the preservation of the membership relationship with any one individual.

Much responsibility falls to Ministry and Counsel in times of such difficulties. The quarterly and/or yearly meeting Ministry and Counsel may be called upon for support and resources. Often these resources provide emotional and spiritual support for those within the meeting who are working to restore or maintain the unity of the meeting community and are working to provide pastoral care for the individual.

Within the meeting, the work needs to be done in a way that honors both the member in question and the members of the community. The final decision to discontinue membership is a meeting decision and must be made in a meeting for business after sufficient work within the community to be sure that everyone understands the process and the purpose. It is important that personal support be offered to the individual whose membership is being discontinued during this process in whatever way is acceptable, and that the individual be kept fully informed when such a meeting is being held.

It may also be possible to continue to care for the individual after membership is discontinued by working with the person's community and family outside of meeting, making sure support systems are in place if they are needed.

A Friend whose membership has been discontinued by the monthly meeting may, if dissatisfied with the decision, file an appeal within one year with the quarterly meeting for a review of the matter. If either the Friend whose membership is in question, or the monthly meeting concerned, is dissatisfied with the decision of the quarterly meeting, an appeal may be addressed to the Permanent Board of the Yearly Meeting. The decision of the Permanent Board is final.

One whose membership has been discontinued may subsequently apply for membership in the usual manner, after one year.

## **Extracts on Membership**

1. Membership is still seen as a discipleship, a discipline within a broadly Christian perspective and our Quaker tradition, where the way we live is as important as the beliefs we affirm. Like all discipleships, membership has its elements of commitment and responsibility but it is also about joy and celebration. Membership is a way of saying to the meeting that you feel at home and in the right place. Membership is also a way of saying to the meeting and to the world, that you accept at least the fundamental elements of being a Quaker: the understanding of divine guidance, the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the meeting's business, the practical expression of inward convictions, and the equality of all before God. In asking to be admitted into the community of the meeting you are affirming what the meeting stands for and declaring your willingness to contribute to its life.

**Britain Yearly Meeting 1995**

2. Membership is a covenant relationship, a commitment both to God and to a community. People in a covenant relationship are bound together by love, answerable to each other for their



words and actions. There are mutual expectations in a covenant: trust, open communication, forgiveness, participation, and perseverance in the face of differences.

**Draft of Illinois YM F&P 1999**

3. [M]embership is simply a rite of passage in that [life-long] process of [transformation], the moment of adult declaration that this is the church structure, this is the spiritual community within which we feel called to live out the process of our spiritual maturing. This is the trellising that best supports the growth of our interior relationship with God and our exterior relationship with the world. These are the people with whom we will live out the vicissitudes of our inner and outer lives. Worthiness has nothing to do with membership. God has already accepted us in our imperfection and is loving us forward toward a more perfect image of God's self. The real issue in membership is commitment on the part of both the meeting and the applicant to remain faithful to the development and requirements of the process within Quaker tradition.

**Patricia Loring 1999**

4. The test for membership should not be doctrinal agreement nor adherence to certain testimonies but evidence of sincere seeking and striving for the Truth, together with an understanding of the lines along which Friends are seeking Truth.

**Friends World Conference 1952**

5. I felt so at home among Friends that I realized I had actually been one for a long time without realizing it. It never occurred to me not to ask for membership, but the process—clearness committee, the whole works—forced me further on: I had to consider issues that, like it or not, needed to be wrestled with. For me, the main wrestling match was with the Peace Testimony—a bout which is not over. (I keep running into Hitler and the Holocaust, and it's still a matter of "I believe. Help thou my unbelief.")

**Marnie Miller-Gutsell 2002**

6. I resisted membership in any group for many years, feeling that it was unnecessary and that all people, of all faiths, who were trying to live based in their experience of the divine, were "the church universal." I didn't like the idea of making formal separations between us. While I experienced and still experience the informal drawing together, as if by a magnetic force, of those who are my "companions along the way" I began to feel a need for a group to join where I could be part of a larger communal voice and work in the world. I had been attending an unprogrammed Friends meeting for several years and had realized that this was where I "fit in" spiritually .... For me, membership is akin to marriage. It is hard to describe what the inner difference is except that it is a deeper commitment, a sense that a decision has been made and barring something which arises within the context of that commitment which threatens to be destructive to me, I will stay with it.

**Maggie Edmondson, 2002**

7. I find myself surprised, time and time again, when I hear older Friends speak with urgency about the future vitality of the Religious Society of Friends and express dismay at the lack of young adults in their meetings. If Friends are committed to addressing these concerns and not simply wringing their hands, perhaps it is time to explore new approaches to membership with the needs of the younger generations in mind. If the monthly meeting structure is frequently less relevant to the "next generation" of Friends, then is it wise to use monthly meeting membership as the primary measuring stick by which we gauge the health and vitality of our faith community? Quakerism is vibrant and thriving in many worship groups and Quaker colleges,



to name two examples, yet our declining membership statistics fail to take these groups into account and thus paint a rather grim picture of our future. Perhaps we can envision a more optimistic landscape if we let go of our historical attachment to monthly meeting membership as the locus of all meaningful Quaker community?

**Emily Higgs 2012**

8. Our membership of this, or any other Christian fellowship is never based upon worthiness .... We are none of us members because we have attained a certain standard of goodness, but rather because, in this matter, we still are all humble learners in the school of Christ. Our membership is of no importance whatever unless it signifies that we are committed to something of far greater and more lasting significance than can adequately be conveyed by the closest association with any movement or organization.

**Edgar G. Dunstan 1956**

9. In describing our own religious experiences, we should use words which liberate rather than words which imprison the spirit. Jesus said, "I am the way." He did not say, "I am the End of the road." We say to an applicant for membership: "We expect you to have a belief, but we do not require you to accept a particular statement of belief. You need not have formulated a full theology, and you need not subscribe to a particular theology, but you must be sincerely seeking Truth. We expect you to be a humble learner in the School of Christ. We hope you will study the Scriptures and we hope you will try to formulate your beliefs, but you need not have arrived at Truth, what we ask is that you be sincerely seeking Truth."

**Thomas Bodine 1985**

10. Convincement is that moment when the idea of being a Quaker becomes a lived reality of being a Quaker, in which the Quaker way comes into the heart and finds a home and makes a nest and settles. It's a subtle, subtle thing, but it's everything also. It's everything. When Jesus said, "I am the way," my understanding of that is that when we come to Spirit and we say "yes" and we allow Spirit to be in us, we live in the world in a different way, and it becomes our way of being.

So I am now a Quaker. I am a member of this tribe and I'm committed to its health. But every time that I say yes to something there's a new level, a new arena, a new something that I'm ready to learn that God is calling me into, and there is a deeper connection to Spirit.

So when I first came into the Religious Society of Friends, I was not conscious of the need to work on issues of racism, but recently I have become convinced that that is a part of my piece in this fellowship. And I don't even know what it is are the future pieces of convincement that need to happen in me that I need to be open to.

And, so, yes, I'm a Quaker but I'm not yet fully the Quaker that I might be. And it's when I stop and say "Been there, done that, its over" that I think I stop being a Quaker. And I need to, maybe, become convinced again.

**Walter Hjelt Sullivan 2015**

11. For as in one body we have many members, and not all members have the same function, so we who are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

**Romans 12:4-5**

12. In a true community we will not choose our companions, for our choices are so often limited by self-serving motives. Instead, our companions will be given to us by grace. Often they will be persons who will upset our settled view of self and world. In fact, we might define true community as the place where the person you least want to live with always lives!



13. While her children were in their infancy she had a great concern to become a member of Friends Society not only because she was fully convinced of the excellence of the principles professed by that society, but because she earnestly desired that her children should receive the guarded education Friends give theirs. She mentioned her concern to a Friend who said do not apply, you will only have your feelings wounded. Friends will not receive you. Thus admonished, and feeling that prejudice had closed the doors against her, she did not make her concern known to the Society. There was nothing but my Mother's complexion in the way to prevent her being a member, she was highly intelligent & pious; her whole life blameless.

**Sarah Mapps Douglass 1844**

14. This was the way that Friends used with me, when I was convinced of truth, they came oftentimes to visit me; and sate and waited upon the Lord in silence with me; and as the Lord opened our understanding and mouths, so we had very sweet and comfortable seasons together. They did not ask me questions about this or the other creed, or about this or the other controversy in religion; but they waited to feel that living Power to quicken me, which raised up Jesus from the dead. And it pleased God so in his wisdom to direct, that all the great truths of the Christian religion were occasionally spoken to. Now this was Friends way with me, a way far beyond all rules or methods established by the wisdom of the world, which is foolishness with God: And this is their way with others that are convinced of the truth.

**Richard Claridge 1697**

15. My first impression of Quaker Meeting was confusion. I could not believe that people really were uniting together in practice not in dogma. It was literally incomprehensible to me, the fact that people believed different things and used different language but could be a community – and such a great community – because they shared the same set of practices, and because they came together in the same space and through that shared worship – that waiting worship – they developed a kind of sense of community and a sense of body, a sense of integration.

**Robert Fischer 2016**

16. I said to one of the Cuban Friends, "It must be hard to be a Christian in Cuba." He smiled. "Not as hard as it is in the United States," he said. Of course, I asked why he said that, and he went on, "You are tempted by three idols that do not tempt us. One is affluence, which we do not have. Another is power, which we also do not have. The third is technology, which again we do not have. Furthermore, when you join a church or a meeting, you gain in social acceptance and respectability. When we join, we lose those things, so we must be very clear about what we believe and what the commitment is that we are prepared to make."

**Gordon Browne Jr 1989**

17. Today membership may not involve putting liberty, goods or life at risk but the spiritual understanding of membership is, in essentials, the same as that which guided the 'Children of the Light'. People still become Friends through 'convincement', and like early Friends they wrestle and rejoice with that experience.

**Britain Yearly Meeting 1995**



## Membership Advices and Queries

### *Advices to the Meeting*

1. Be clear with attenders considering membership that, while they are not expected to subscribe to specific beliefs they are choosing a spiritual path that is grounded in the guidance of the Inward Light.
2. Provide instruction and mentoring for those interested in becoming members. Learn to articulate the spiritual grounding and the responsibilities of membership. Encourage prospective members to read NEYM's book of *Faith and Practice* and be ready to engage with them about what they read there.

### *Advices to Meeting Members*

1. Become familiar with all aspects of the meeting's life and help each other to discern where and how it might be appropriate to become engaged.
2. Share the responsibility and privilege for the ongoing search for Divine guidance. This is fruitful both for the individual and for the group.
3. Look upon members as fellow disciples seeking Divine guidance. If you feel discomfort with the spiritual language of others, ask yourself why and help others explore their discomfort with yours. Authentic religious expression does not exclude those with a differing experience or differing ways of expressing it.
4. Become acquainted with the whole meeting community; share in its joys and sorrows and be willing to let the full community share in yours.
5. Encourage one another in personal devotional practice outside of meeting for worship.
6. Turn to the One who unites us in a perfect love when as members, we meet our limitations of understanding and ability to love.

Although Queries may often be answered with a simple affirmative or negative, it is vital to ask corollary questions, such as "why," "how," or "when." A qualified answer arising from introspection is more meaningful and constructive than an uncritical "yes" or "no." (*North Carolina Yearly Meeting [Conservative] 1983*)

### *Queries for the Meeting about Potential Members*

1. Are we aware and supportive of an individual who may be moving toward the commitment of membership?
2. How do we help attenders learn more about Quaker faith and practice?
3. Do we encourage seekers to find a spiritual home, whether or not it is with Quakers?
4. Do we help individuals to become familiar with and participate in the life of the meeting community?

### *Queries for the Meeting about Membership*

1. Do we understand the responsibilities of membership to offer ongoing nurture and support to each other?
2. Do we value, support and maintain connections with all our members?
3. Are we living as a spiritual community under Divine guidance?



*Queries for Individuals Considering Membership*

1. Why do I want to be a member of the Religious Society of Friends? What does membership mean to me?
2. Am I actively engaged in nurturing my spiritual growth?
3. How do I take responsibility for the spiritual vitality of the meeting?
4. What part does meeting for worship play in my life?
5. What is my understanding of the spiritual foundation of Quaker worship and of Quaker business process?
6. What role does being a member of the Religious Society of Friends play in my relationship with the Divine?
7. Am I familiar with New England Yearly Meeting's book of *Faith and Practice*?
8. To what extent have I become acquainted with the meeting community and what experiences have I shared with them?
9. Do I trust the community to help me discern a leading? Do I participate in the discernment processes of the meeting?
10. Am I willing to be vulnerable with meeting members and deal tenderly with their vulnerabilities?
11. In what ways do I demonstrate my commitment to the meeting community and to the Religious Society of Friends?



## Appendix 4: Membership

### 4A. Process for Joining a Friends Meeting

1. A person desiring membership in a Friends meeting initiates the process by writing a letter to the meeting, addressed to the clerk of the meeting.
2. Adult members may request that their children be accepted as associate members.
3. The clerk reports receipt of the letter at the next business meeting, and refers the letter to the appropriate committee of the meeting, usually Ministry and Counsel. The clerk may withhold the name of the applicant if the applicant wishes or if it is the practice of the monthly meeting.
4. The committee which receives the membership request appoints a clearness committee to meet with the applicant.
5. After having met with the applicant as many times as necessary, the clearness committee reports back to this committee. In the case of potentially competing affiliations such as dual membership these matters should be resolved before reporting back.
6. If the recommendation is that the applicant be accepted into membership, this recommendation is reported to monthly meeting for business.
7. If the clearness committee finds that the applicant is not yet ready for membership, the clearness committee reports this to the committee that appointed it. That committee may choose to extend the process.
8. Occasionally the group may reach clarity that membership in the Society of Friends is not the Spirit's leading for an applicant. If both the committee and the applicant remember that the goal is clearness that allows faithful action, then this outcome can be seen as a positive one. The clearness committee reports this to the committee which appointed it. That committee reviews the decision and brings its recommendation to the business meeting.
9. If the monthly meeting for business accepts the applicant into membership, the action is minuted and the applicant's name is submitted to the meeting recorder who will add it to the meeting's records.
10. The clerk of monthly meeting writes a letter to the new member, acknowledging the action of the monthly meeting for business and welcoming them into membership.
11. The new member is welcomed into the meeting.

### 4B. Writing a Request for Membership

The letter requesting membership might include statements of:

1. Your desire to become a member.
2. How you came to the decision to request membership.
3. Your understanding of the spiritual grounding and aspirations of the Religious Society of Friends now and in the past. (This can be brief.)
4. Your willingness to meet with a clearness committee for membership.



## 4C. Suggested Topics for the Meeting of the Applicant and the Membership Clearness Committee

Below are suggested topics to be addressed. Many of them will occur naturally in the course of conversation and are not meant as an examination, nor is it expected that there are “right” or “wrong” answers. The value of these topics lies in what they may reveal of experiences of the Spirit of both the applicant and the members of the clearness committee. Sufficient time should be allowed to ensure mutual understanding and trust. The discussion should take place unhurriedly in the spirit of a common search and seeking for clearness on the part of both the applicant and the clearness committee.

Sometimes the membership clearness committee may feel an individual is not ready for membership. It is important to recognize when this is the case and equally important to continue to provide pastoral care to nurture the individual’s progress on their spiritual journey. This may include suggestions for religious education opportunities, spiritual companionship, counseling, or other necessary assistance.

1. *Process of clearness.* What is your understanding of the process of coming to clearness?
2. *Spiritual journey.* Describe your spiritual journey. What is your experience and understanding of the Spirit? What role does it play in your life? How do you anticipate that membership in the meeting and in the Religious Society of Friends will affect this journey?
3. *Quaker history and experience.* What is your understanding of Quaker history and experience? What is your own experience of following the Inward Light as guide rather than relying on worldly authority? Have you found the collective experience and insights of Friends helpful in developing your own understandings?
4. *Quaker diversity.* Are you aware of the diversity of language and theology used by Quakers to describe basic Friends’ principles? Can you be comfortable with both Christian and universalist language when it is used to describe a spiritual experience? Can you be open to the experience that lies beneath the words?
5. *Testimony and witness.* Do you find yourself in harmony with the way the Spirit has consistently borne testimony in the lives of Friends throughout our history? To what can you testify from your own experience? How has this affected your witness? How have you been affected by the meeting’s expressions of testimony?
6. *Quaker faith and practice.* How familiar are you with Friends’ faith and practice? Are there some aspects which are particularly meaningful to you? Are there some that you find confusing or with which you do not connect?
7. *Contributions to the meeting community.* How are you involved in the life of the meeting? How do you hope to grow within and contribute to the community? What is your commitment to the meeting community and to the Society of Friends as a whole?
8. *Living in spiritual community.* Along with the joys and benefits of living in a spiritual community come potential hardships, disagreements and incompatibilities. Are you ready to address such difficulties with love and with an open heart? Are you aware of the contemporary struggles within the meeting and among Friends?
9. *Quaker decision-making.* Have you participated in the monthly meeting for business or served on a meeting committee? Do you understand how Friends make decisions?
10. *Organizational structure of the Society of Friends.* Do you understand the interdependence among monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings? Are you open to participating in these bodies?



11. Other affiliations. Are you affiliated with other religious organizations? How do those affiliations affect your involvement in and commitment to the meeting?

#### **4D. Suggested Procedure for Transfer of Membership within the Society of Friends**

*For the Friend who wishes to transfer membership:*

1. When a relationship with a new meeting has been established, the Friend desiring to transfer membership applies to the clerk of the meeting of which they are a member for a Certificate of Transfer to the new meeting.
2. At the same time, the Friend writes to the clerk of the new meeting indicating that a request for transfer has been made.

*For the meeting from which a transfer is being made (the originating meeting):*

1. Upon the clerk's receipt of a request for transfer of membership, the clerk refers the request to the appropriate committee of the meeting.
2. If there are no obstructions or difficulties, this committee recommends to the monthly meeting that the transfer be approved. If there are problems, this committee will attempt to resolve them or report back to the clerk the circumstances blocking their way.
3. Approval by the monthly meeting for business is required for completion of the transfer.
4. The clerk or recorder completes two copies of the Certificate of Transfer, sending one to the receiving meeting, along with a copy of the Acceptance of Transfer, and keeping one for their own records. (The originating meeting is obligated to inform the receiving meeting of any special condition or problems experienced with a transferring member.)
5. The clerk or recorder retains one copy of the Certificate of Transfer.
6. If reply from the receiving meeting is not received in due time, another copy of the Certificate of Transfer may be made and inquiry sent to the receiving meeting.
7. When the Acceptance of Transfer is returned by the receiving meeting, a copy of the member's meeting membership record is sent to the receiving meeting, thus completing the interchange. The clerk or recorder appends the copy of the Acceptance to the meeting membership record for that member and files those documents in whatever manner the records of "former members" are preserved. The Friend remains a member of the originating meeting until the new meeting has minuted acceptance in their monthly meeting for business. The date of that meeting marks the official change and is so reported to the Yearly Meeting through the annual statistical report.

*For the receiving meeting:*

1. The clerk receives the member's letter of intention to transfer membership. When the Certificate of Transfer and the partially completed Acceptance of Transfer are received, the clerk acknowledges them, in writing, and reports it to the next meeting for business. The clerk then forwards the request to the appropriate committee (usually Ministry and Counsel).
2. This committee appoints a clearness committee, at least one of whom serves on the committee with responsibility for membership. They explore with the transferring member such matters as are necessary in order that there be common understanding of the new relationship. If the committee finds clearness, it reports to the appropriate committee, which then makes its recommendations to the next monthly meeting for business.



3. When the committee recommends acceptance of the Certificate of Transfer to the monthly meeting for business, and the meeting accepts the recommendation, the meeting minutes its decision regarding the acceptance of the Friend as a member. With acceptance, that minute records membership in the new meeting as of that date.
4. The clerk furnishes the member with a copy of the approving minute.
5. The clerk completes the Acceptance of Transfer and makes a copy of it.
6. The clerk or recorder sends the copy of the Acceptance of Transfer to the clerk of the member's originating meeting.
7. The Certificate of Transfer and the original Acceptance of Transfer become the meeting's membership record. The recorder preserves them in the meeting's file of current members. The meeting may receive a copy of the meeting membership record from the old meeting. This is not an official record and may be stored in whatever manner the meeting holds background information about its members.
8. When all business has been satisfactorily completed, the meeting should make arrangements to welcome their new member.
9. The new member is included in the meeting's next statistical report.

*Note:* Meetings vary in how they distribute responsibilities of the clerk and recorder. To avoid unnecessary delay or confusion, each meeting will prosper by clarification of these tasks.

## **4E. Forms for Transfer of Membership within the Society of Friends**

### **Certificate of Transfer**

[Meeting letterhead and date]

To \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting of Friends

Dear Friends:

This is to certify that \_\_\_\_\_ [a member/members] of this Meeting [has/have] requested a certificate transferring membership to your Meeting. Upon due inquiry, no obstruction appears to granting this request. We therefore commend [him/her/them] to your [Christian/spiritual] care. Please acknowledge receipt of this certificate and acceptance of the transfer by completing and returning to the clerk, the annexed statement.

Signed by direction and on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting of Friends, held at \_\_\_\_\_, State of \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ [month] 20XX.

\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk

Address \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Acceptance of Transfer**

To \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting of Friends

Dear Friends,

We have received the transfer certificate issued by you on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20XX and have accepted \_\_\_\_\_ into membership with us.



Signed by direction and on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting of Friends, held at \_\_\_\_\_, State of \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ [month], 20XX.  
\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk

#### 4F. Sojourning membership

There may be times when a Friend will spend a period of time attending a meeting at some geographical distance from their home meeting, with the intention of ultimately returning to the meeting where they are a member. If the member wants to become involved in the meeting which they are attending, the member may request that their home meeting send a Minute of Sojourn to the meeting with which they want to be involved for the period of their stay. This Minute of Sojourn commends the member to the meeting of their sojourn, asking that they be welcomed into the new community for the duration of their stay.

If the Sojourning Member becomes involved with the new meeting, it is traditional that the Meeting of Sojourn send a letter to the home meeting when the period of sojourn is finished, returning care of the member to the meeting from which they came.

#### 4G. Transfer of membership to a church outside the Society of Friends

##### Request for Transfer

To the \_\_\_\_\_ Church, city, state.

Dear Friends,

\_\_\_\_\_, [a member/members] in good standing in this Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, [has/have] expressed the desire to become [a member/members] of your Church. We have considered this request and there appears to be no obstruction to granting it. We therefore recommend [him/her/them] to your care. Their membership in this meeting of the Religious Society of Friends will end when we receive acknowledgment of your acceptance of this transfer.

Signed by direction and on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held at \_\_\_\_\_, State of \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20XX.

\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk

Address \_\_\_\_\_.

##### Acceptance of Transfer

To \_\_\_\_\_ Monthly Meeting of Friends

We have received the letter issued by you on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20XX, and have accepted \_\_\_\_\_ into membership with us.

Signed on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ Church, on \_\_\_\_\_ [date]

\_\_\_\_\_  
[Signature]

\_\_\_\_\_  
[Title]



#### **4H. Discontinuance of Membership**

The monthly meeting records the discontinuance of a membership in its records and sends a copy of the pertinent minute to the individual involved.



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# Dying, Death, and Bereavement

**Presented at the 2019 NEYM Annual Sessions  
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One rarely knows how death will arrive, either for a loved one or for oneself. Will death come through injury, illness, old age? Will it come quickly or slowly? Will there be warning? Each death is unique, and may not come at the end of a long life. Yet, each life, whether short or long, is whole and precious.

Early Friends recognized the passage into death as a liminal space in which a person might be particularly conscious of the Eternal. It was common for friends and family to gather to hear the testimony of the dying person. While this rarely happens in a formal way now, many still find deep openings sitting with a dying person whether in silence or in conversation, and even when they are with a person who is unconscious, distressed, or wrestling with great pain.

Keeping a sense of sanctity and care around death may present a challenge. Many aspects of the modern world distance us from death. Deaths are often outside the home, or far away geographically from loved ones. Certain aspects of death, such as medical care or funeral arrangements, are usually handled by others, leading to less engagement with the physical reality of death than in former times. At the same time, the still common experience of mass deaths from war, or other violence, may lead one to objectify death as remote and unreal.

What happens beyond life is a mystery, but Friends trust it is part of a universe sustained by Divine Love. Friends' witness is that one may live in God's realm in the present. As such, life choices are made not in hopes of heaven in an after-life, but on how one can embody that realm in the present.

Birth and death are parts of the natural order of creation. A given life span is only one fleeting but precious part of the life of the universe. What precedes and follows it becomes part of a larger spiritual context. Birth, life, and death are complementary parts of the cycle of life anchored in the Spirit.

## Dying

Dying may happen in an instant or may be prolonged, but anticipation of dying may affect anyone. Until one directly faces death for oneself or for loved ones, there is much that is unknown. Sharing experiences of being with someone who is dying may help confront and allay some fears. It also offers the chance to explore spiritual questions together and to offer comfort to each other.

For those who are in the process of dying, it may be important for them to talk about their fears, regrets, or emotional and financial concerns for those being left behind. Sometimes there is vital work of forgiveness of oneself or others to be done. One may mourn what will be left undone, or that which will never now be experienced.

There can be a sense of release from fear when a person relinquishes the fight against disease and accepts their coming death, a release that leaves room to embrace the stretch of life that remains. Just as it is common to give thought to the birthing experience, some people give thought to the experiences surrounding death such as who might be present or choosing comforting music or readings.

When one is a patient, there may be medical choices that affect one's dying and death. Not only are there choices of what course of treatment to accept, there are also choices to be made about wheth-



er to receive pain management only without looking for a cure<sup>1</sup>, whether to enter hospice care<sup>2</sup>, to refuse food and drink<sup>3</sup>, or to choose physician assisted death in states where it is legal<sup>4</sup>. In making these decisions, it is valuable to include family and friends, and perhaps a clearness process with members of the meeting. Any decision made by the patient inevitably affects others who are close.

When dying happens over a period of time, support for caregivers is as important as care for the one who is dying. Those providing care are likely to have major responsibilities for physical needs, overseeing medical and financial decision-making, coordinating communication with family and friends, and providing emotional support. All these require much energy and stamina. At the same time the caregivers may be experiencing emotional turmoil. It is normal to swing between hope and fear as symptoms change, to feel drained and tired, resentful, scared, angry, overwhelmed or sad as well as to feel tender and loving. Caregivers may experience frustration, physical revulsion, and rage against what feels like an injustice. As they provide support, caregivers, in turn, need to receive support.

While accompanying some people as they die may prove inspiring and reassuring, that is by no means always the case. Staying present to the person may be challenging when the manner of death is difficult. There may be anger or even horror, and one may profoundly disagree with the dying person's choices. Remember the vital importance of dependence on the Spirit for guidance, comfort, and strength beyond one's own resources.

## Death

While it is helpful to all involved to plan and make decisions, death can happen in unexpected ways over which one has no control, and for which there has been no preparation<sup>5</sup>. Accidental death, violent death, miscarriage, death of a child at any age, and death by suicide all challenge one's ability to accept and understand. One's faith as well may be sorely tested. Not only the individuals involved, but the whole meeting may need to process and grieve together.

At times there are difficult decisions to make about death: for example, whether or not to terminate an unplanned or complicated pregnancy, whether to end one's own medical treatment, or whether to stop a person's life support. Friends may want to gather with a clearness committee for discernment at such times.

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1 *Palliative Care*: Care that focuses on relieving the symptoms, pain and stress of serious illness. A patient does not need to be terminal to receive palliative care. Palliative care patients often continue full treatment for their illness while in a palliative care program.

2 *Hospice Care*: Terminal illness care at home or in a hospice facility. Care is focused on alleviating pain and helping patients prepare for the end of life. Instead of treating the illness, hospice nurses and other medical professionals work to ensure the patient's physical comfort and emotional peace. Hospice is designed to minimize medical intrusion and maximize a patient's ability to enjoy what time he or she has left.

3 *VSED (Voluntary Stopping of Eating and Drinking)*: An intentional decision to stop drinking liquids and eating food—for the specific purpose of causing death. It causes death by dehydration, usually within seven to 14 days. While it may not require governmental action or physicians' authorization, care should be taken to consult the specific laws of one's state.

4 *PAD—Physician Assisted Death*: The practice where a physician prescribes a potentially lethal medication to a terminally ill, suffering patient at their request that they can take (or not) at a time of their own choosing to end their life.

5 If a death occurs outside of a hospice or medical setting, particularly if unexpected or unattended, it needs to be reported immediately.



Taking the time for advance planning, including planning for costs, when one is still in good health is an act of love for those who will be left behind. It allows for careful consideration of one's own wishes, as well as time for conversation with loved ones about what they need and want. It also relieves loved ones of worry about details when grief is fresh and may be overwhelming. Discussing choices surrounding death with family members helps avoid later struggles and disagreements. Making sure that those responsible know the whereabouts of important information will facilitate what they need to do. Meetings may offer to keep copies of members' final choices on file at the meetinghouse.

Formal documentation may include advance directives, a will, a list of important contacts, the location of personal documents and passwords, a draft obituary, plans for a memorial service, and choices concerning type of burial, organ donation, possible donation of the body for research, and other specifics about treatment of the body. Organizing one's papers and possessions while one is able is a gift to all concerned. In addition, Friends may wish to consider writing ethical wills to leave a legacy of those non-material things that were important to their lives, such as their spiritual beliefs, guiding principles, and cherished family stories. (See Appendices 7A and 7B.)

## **Bereavement**

When death is anticipated, grief begins early as those who love and care for someone watch the progress of the illness, perhaps witness pain and suffering, and realize their loss has already begun. While death involves grieving by family and friends, depending on circumstances, the grief may be mixed with gratitude, a sense of completion and rightness, or a sense that something sacramental has happened. It is also possible that the dying and the death will be traumatic, and there will be need for loving friends and family to actively support the bereaved. Sudden or violent death can pose further challenges, beginning with a period of shock during which the bereaved person's basic needs must be addressed.

Whatever the circumstances, death can be a complex and stressful time for families, and negotiating family expectations and sensitivities can benefit from spiritual support. This is especially important when a bereaved person has been unable to celebrate the life of their loved one with others, either because of geographical distance, estrangement, or the decision not to hold any kind of funeral or memorial service.

Grief is a process of healing. It is not linear, even though it has stages, and it has no time limit. The acute pain may dissipate, but it may resurface at unexpected intervals. Other feelings may arise: anger, regrets, and unresolved issues. Loss of a loved one changes the shape of one's world, even when the loss has been foreseen and comes at an expected time. There may be a permanent sense of absence. Not only one's feelings, but one's very sense of identity and one's roles in life may change. There is an alchemy involved in entering fully into grief, a process whereby feelings of despair and sorrow are accepted, fully experienced and transformed.

## **Meeting Responsibilities**

Preparing for the eventuality of illness, aging, dying, and death of oneself or one's loved ones is eased by an open flow of communication and exploration of these topics before such events occur. The meeting, or a memorial committee, can encourage advance decision-making by holding discussions on such topics as durable power of attorney, advance directives, eldercare, hospice, wills, and burial options, and by keeping a file of Friends' final wishes as described above. This helps to relieve much stress when death occurs. When the meeting community is prepared and engaged, it can be a meaningful source of solace, comfort, and strength for a dying person, caregivers, and others affected



by a death. As members of the meeting share this experience, they may grow in their own spiritual understandings of death and in their capacity to meet difficult experiences with love. Many meetings have regularly scheduled times to share the joys and sorrows of the community, inviting prayer and practical assistance. Meetings can also offer support to the dying as well as the bereaved with a clearness or support committee. (See Pastoral Care section.) As with all pastoral care, it is important for the meeting to gauge the scope of its ability to provide assistance.

Should a cause of death present particular challenges to the meeting, such as a death by violence, additional support for the community may be needed from Friends beyond the monthly meeting. At times, a number of meetings may need to uphold one another through times of grief following tragedies in the wider world, such as mass shootings or catastrophic events such as earthquakes. They may wish to join with other faith communities in mourning such events.

At the time of death, Friends should assist the family in whatever ways they can, such as help with children, with food or housework, or with hospitality for visiting relatives. If prior planning has not been done, the meeting may be asked to assist a family in making decisions regarding disposition of their loved one's body and, if there is no family, consider doing this service for the deceased Friend. When choosing an alternative to the services of a professional funeral director (in states where this is legal) it is very helpful to have the support and assistance of one's community.

If the meeting has a memorial or burial committee, it should be familiar with the legal requirements, which vary from state to state, and be ready to help Friends follow the burial protocols with simplicity and dignity, and to assist in filing the appropriate paperwork.

## **Memorial Minutes and Memorial Meetings**

Memorial minutes and memorial meetings are valued spiritual practices of Friends. The memorial minute testifies to the grace of God as revealed in the life of a Friend, while the memorial meeting for worship is a time to give thanks for that grace. The minute recounts the life, distinctive qualities and contributions of the Friend who has died. It may include excerpts from an individual's pre-written spiritual autobiography or other writings. When there is time for it to be written before the memorial meeting, parts of it may be read aloud during the worship. Often it is written later and may reflect ministry that has arisen in the memorial meeting.

While early Friends remembered the deceased during a regular meeting for worship, it is more common now to schedule a separate time. It is important to be aware of the needs both of the family and of the meeting, especially if the family is not acquainted with Quaker forms of worship. In some instances two services may be held to accommodate both the family and the meeting. Members are encouraged to attend a memorial meeting whether or not the person who died is someone they knew well. Honoring a life in this way may help family members and the meeting through this difficult time of transition. (See Appendices 7C, 7D, and 7E for guidance on writing memorial minutes and conducting memorial meetings.)

## **Burial**

Early Friends followed simple burial practices and often had no grave markers. Many options are available today with or without the services of a funeral industry professional. Some meetings have a burial ground, or a memorial garden for cremated remains, and some have a standing burial committee to help guide families through the burial and memorial process.



## Extracts

1. I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor powers, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Epistle to the Romans 8:38–39**

2. [D]eath is no more than a turning of us over from time to eternity. Death then, being the way and condition of life, we cannot love to live, if we cannot bear to die.

They that love beyond the world cannot be separated by it. Death cannot kill what never dies. Nor can spirits ever be divided, that love and live in the same divine principle, the root and record of their friendship. If absence be not death, neither is theirs. Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another still. For they must needs be present, that love and live in that which is omnipresent. In this divine glass they see face to face; and their converse is free, as well as pure. This is the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are, in the best sense, ever present, because immortal.”

**William Penn 1693**

3. *The following experience relates to the death of his son Lowell at the age of 11, while Rufus Jones was on a visit to England in 1903.*

The night before landing in Liverpool I awoke in my berth with a strange sense of trouble and sadness. As I lay wondering what it meant, I felt myself invaded by a Presence and held in Everlasting Arms. It was the most extraordinary experience I had ever had. But I had no intimation that anything was happening to Lowell. When we landed in Liverpool a cable informed me that he was desperately ill, and a second cable, in answer to one from me, brought the dreadful news that he was gone. When the news reached my friend John Wilhelm Rowntree, he experienced a profound sense of Divine Presence enfolding him and me, and his comfort and love were an immense help to me in my trial...

I know now, as I look back across the years, that nothing has carried me up into the life of God, or done more to open out the infinite meaning of love, than the fact that love can span this break of separation, can pass beyond the visible and hold right on across the chasm. The mystic union has not broken and knows no end.

**Rufus Jones 1947**

4. And so comes the next opening—the sense of being part of a universe, of a personal relatedness to all life, all growth, all creativity. Suddenly one senses that his life is not just his own little individual existence but that he is bound in fact to all of life, from the first splitting off of the planets, through the beginning of animate life and on through the slow evolution of man. It is all in him and he is but one channel of it. What has flowed through him, flows on, through children, through works accomplished, through services rendered; it is not lost. Once given the vision of one's true place in the life stream, death is no longer complete or final, but an incident. Death is the way—the only way—life renews itself. When the individual has served his purpose as a channel, the flow transfers itself to other channels, but life goes on. And in this great drama of life renewed, one sees and feels the divine presence, and feels himself one with it.

Facing the possibility of death, I saw that I did not fear it. Why should I? Since life carries death with it like a seed, since this is normal, what is there to fear? The gift of life is inseparably united to the promise of death: on no other terms is life ever given. And death is a promise rather than a threat, for who would want to continue a life that is worn out?



5. The time to think about death, most truly to face it creatively, is not when it is near, but rather when one is at the peak of one's life's energy and creativity. Certainly this was the attitude of early Friends. Of course they knew death would come, but in the reading of thousands of the pages of the writings and journals of early Quakers, I have been impressed by how little concern the journal writer expressed for her or his own death or for what would happen after death. This is all the more remarkable when one remembers how common death was in those times, how central it was in most thought, and that the religions contemporary with Quakerism heavily emphasized the transition at death from physical life to heaven, hell, or purgatory, and each religion promised the best road to heaven.

Instead, Quakers, quietly placing their faith in the God they worshipped to handle all that happens after human death, concentrated their energy and their faith on the living of a holy life. For as Fox says repeatedly, ... our task, our responsibility is to make this present life holy, consecrated, a temple of the living God, the indwelling Christ. This gives to us the power to be the people of our God, to master and conquer temptation, to order our lives by the divine principles steadily revealed to us.

Cecil E. Hinshaw 1979

6. However much death has been expected and prepared for, it is still a shock when the moment comes. This shock produces a numbness at first which is merciful. It may enable the bereaved person to carry out the practical tasks which follow a death. But it may not. If we are sensitive we will see what help the bereaved person needs ... How often we hear people say in those early days: 'She is being marvelous'. But this stage passes, and a period of great inner chaos can follow ...

[The] loss of one's partner can be one of the severest forms of psychological stress. The emotions can be quite overwhelming. Some say it feels like insanity ...

Slowly life can be found to have meaning again, and at the heart of that meaning lies the word 'love'. 'Growth into true life,' wrote one widow, 'lies in love of one another. We have the choice of letting grief shadow our lives or growing from it.' This healing love is beyond us and within us and continually seeks us out. Those whose privilege it has been to come right through grief know this in a deep and personal way. They can in their turn reach out to others in distress. The true meaning of the word 'compassion' is 'suffering together with someone'. Perhaps they have discovered for themselves that the sense of the absence of God which came with the depression made them know how much they need God.

Diana Lampen 1979

7. About a dozen years ago I became critically ill and I have a vivid memory of looking down on myself on the bed; doctors and nurses worked on that body; and I felt held in such secureness, joy and contentment, a sense of the utter rightness of things—I was held in the hands of God. The crisis passed and I was filled with wonder at the newness of life ...

Can we face up to the fact of death? Can we prepare ourselves in some measure for dying? I feel I have to try and tell you of my experience and the understanding it brought me—however personal and limited. From the closeness of my own dying, I know God is. Death is not a negation of life but complements it: however terrible the actual dying, life and death are both parts of the whole and that wholeness is in God. I still fight the conventional words of "resurrection and life everlasting" but I know that after Jesus died the overwhelming certainty of his presence released his disciples from fear. I believe eternal life is in each moment of life, here and



now; the real tragedy is not how or when we die but if we do not live the life we are given to our full potential.

**Jenifer Faulkner 1982**

8. One particular evening during Sue's last days was especially striking. A few of us sat at her bedside, along with her two dogs and her son, who lay red-eyed alongside her on the bed. In conscious awareness, we of her and she of us, we were together in our letting go. Together we were packing her bags for the walk between worlds to whatever might be next for her. There was a telling instant that lifted our tired and teary eyes. With a soft giggle from her frail and translucent body, she comforted us. Sue's presence was almost regal as she signaled her acceptance of death. That soft laugh spoke to a faith and basic trust that clothed her in comfort, while equally clothing the rest of us. So it is with dying. Someone is leaving, and friends and family are equally participating in the parting. Conscious separation has always seemed important to me, and it can be one of love's finest moments. Of all the many kinds of love, this love may be the kindest of them all. With all of the uncertainties on the bridge between one world and another, our trusting acceptance is what really allows a loving and lasting embrace.

**Stephen Redding 2010**

9. We are used to hearing the term "centering" and I haven't before had a really good image for how that feels, just that there is a lightness and a clarity of focus which doesn't have words ... I was holding a sense of this when a small group of us went to have worship with Friends I will call Kate and John in their home. Kate had recently been discharged from the hospital into hospice care at home and was mostly bedridden ... As we sat together in a circle I became aware of so many other concentric circles of caring beyond us. What surprised me was that Kate was not at the center of these circles. At the center was a shining entity like a pillar, filled with its own dynamic movement, and she was one of the people who was tending this central entity. It felt that this central entity was the beautiful dance of relationship between Kate and everyone present, but especially with her husband and her daughter and all those closest to her. They were not primarily tending her; she and they together were all tending the quality of their relationship and their love for one another. I felt strongly that Kate still had work to do, the most challenging work she had ever undertaken—to tend this flame of love together with her loved ones. When I voiced this she expressed what a sense of relief it was for her to feel that she was still part of the circle actively holding something more than herself.

**Maggie Edmondson 2016**

10. She (my sister) reminded me that Quaker faith was not written down; it was lived, and I was living it. I was trying to find answers in books and histories that weren't meant to provide guidance. The answers would only come from me being present in the light, and living my faith. So I put the books down. I thought back over the past few days as my father lay dying. And there I saw my faith. My father was surrounded by his family: his three daughters, his brother and sister, and his best friend of 37 years. He was never alone. Even as he began to fade in and out, we were present on his behalf and holding him in the Light. Some people prayed; others held his hand. It didn't matter what we did, because we all loved ... and God was with us... This was going to be a sad time, horribly sad, but it should not be horrible. And it wasn't; instead, it was filled with a kind of light I had never experienced before: somber and soft. ... When my father slipped from this world, the entire family gathered around him. In retrospect, it strikes me how much this process was like a meeting for worship. In the silence, his brother, sister, and best friend told stories about his life. We opened ourselves up to our memories, and our sorrow. We cried but we also laughed. It was our way of holding him in the light as he



began his journey. I also think it was our way of gathering ourselves and finding the light in our sorrow.

Shannon Zimmerman 2017

11. I sat in a bedside chair and waited. Minutes went by and after a while I didn't hear Glenn's labored breathing. The sound of machines, monitors, and people in the hallway evaporated. It felt like being in meeting for worship, when the gathered center down and it's just us and the Light of God, losing ourselves in a blessed silence. For a moment it was as if Glenn and I were lifted up and held in peace.

Geoff Knowlton 2017

12. Grief is a holy madness. It is not a puzzle to be solved, a problem to be overcome, or a situation to be managed. It is a wilderness we wander in search of the sacred—an absent other, a missing self. No one can take this wilderness from us, and no one should. You who grieve, stay away from people who want you to get over it fast. They don't know that the work you're doing is holy ...

"The Truth must dazzle gradually/Or every man be blind—," Dickinson wrote. Grief is just as dazzling. It is a madness that makes divinest sense. The truths it reveals cannot be known all at once; they must be seen on the slant of time.

One of the most powerful truths I learned was that the loftiest part of myself was always on duty. It was present despite the chaos, within the chaos. Present wherever I wandered, whatever I found: snake or squirrel, bee or bone, rock or razor.

In the place I call North, I felt found, rescued, met, known, led, righted, given to, bestowed upon, inspired—all words claimed by religious tradition. What do *you* call this place? What is its center? For me, North is the soul's magnetic pole; the divine is its compass, nothing less.

Patricia McKernon Runkle 2017

13. Not Knowing What to Expect

*Not Knowing what to expect  
I would never pack light  
For trips to the West*

*Shoes were the worst;  
Of course I'd want my work boots  
Because that is who I am*

*But I'd also want my Bean  
Boots, in case of mud.  
And some slip-ons for around the house*

*I'd want some shoes easy to  
Put on and take off in the  
Airport (pack my pocketknife in the luggage)*

*Not knowing what to expect  
I'd want to pack my computer and some music  
And a book of puzzles in carryon*

*There's a trip I'll be taking soon  
Without an overhead bin I need to  
Unpack. I won't be able to take anything with me.*



*Still, not knowing what to expect  
It's hard to pack light  
For a trip to the unknown.*

**Edward Baker, written April 2017,  
six months before his death**

14. “For the last couple [of] years, the phrases often on her lips to describe her journey were statements of hope and faith: “Welcome what is” and “All will be well.” She lived into these words.

Though she lived in a great deal of pain her last year, she was unlikely to mention it except in passing. She made [an] effort to be present to people and to the Meeting whenever she could manage it. Brian was her constant and loving help-meet.

Two months before she died, Betty made the decision to enter hospice, and once her decision was made and shared, she lived into it with openness, humility and grace, and one could even say hospitality.

“Welcome what is” released her into all that life was to her at the moment: all the love and all the pain, living in what Friend Bill Taber called “The cross of joy.”

**Excerpt from memorial minute for Elizabeth Poynton,  
Worcester Meeting 2019**

15. We don't get to control some of the most significant moments in our lives—birth, death, and events that may be physically and emotionally traumatic. What we do get to do is say what we need, offer the support we can give, and invite God to sustain us and help us be present to what is happening.

As someone who carried and gave birth to my child, shepherded my mother through ALS and her death, and has sat with many families grieving the loss of a child to suicide, gun violence, or other sudden deaths, I know there is not always grace, there is not always mercy, and things don't go as we would want. There is always, however, our capacity to endure, to be present, and to draw on God's strength when we feel ourselves past the point of endurance and past our capacity to be present.

So many times ... I wanted to stop, to check out, to tune out, to walk away. The pain—physical and emotional—was too much. In each case, I chose to stay present. It was hard and I often questioned where God was at all, particularly when a young person I loved had been gunned down. The anger and horror and all-consuming rage I have felt at times were bigger, in those moments, for me, than my experiences of God.

When I fought to maintain my mother's comfort as her organs were rupturing in a medical system that had forgotten to treat her like a person, when I tried to pump life back into the dead body of my student, when I stood over my 3-day-old child in the NICU, willing him to live, the only grace I was given was that I was able to stay present to my mother, my student, and my child. I felt everything I was feeling *and* stayed present. Only one of those three people is still alive and I didn't walk out of those experiences unscathed. To the best of my ability to understand it, God was with me in supporting me to be present to what was happening, in all its horror, and that that presence is what allows me to heal after each of these experiences. I have not returned to the person I was before these moments, but, for the most part, I have been able to release the all-consuming fear and rage and hold those moments for what they were—horrible, traumatic, sad, and life-altering.

We carry trauma and grief in our bodies, no matter what sense our minds and psyches make of it. I have worked with enough survivors to know that sometimes the trauma is so great, that



disassociating is the way our beings can best survive the horror we endure. And I also know that people who can identify even one person with whom they can talk about their trauma, are far more likely to heal. My understanding of this is also about presence—that when we bear witness to another’s pain, we shift some of that pain and offer a space for healing.

I do not know what of my presence my mother and student could feel or know. We can not always create the reality we want for each other; we can always be present to the reality another is facing. This is one of the purest ways I know to “answer that of God in everyone.” It is not about having an answer or solution, but simply being there, and being there fully.

“Birth, death, and other big hard things.”

Lisa Graustein, personal communication, January 2019

## Advices and Queries

### *Advices for Meetings*

1. Encourage one another to acknowledge the reality of death and come to a greater understanding of dying.
2. Remember the power, strength and comfort of both collective and individual prayer for those who are dying or who are bereaved.
3. Support those going through the process of dying, death and grieving. Help them to realize and express their wishes for the memorial meeting. Be sensitive to the needs of family, friends, and the meeting.
4. At times the need of the dying person for privacy conflicts with the caregivers’ and the family’s need for support. Be mindful of the ways information is shared within the meeting. Use discretion and discernment.
5. Make resources available on the practical, emotional and spiritual aspects of dying, death, and bereavement.
6. Be mindful of the ongoing support needed for those whose needs may be invisible: the very ill who are unable to come to meeting, caregivers, and those grieving.

### *Advices for individuals*

1. Remember that death is an integral part of the fabric of life rather than an evil to be avoided at all costs. God is ever present.
2. Prepare for the end of life while you are able. Remember that infirmity and death can come unexpectedly. Advance planning is a gift to those left behind.
3. Advance planning is particularly important when care of dependent children needs to be considered.
4. Do not burden your heirs with decisions about possessions that could have been made through thoughtful preparation.
5. Clearly stated wishes regarding dispersal of property, heirlooms, and other family treasures may help to avoid pain and conflict.
6. Be aware that grieving is normal, is painful, and has no defined time limit. Be open to God’s love and the love of Friends, knowing that there are those willing to walk with you. When it is another’s turn to grieve, remember to support that person in whatever ways are helpful, with imagination and care.



7. Stay close to the Inward Guide as you navigate your own and family expectations and sensibilities around death.
8. Make a regular practice of prayer and dependence on the Divine so that in times of urgent need, you may more easily find your way to the embrace of the Spirit.
9. When visiting a person who is dying, or a person who is grieving, take care to keep the focus on that person, rather than on one's own feelings and responses to the person's condition. Be equally careful when speaking to that person's family or caregivers.

Although Queries may often be answered with a simple affirmative or negative, it is vital to ask corollary questions such as "why", "how", or "when." A qualified answer arising from introspection is more meaningful and constructive than an uncritical "yes" or "no" (*North Carolina Yearly Meeting [Conservative] 1983*)

#### *Queries for Meetings:*

1. How does the meeting invite learning about, discussion of, and preparation for end-of-life issues, at both a practical and a spiritual level?
2. Does the meeting want to offer a place to file final choices for its members or biographical material which might be useful in preparing memorial minutes?
3. How might the meeting support individuals, families, and the meeting as a whole, as each grieves, not only in the near future, but over time?
4. When death happens in a disturbing way, is the meeting a place where Friends know they can express difficult emotions and share together as needed?
5. Has the meeting considered the need for a burial/memorial committee to stay current with the state laws and with the choices available? If the meeting has a burial ground, does it have clear guidelines for its use and an accurate record of who is interred? (See Appendix 7G)
6. Has the meeting considered whether it is able to support those considering options that will hasten death?

#### *Queries for Individuals*

1. Am I fearful of death, or of dying, and how might these fears be faced?
2. How does my faith inform my understanding of death? Am I living in the Eternal?
3. What insight and wisdom do I have to pass on to the next generation?
4. Do I know what to do when the death of a loved one occurs? Am I prepared to support the choices they make?
5. Do I know that I need not be alone in grief, and that I might share it with others? Am I willing to seek support when I need it?
6. Am I willing to be present to other Friends when they are grieving, to offer practical and spiritual support, making myself available as needed or wanted?



## Appendix 7: Dying, Death and Bereavement

### 7A. Health Care Decisions, Legal Documents and Financial Information

Friends are strongly advised to make their final arrangements well in advance remembering death does not always wait until we are old. Make sure those close to you understand your wishes and know where to find the necessary information. Meetings can help by having packets of the necessary forms available, periodically encouraging Friends to fill them out and, if desired, providing a lockbox at the meeting house in which to keep copies of completed forms.

The more details are written down ahead of time, the more easily survivors can act upon your wishes. Do not hesitate to add details to the ones suggested below.

*Some Suggested Documentation:*

- *Health care advance directives:* These are available online for each state or from your local hospital. Are these current and up to date? With whom have you discussed your wishes?
- *Will or trust information:* List the names and phone numbers of those who have any written documents, and where the documents are kept.
- *Organ donation:* Have you made the choice to be an organ donor? Do you carry documentation with you?
- *Durable power of attorney for health Care (DPA/HC):* Write down the contact information of whoever has documents, and where your copy is kept.
- *Durable power of attorney for your estate:* contact information
- *Bank accounts:* Information that will allow access
- *Credit cards:* Bank name, account number, card location, contact information
- *Safe deposit box:* Location of box, location of key
- *Annuities, life insurance policies:* Location of these documents, name and phone number of representative or agent to contact.

### 7B. Personal Wishes and Final Arrangements

(Some meetings may have their own forms to offer. It is important to have this information collected for the family.)

*Personal data:* Pertinent documents along with telephone numbers of executor of will/trust, etc.

*Contacts:* List key persons who would be willing to notify networks of other people, such as an immediate family member, a professional colleague, a close friend, etc.

*Instructions for final arrangements:* It is advisable to review and update these decisions regularly.

*Funeral director:* Does your state require you to use a funeral director? If you need or choose to have a professional funeral director involved, indicate the name, address and phone number. Have you talked with this funeral director?

Consider what your wishes are for disposal of your body or cremated remains: Would you prefer burial or cremation or donation of your body to medical research/education?



*If you choose burial:*

- Would you choose to be buried in a coffin or other receptacle, and if so what type? Would you want to purchase it ahead of time?
- Would you choose a green burial (no embalming; only readily biodegradable shroud or container), and do you know the associated regulations for your state?
- You may wish to stay informed of other options for body disposition as they develop.

*If you choose cremation:*

- Do you plan to have the funeral director transport your body to the crematorium, or do you prefer to have those close to you do so?
- Do you have a particular vessel you would like to use for containment of your cremated remains?
- Would you like your cremated remains scattered in a particular place? Is this a legal possibility?

*If you chose to donate your body:*

- Have you contacted the appropriate organization and made the arrangements?
- Have you communicated an alternative plan in the event your donation cannot be accepted?

*Memorial service or funeral:* Do you have a preferred location? Is there someone you would like to officiate? Is there music you would like? Do you want to have flowers? Who should be notified, near and far? Do you have any other specific instructions?

*Charitable donations:* Provide names and addresses of organization(s) you wish to receive memorial donations in your name.

*Obituary:* You may wish to write this yourself, or choose someone else to do it. Who has information about your life?

*Care of dependent children:* Note the names and phone numbers of those you have chosen to take responsibility for immediate and long-term care of dependent children and other instructions concerning their care.

*Pets:* Give the name and phone number of whoever will provide care for your pets.

## **7C. Planning a Memorial Meeting**

A memorial meeting is a meeting for worship celebrating the movement of the Spirit and the grace of God in the life of a deceased Friend. It is usually arranged by members of Ministry and Counsel, another designated committee, and/or the meeting's pastor, in consultation with the family and in accord with any wishes recorded by the Friend. In some cases two services may be appropriate to meet both the needs of the family and the needs of the meeting. Meetings or their pastors may be asked to provide this service for people who are not part of the meeting community, and need to be clear how to respond to this request.

In an unprogrammed meeting, a designated Friend is appointed to briefly explain how the meeting will be conducted and to invite participation of the worshippers. A memorial meeting in the programmed tradition will generally include readings, prayers, and music in addition to information on the deceased's life and a time of open worship. Below are considerations when planning a memorial meeting. Meetings are advised to consider what they can reasonably offer before making a commitment to a bereaved family.



### *The Memorial Meeting:*

- *Welcome and closing:* Usually a Friend from the meeting will be appointed to open and close the meeting.
- *Planned program:* Are there any wishes for particular readings, music, musicians, or persons to speak? If so, what will the family and what will the meeting organize?
- *A printed program:* ascertain whether or not the family would like a printed program and what their estimate is of the number needed. Are there special quotations or pictures to include? Would the family like the meeting to handle this or would they prefer to do it themselves?
- *Refreshments:* What can the meeting reasonably provide? Often the refreshments are provided jointly by the meeting and family members of the deceased.
- *Guest book:* Does the family wish to provide one or would they like the meeting to provide it?
- *Child care during the memorial service:* Is the meeting able to provide child care should it be needed?
- *Memorial display:* Would the family like to create a display of mementos and photos? Where will it be placed?
- *Overnight hospitality:* Is the meeting able to offer hospitality if it is needed?
- *Logistical responsibilities:* Confirm the chosen date and time with your meeting's scheduler and make sure arrangements have been made as needed for cleaning, opening and closing the meetinghouse, snowplowing, flowers, catering, and setup and clean up people.

Consider the capacity of the meeting house in relation to the expected attendance. Will a sound system be needed?

Assign Friends to serve as greeters, to answer the telephone, to help handle parking issues.

## **7D. Memorial Meeting Printed Programs**

In addition to the person's name, birth and death dates, and the location and date of the memorial meeting, the printed program may include some facts about the person's life and/or a photo, picture, or favorite text. In the unprogrammed tradition something like the following may be added:

### **A Memorial Service in the Manner of Friends**

Welcome family and Friends of \_\_\_\_\_, to the \_\_\_\_\_ Friends Meeting. A Friends memorial service is a special meeting for worship in the traditional manner of Friends. It is a meeting of thanksgiving for the life of the one we have known and loved and by whose presence we have felt blessed. As Quakers we gather for worship in listening and expectation: it is our understanding that in the silence all people can experience God directly. The ministry that occurs comes from those in attendance, as they listen inwardly to God. Anyone present may speak, or remain silent, as the Spirit directs. Tears and laughter are both appropriate. It is not in silence nor in words, but in sincerity of heart that we testify best to the goodness of God as we have seen it manifest in the life of our friend. We seek, in prayer and worship, to give thanks to God, the creator of our friend, and of us all.

If you wish to speak, please stand (*and wait for the microphone*) so that all can hear you clearly. We encourage you to leave a few moments for silent reflection of the previous message before you stand to speak. The responsibility for the spiritual depth of the meeting rests with each attendee. Those who keep silence, as well as those who give a vocal message, do their part when they yield their minds and hearts to the guidance of the Spirit.



The close of the service will be signaled with a handshake and greetings passed among those present.

In the programmed tradition an order of service may be printed including such elements as Greeting and Gathering Words, Readings, Music, Prayers, Scriptures, Overview of the deceased Friend's Life, Open Worship, and Parting Words. The meeting's pastor or other designated Friend will generally open and close the meeting and offer words of transition between each element of the service.

## 7E. Memorial Minutes

### *Writing a Memorial Minute*

When a member of the Religious Society of Friends has died, it is customary for the meeting to write a memorial minute. Unlike an obituary, a memorial minute considers the ways in which the deceased Friend's religious convictions have been expressed through the Friend's actions, relationships, and spiritual gifts. The memorial minute becomes a permanent record, for the meeting and the Religious Society of Friends, of the grace of God as expressed through the life of the deceased Friend. The process of writing a memorial minute starts in the monthly meeting Ministry and Counsel. The committee may choose other members of the meeting to do the writing. Small meetings may wish to write these minutes as a committee of the whole, and large meetings may name a subcommittee specifically organized to fulfill the work. When the draft is completed Ministry and Counsel ensures the readiness of the work before presenting the memorial minute for approval to meeting for business. All memorial minutes approved by a monthly meeting are sent to one's Quarterly meeting and from there to the Yearly meeting.<sup>6</sup>

There is no required length, either short or long, but a memorial minute should be a truthful and conscientious expression of the distinctive fruits of the Friend's religious life. Care is taken to honestly reflect the difficulties and the joys of this Friend's life. Describing the positions the Friend may have held within the Society, or in their secular life may be less meaningful than describing the quality of presence and commitment they brought to their service. Some Friends may themselves have written statements about their life as a Friend. These statements are often a precious record in the Friend's own voice, and with careful judgment, might be included in the minute. When considering what to include in a memorial minute the following queries may be helpful:

- How does the inclusion of this information in the memorial minute reflect the movement of the Spirit in this Friend's life?
- What gifts of the Spirit did this Friend bring to the meeting?
- Are there meetings, organizations, or individuals in the Yearly Meeting, or in other Quaker institutions, who should be contacted to bring fuller understanding of the Friend's life and service?

Monthly meetings may send their memorial minute to Quaker organizations in which the Friend was involved, or to other places the meeting deems appropriate where the Friend was active, for non-Friends who may not be aware of the death.

## 7F. Bequests

When making a bequest to a Friends' institution, Friends are asked to be mindful that restrictions on the gift may impede the needs and leadings of the community in the future. A gift that is restricted to

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<sup>6</sup> In 2018, the Yearly Meeting wrote suggestions for writing memorial minutes. Monthly meetings wishing additional guidance in writing these minutes may request that advice from Permanent Board.



a specific use, may, over time, become difficult to access or use given the changing needs of an institution, or the leadings of its members. Friends should trust those charged with financial care to make careful corporate decisions concerning the well being of the institution and its members. If donors have a specific interest they wish to support with their gift, a letter naming the interest is sufficient to guide the institution and its members to support that interest as they are led. A Friends institution may choose to refuse a bequest if it finds the terms of the gift are not in keeping with its mission or with their leadings.

When making a bequest, donors should be mindful that the funds will be invested consistent with Friends principles and concerns. This may mean that funds will not be invested for the highest rate of return.

In American society it has become common for educational buildings, philanthropic funds, and the like, to carry the name of a donor or of a person or family being memorialized. This is not consistent with Friends principles.

## **7G. Burial Grounds**

Meetings that maintain their own burial grounds should establish policies governing interments, the marking of graves, and the keeping of records. The meeting should appoint a committee of two or more Friends to have oversight of the burial grounds and to insure adherence to the policies. The committee should take care that a plot or reservation of space in the burial ground does not, in the passage of time, pass from meeting control or ownership.

In establishing regulations as to grave markers, meetings should observe the principles of moderation and simplicity. Meetings without burial grounds may wish to create and maintain gardens of remembrance where members' cremated remains may be scattered or buried.

In cases where the maintenance of a burial ground no longer in use has proved burdensome to the meeting, the possibility of turning it over to the care of others may be considered, with due regard to the use to which the ground would be put.



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# Personal Spiritual Practices

**Presented at the 2021 NEYM Annual Sessions  
Given Preliminary Approval August 12, 2019**

*“Give over thine own willing, give over thy own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart, and let that grow in thee and be in thee and breathe in thee and act in thee; and thou shalt find by sweet experience that the Lord knows that and loves and owns that, and will lead it to the inheritance of Life, which is its portion.”*  
Isaac Pennington, 1661

*...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... . If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.* Galatians 5: 22-23, 25

The basic spiritual discipline of Friends is regular worship, both communal and individual. This discipline is supported by a variety of practices. Just as one supports a busy life with healthy personal habits, which vary from person to person, Friends choose spiritual practices that help ground them in the life and guidance of the Spirit. Although most of these are shared with other faiths, a few are especially valued by Friends, such as intentionally taking time to “stand still in the Light” (George Fox) and to “sink down to the Seed”. Friends believe that the Light can illuminate the whole of one’s spiritual being. It may fill one with joy and comfort, or it may show what is distressing and difficult, shedding light on places one may not wish to acknowledge or face. By embracing this guidance of the Spirit, Friends open themselves to the possibility of transformation.

Friends seek to live in continual awareness of the Spirit. It is the underlying intention of awakening to the Presence that makes something a spiritual practice. Many people commit themselves to a daily spiritual practice to settle their hearts and minds and to refresh their awareness of God’s presence and guidance. Early Friends recommended daily times of “retirement”: time spent in worship, prayer and Bible reading, in silent waiting upon the Spirit, and in journal writing. Contemporary Friends continue to use these practices and have augmented them with readings from Quaker writers past and present, meditation, gratitude practices, engagement with nature, wisdom from other traditions, movement, artistic endeavors, and service, among others. Friends may also look for those moments in their lives when they feel particularly centered or open to the movement of Divine love and find ways to use these times of awareness as a spiritual practice. When Friends embrace these times as a priority, they make space for them, integrating these practices into their lives. Regardless of how peaceful or busy a Friend’s life may feel in any particular moment, taking time to attend to one’s own spiritual condition can offer refreshment and renewal.

A daily spiritual practice helps bring one into a realm of spiritual stillness that opens one to the Inward Light. The Light illuminates the inner landscape, allowing one to see oneself more clearly. Early Friends spoke of being “searched” by the light while at the same time feeling the calling and the support to transform themselves. Friends understand that in opening themselves to the enlivening influences of the Spirit, their experience allows them to become more open channels of God’s love. Spiritual practices also help one to stay in balance, bringing one back to center and so more available to the motions of divine love. Sometimes the fruits of a practice are what one hopes for and expects. At other times those fruits may be surprising, challenging, and life-changing. Sometimes it is difficult to recognize them at all. While a spiritual practice is the journey of an individual with the Inward Light, it bears fruit in the world.



Over time it is not uncommon to find that a particular spiritual practice no longer opens the space of refreshment and inspiration that it has in the past. An ebb and flow of motivation to continue in a daily practice is also a common experience. Spiritually dry periods or plateaus can be discouraging, yet worship, patience, and trust may reveal important lessons. By remaining alert to the changing dynamics of living in the Spirit, one may come to discern whether it is right to continue a particular practice, despite the dryness, or whether it is time to move on. The counsel of a spiritual companion can be a great aid in this discernment. Seemingly independent of one's effort or awareness, experiences of breakthrough may arrive.

Children also experience spiritual insights. They understand, at an early age, the impulse toward moments of quiet joy or spontaneous expressions of gratitude and may instinctively adopt spiritual practices that center, calm, and sustain them in difficult times. A child's awareness of the Presence often reveals itself in unselfconscious expressions of awe and wonder at life. The freshness of a child's trust and exuberance of discovery are gifts. Young people learn to nurture spiritual awareness by observing the practices of adults in their lives. Many families use mealtimes to pause together for silent grace or a spoken prayer of gratitude. Times of shared reverence can be a source of joy for all ages.

Friends who practice a discipline of worship throughout the week come to meeting prepared for corporate worship. They are able to center more quickly and help to anchor the meeting in prayer. Their practice is a gift to the community, enhancing its life in the Spirit and aiding in the faithful conduct of business.

Spiritual discipline, at its heart, involves a decision to listen for, and be obedient to, the Inward Guide in every situation, holding the commitment to do whatever love requires.

*Begin where you are. Obey now. Use what little obedience you are capable of, even if it be like a grain of mustard seed. Begin where you are. Live this present moment, this present hour as you now sit in your seats in utter, utter submission and openness toward Him."*

Thomas Kelly, 1939

## Extracts on Personal Spiritual Practices

1. Retirement may be the practice most accessible to contemporary Friends. Our meetings for worship are times of retirement. Walks in the woods or sitting by the ocean can be times of retirement, as can retreats extended over several days. Thomas Kelly wrote that we can be in contact with "an amazing sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a divine center." Times of retirement are the times when we pull back from the chatter and busyness of our outward lives, enter that amazing sanctuary, and allow our inner wisdom, the Inward Teacher, to rise up in us. For early Friends retirement was a prerequisite for a life of faithfulness. Retirement was a daily discipline, sometimes many times in a day. We may think that at the pace of 21st-century life, there isn't time for daily retirement, yet retirement is a basic building block for all other spiritual disciplines. We have to pause, let the static quiet, so that we can hear. Thomas Kelly reassures us that if we establish mental habits of inward orientation, the processes of inward prayer do not grow more complex, but more simple.

Patricia McBee, 2003

2. Stand still in that which is pure, after ye see yourselves; and then mercy comes in. After thou seest thy thoughts... do not think, but submit; and then power comes. Stand still in that which shows and discovers; and there doth strength immediately come. And stand still in the light, and submit to it, and the other will be hushed and gone; and then content[ment] comes.



George Fox, 1652

3. The purpose of meditation is to enable us to hear God more clearly. Meditation is listening, sensing, heeding the life and light of Christ. This comes right to the heart of our faith. The life that pleases God is not a set of religious duties; it is to hear His voice and obey His word. Meditation opens the door to this way of living.

Richard Foster, 1978

4. Just before the farm dam, I pause, totally by myself. I look up the valley. The sky is an incredible blue, touched by the rock faces of the mountains. I rest on my stick, and I am filled with peace. God is near.

Neil Brathwaite, 2007

5. *Written shortly after the death of his father with whom he shared a passion for photography.*

The real beauty is the magic that happens while the product is being made. For myself that journey consists of silence, listening to the world around me and waiting for it to speak....Most of the time I find that peace in nature, but that's only a particular setting.

I find my inner light has a clearer voice when the waves of the ocean lap on the rocks with the sun dipping below the horizon and lighting the sky with deep golds and reds to darker magentas and deep purple blues. I can feel my father next to me, sitting in silence as we wait for the magic hour to pass while capturing images that center my mind and bring me to calm....The journey of art is my religious space, the end product is the voice that has sparked me to speak. Whether someone likes it or not is not what is important to me, it is the journey....

Will Reilly, unpublished, 2020

6. Consider now the prayer-life of Jesus... Incident after incident is introduced by the statement that Jesus was praying. Are we so much nearer God that we can afford to dispense with that which to Him was of such vital moment? But apart from this, it seems to me that this prayer-habit of Jesus throws light upon the purpose of prayer. ... We pray, not to change God's will, but to bring our wills into correspondence with His.

William Littleboy, 1937

7. I have always greeted God in the morning. It makes a difference. There is no way that I would have faced my teaching day without morning devotional time. One year I had a girl in my class whose behavior often devastated the other children, leaving them in tears. Having used many methods of responding to her behavior and its impact on the other children, I knew that more help was needed. Each morning I held her in prayer with me, in a circle of light, putting Jesus in the mix as well. I could not do this alone and needed a strong visual to remind me of that. Her behavior gradually changed for the better. One day she surprised me by giving me a hug. I do not know if the prayers helped her, or more probably, changed me, and my relationship to her, and she responded positively.

Sue Reilly, 2021

8. I love to knit. I love creating lovely things, learning new stitches, designing my own patterns. But really, how many shawls, sweaters, socks can one person use? I have discovered over time that knitting for charity is a useful way to engage in a craft I love without being overwhelmed by things I don't really need. As I was browsing through charity knitting websites I came across the story of a mother whose infant died at birth. She recounted the pain of going to the children's section of a department store to find a gown in which to bury her child. The store was filled with mothers and healthy babies and adorable clothing her child would never grow



to wear. She fled, overwhelmed with grief. I found patterns for burial gowns on the site and thought maybe I should try one. Small, no big commitment, not too complicated. As I began to knit, however, I found myself thinking about that mother. I was grateful that I never had to experience that pain. I grew more and more quiet in my mind, simply letting my hands be guided by compassion. The completed gown and cap were given to a friend who is a chaplain in a hospital that specializes in high risk births. She asked me to knit more. Since then, I have knit many burial gowns, the smallest only six inches from neck to hem. I don't knit them all the time. I wait until I find myself unsettled in my own life, feeling unbalanced, or small minded, or ungrateful. Then it is time. As love and compassion flow through my needles, they also flow through me. As I offer a gift of love and healing, I am also healed, returned to balance, held in loving arms.

Marion Athearn, 2017

9. Music. The language of all humankind. For some, it is the vibration of the sound that flows up from the ground and flows through their body becoming the drum of their heartbeat. For some it is a friend, holding them. For some it is what knows exactly the right thing to say. For some it is what inspires movement, drawing their arms to sky, palms open. For me, it is sanctuary. Music is the air that I breathe, the food that I hunger for. In a wide ocean with no boat, it is my life jacket. Music is what flows through my veins and pours out of my soul, it fills my belly in the evening...There is a sense of such awe that I experience when singing or otherwise creating song with a group of other people. It becomes evident that we each are all merely a colored piece of thread, woven together into a larger tapestry. Together we sing through the dissonances and burst into colorful harmonies, we mourn together, and we sing of splendor and joy together. I don't know what God is. I don't know who, why, or how God is. I don't even know IF God is. What I do know, though, is that whatever this light is, whatever this energy shared amongst all of humanity is, this feeling, this togetherness, this LOVE, is what will bring me to walk hand in hand with the unexpected, and lead me through the melody of life.

Joli Reynolds, age 18, 2020

10. For many of us, it's in meeting for worship (typically in a Quaker meetinghouse) that we most readily connect deeply with Spirit, seek guidance, offer thanks for the abundance of our lives, and honestly feel the pain and confusion that sometimes dominate life's moments.

But in artistic creation, and in the contemplation of the artistic, we can also be present with Spirit, and open to important leadings. For me, being in the dance studio, typically with my camera, I've found that as I experience the creation of new choreography I witness a living, moving rendition of God's grandeur. The dance studio has become my other meetinghouse, where miracles happen every day and where both the dancers' and my own creativity come alive and find new expression. A spirit of grace enters my life each time I set forth in these sacred spaces, and God does speak to me. Just as we center into worship, I center into my presence in that space where dance is created. I use the word "worship" to describe this experience – there is no other word that captures the reverence and excitement. Early Friends were afraid of the arts, concerned that artistic work would be a distraction from the spiritual work that is so important. Friends were cautioned to avoid the arts, to not have pianos or other instruments in their homes, and to shun any possible distractions. My testimony is exactly the opposite: creating and experiencing any artistic work is a way to encounter our spiritual center, to be led by it, and to express it. When we stop measuring our artistic attempts and just look for the purity and passion of our intent and our source, we will find that our lives are filled with even more spiritual nourishment.

Arthur Fink, 2018



11. I read that I was supposed to make ‘a place for inward retirement and waiting upon God’ in my daily life, as the Queries in those days expressed it... At last I began to realise... that these apparently stuffy old Friends were really talking sense. If I studied what they were trying to tell me, I might possibly find that the ‘place of inward retirement’ was not a place I had to go to, it was there all the time. I could know the ‘place of inward retirement’ wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, and find the spiritual refreshment for which, knowingly or unknowingly, I was longing, and hear the voice of God in my heart. Thus I began to realise that prayer was not a formality, or an obligation, it was a place which was there all the time and always available.
- Elfrida Vipont Foulds, 1983**

Also, see the 2014 *Interim Faith and Practice*, Extracts 1.18, 1.20 and 1.36.

## Advices

1. Preserve places of silence in your life to “sink down to the Seed”.
2. Yield your life to the Inward Guide, remembering to turn to that guidance throughout your day.
3. Make time for the Bible and spiritual writings in your devotional reading. Become familiar with the experiences of Friends through time.
4. Be aware of times and activities which help ground you and open you to the Presence, and make space for them in your life.
5. Recognize and uphold the spiritual life of children and youth. Invite them into times of quiet reflection and prayer.
6. Know that you are held in love when your practice takes you to a place of illumination that is painful or unsettling. Open yourself to God and the possibility of transformation.
7. Experiment. Be adventurous.

## Queries

1. Do you make time in your daily life for reading, silence and waiting for God in prayer that you may know more of the guidance and presence of the Holy Spirit?
2. Do your spiritual practices lead you to a greater sense of the Presence?
3. What practices help open you to be a channel for Divine love?
4. Do you take time to attend to your spiritual condition? Do you turn to Faith and Practice for inspiration as a part of your spiritual practice?
5. Are there times you resist a spiritual practice, and why?
6. During times of dryness or difficulty what helps you to persevere? Can you trust that God’s work is continuing when you cannot feel it?

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# Marriage

## Granted Preliminary Approval on 10 August 2022

*For the right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priests' or magistrates'; for it is God's ordinance and not man's; and therefore Friends cannot consent that they should join them together: for we marry none; it is the Lord's work, and we are but witnesses. George Fox, 1669*

*Thomas Ellwood on recalling his own marriage in 1669: "...We sensibly felt the Lord with us and joining us, the sense thereof remained with us all our lifetime..."*

### What is Marriage?

- 1) For Friends, marriage is a leading, a joyous spiritual, emotional, and physically intimate union of two adults who promise, with Divine assistance, a lifetime together. They affirm this covenant in a meeting for worship, witnessed by a community that has tested that leading and is prepared to support it.
- 2) For those who follow this leading, marriage becomes a powerful spiritual framework for their lives, built with generosity, mutual love, equality, and attention to the Spirit. Such a marriage is an expression of God's love, a witness to the Inward Light and the fruits of its nourishment and guidance.
- 3) It is Friends' witness in New England Yearly Meeting that two people may be called to marriage regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identities.
- 4) When George Fox and Margaret Fell married in 1669, they announced that their union was a testimony to a new type of marriage, arising from their redemptive experience. They married as equals, without subjugation of Margaret to George in any way; George waived any claim to Margaret's considerable wealth and she continued her public ministry. They spoke of their sexual relationship as being, for them, an expression of their divine unity rather than for the purpose of procreation. The purpose of their marriage was to help each other be faithful to God. These were profoundly radical views for the time. Many Friends have found the way they approached marriage to be a compelling testimony to the spiritual leading and egalitarian partnership that form the basis of marriage for Quakers.



## Considering Marriage

5) For adults of any age, responding to the leading to marry is a weighty and joyful step. Friends encourage the couple to examine their relationship in the light of how the Spirit is moving in each of their lives, making sure there is room to support each other's leadings, and to make their marriage a home for the Spirit. It is important that the couple come to marriage as equals, with mutual respect, each accepting the wholeness of the other.

6) A foundation of marriage is the ability to look clearly and honestly at oneself and to engage in open communication with one's partner. When disagreements arise, they need to be acknowledged and heard with respect, while taken as an opportunity to more fully understand the needs of one's partner. In these difficult moments couples may find sitting in prayer together allows for fresh openings in their communication, preventing the disagreement from falling into bitterness.

7) Different attitudes toward finances are often indicators of different values concerning how we are called to live our lives. Decisions about money are entwined with nearly every activity of married life, such as spending on housing and living expenses, parenting, socializing, gift-giving, vacationing and charitable giving. Unless a couple learns to navigate these financial decisions together, large expenditures and even small ones have the potential to be sources of discord.

8) Integrity requires premarital honesty about any debt or other financial obligation. It is also advisable to consider openly any circumstances that may potentially lead to a substantial change in the couple's financial expectations: perhaps one person is hoping to return to school for more training, to change careers or to follow a calling involving a very different lifestyle. It may be challenging for a couple to give each other grace while still being able to ask for the change they need, yet it is the experience of Friends that it is important to do so.

9) The physical aspect of a marriage is a powerful connector, and sometimes may be linked with a strong sense of spirituality. Mutual delight in physical intimacy is a gift that needs nurturing. While it may take some time for both partners to find balance and satisfaction in their sexual lives, it is important that they ask for and offer one another a tender path toward being free and honest in their sexual desires. Couples need to be clear and open with each other on their attitudes to and understandings of monogamy and fidelity. The sexual relationship is not



static and will change with alterations in health, with the advent of a family, with age, and in times of stress.

11) When considering the leading to marry, Friends encourage couples to discuss their personal hopes and assumptions about marriage, as well as the familial and cultural norms they may have taken for granted. Queries in Appendix 6B will help a couple explore underlying expectations for roles in the marriage, sexuality, the possibility of children, connections with family and friends, and approaches to finances. (*The references to appendices will be standardized during the final editing.*)

## **Changing understandings of marriage**

10a) As social norms related to sexuality and marriage change over time, meetings may receive requests for marriage that fall outside those described in this *Faith and Practice*. Members of a meeting may be challenged by such requests upon first consideration. In some cases, the request for marriage is clearly beyond the bounds of acceptance (such as a marriage between an adult and a child). A meeting receiving a request for a non-traditional marriage under its care (such as commitment to multiple partners) has the responsibility to discern carefully whether the relationship arises from God's call in the lives of the individuals, enriches the life of the meeting, and amplifies God's love in the world. Special concern should be given both to power imbalances that could cause harm to individuals involved, and to any potential legal implications. In some cases, the meeting may consider other forms of support, such as a recognition of commitment.

10b) Friends' understanding of marriage is not static throughout time. In recent history, New England Friends struggled to approve same-gender marriages. Two centuries ago, Friends struggled to approve the marriage of a member to a non-Quaker. The fact that these are now settled matters among us should not obscure the fact that the discernment, with its unknown outcome, was long, hard, tender, and sometimes painful. The practice of New England Friends is to discern as a larger body those matters that arise from monthly meetings, where each person can be most truly heard and known, and where we are always invited to broaden our understanding of ways to embody the love to which God calls us.



## Marriage under the Care of the Meeting

12) Friends use the term “marriage under the care of the meeting” to refer to a couple's preparation for marriage and their wedding through a series of steps that begin with a written request to a meeting's clerk and continue with:

- a clearness process reporting to Ministry & Counsel or other appropriate committee of the meeting (*see the chapter on Ministry & Counsel for a discussion of the various ways different meetings allocate this work to committees. In this chapter, we will refer simply to Ministry & Counsel.*);
- the business meeting's approval of a recommendation that the marriage proceed;
- the work of the wedding committee (traditionally called an oversight committee);
- the business meeting's approval of a called meeting for worship for the wedding;
- the wedding itself, including the signing of the Quaker wedding certificate by all present;
- the signing of the marriage license by the clerk or other member designated as the representative of the meeting.

It is important for couples to allow the clearness process to take its due time. Any logistical arrangements for the wedding and reception should remain tentative until after the business meeting has approved the recommendation of Ministry and Counsel. (*See Appendix 6A for more detail on the process of taking a marriage under the care of the meeting.*)

After the wedding, continued care of the couple married under the care of the meeting becomes part of the pastoral care the meeting offers to all its couples. (*see chapters on Ministry & Counsel and on Pastoral Care.*)

### The Clearness Process

13) When a couple asks the meeting for clearness for marriage under its care, the guiding concern of the meeting is the nature of the couple's spiritual relationship to each other and to the meeting, and of their life together under the guidance of the Spirit. To that end, Ministry and Counsel appoints a clearness committee that also helps the couple explore their expectations for the marriage relationship, the responsibilities they will be bringing to the relationship, and their hopes for their future together. It is a time for everyone present to explore together what marriage promises and entails and how it can be guided by the Spirit. If the couple does not intend the marriage to be legally



recognized, this is discussed within the clearness committee and is named when the marriage is brought to the business meeting for approval.

14) While the clearness process is often an opportunity for enrichment of the couple's relationship, its primary purpose is to discern on behalf of the meeting whether it is rightly ordered that the meeting take the requested marriage under its care. In situations in which the clearness committee finds unity that marriage under the care of the meeting is not rightly ordered, either because the couple is not ready for marriage, or because a Quaker marriage is not right for them, the committee must have the tender courage to report its discernment to the couple and to Ministry and Counsel.

15) The clearness process provides an opportunity for the couple to reflect upon what they are called to express in their vows, and for the clearness committee to ensure the vows reflect an understanding of the religious basis of a Quaker marriage. This preparation enables both the couple and the meeting to participate in the wedding ceremony with integrity. Couples often comment that they look forward to this careful discernment in the presence of others who are there to support and guide them. The experience may result in friendships within the group that last long after the wedding day.

16) Some monthly meetings appoint two separate clearness committees, one for each member of the couple. In addition to their separate meetings, the committees meet jointly with the couple before making their report to the meeting. Other meetings appoint a committee that meets together with the couple, then meets separately with each member of the couple, before coming back together for final discernment.

17) If only one of the couple asking to be married under the care of the meeting is a Friend, it remains the responsibility of the committee to be sure the religious basis of a Quaker marriage is understood and appreciated so the integrity of the ceremony is upheld. The marriage vows may be changed, in part, to reflect the spiritual traditions of each member of the couple.

18) Occasionally a meeting is asked to take a marriage under its care in which neither person in the couple is a Friend. This may be a couple searching for a spiritual home who in the future may become committed members of the meeting. It may be a couple simply looking for a venue, or a wedding format. In each case, care should be taken to listen with an open heart and help the couple discern the way forward with integrity. The meeting may choose to support the couple in creating a ceremony "after the manner of Friends" where the marriage is made legal by a justice of the peace or other public official. *(See Appendices 6C & 6D for queries for the marriage clearness process.)*



## The Wedding Committee

19) If the request to be married under the care of the meeting is approved by the business meeting, a wedding committee is appointed to help the couple with their wedding plans and to have care of the meeting for worship in which the wedding takes place. This committee, traditionally called the Committee of Oversight, assists the couple as they finalize their marriage vows and make wedding arrangements. The committee also makes sure that any legal documents are requested in time and returned, signed, as required by the state. Many meetings have developed a list of responsibilities for the committee that are specific to their meetinghouse and its facilities. *(See Appendix 6E for more details on the wedding committee's responsibilities. See the chapter on Ministry & Counsel for a discussion of the word "oversight".)*

## The Wedding Ceremony

20) The Quaker marriage ceremony is distinctive, having arisen in the seventeenth century as the Quaker movement was becoming organized. Since Friends understood the union of a couple in marriage to be the Lord's work only, and their marriages were not established by a priest or a magistrate, Friends' marriages were not legally recognized.

21) As Friends were keen to have their marriages accepted within the general society, they did everything they could to make their weddings transparent and as close to legal marriages as possible. Couples had to be found clear to marry by the meeting where the wedding was to be held. Banns<sup>1</sup> were published in a local newspaper since they would not be read out in a state recognized church. Vows were carefully prepared in order that promises made to one another were made with appropriate modesty and consideration that any marriage would be at risk without God's guidance. An oversight committee helped the couple negotiate the planning of the wedding through to its conclusion. The wedding took place in a regular meeting for worship where the couple rose and said their vows to each other. Because Friends wished to establish a legal grounding for the marriage, those gathered were asked, as witnesses, to sign a certificate describing the events, the vows, and the date on which the wedding occurred.

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<sup>1</sup> A notice read out on three successive Sundays in a parish church, announcing an intended marriage and giving the opportunity for objections.



22) Today, a Friends' wedding ceremony usually occurs during a specially called meeting for worship at a time and place approved by the monthly meeting. Family, friends, and members of the meeting gather in waiting worship. The couple comes into the meeting room together, signifying their unity in taking this step together and that they are freely giving themselves to each other. They seat themselves and settle into worship.

23) Because the format of a Quaker wedding differs from what non-Friends might anticipate, a member of the meeting may rise and give brief reflections on the nature of a Quaker wedding and explain the order of the ceremony. In some cases, a printed program is provided. In unprogrammed meetings, after a time of gathered worship, the couple rises and exchanges their vows. They then sign the certificate, after which it is read aloud. The ceremony continues in waiting worship where those who are moved to speak may do so. In New England's semi-programmed meetings there will usually be readings, music and spoken prayers, in addition to the exchange of vows and a period of open worship. In the traditional Quaker vows, each person promises with Divine assistance to be a loving and faithful partner as long as they both shall live. The commitment is to each other, understanding that the commitment is made in the presence of God, and their families and friends. Other words may be chosen for the vows, but the intent is the same. (*See Appendix 6G.*) Whether or not there is a pastor facilitating the ceremony, there is no one "performing" the marriage. Some couples experience being joined by the Spirit before the time of their wedding. For them, the wedding ceremony is the public acknowledgement of a spiritual reality. For some, the public exchange of vows brings about a shift in the relationship as together they enter into this covenant with God and the community.

24) Friends and family members attending a Quaker wedding may be unacquainted with Friends' ways. Care should be taken in weddings that include many non-Friends to explain the wedding ceremony so that all may fully participate. (*See Appendix 6F.*)

## **Sustaining a Marriage**

25) No ceremony can create a marriage. A couple is joined in marriage by the Spirit and maintains the marriage over time through love and patience, each supporting the other while appreciating their differences. Those differences can be a strength in dealing with the complexities of life, and the gifts of one person can provide the support that allows the other's to flourish. Just as a couple learns to appreciate one another's gifts, they learn to accept each other's vulnerabilities with generosity of spirit. The marriage grows in the love that is fostered by this creative balance of support. Relationships grow and



strengthen when each person is committed to considering how their own words and actions--small and large--impact the other. It is important not only to have the right marriage partner but also to *be* the right marriage partner.

26) Committed, intimate relationships are built on a foundation of truthfulness and humility. Within a marriage, this requires willingness to be honest with one's partner when one is feeling afraid, hurt, angry, or vulnerable, as well as to generously express gratitude and joy. Sensitively and honestly naming one's sense of the condition of the relationship is an essential practice for sustaining intimate relationships. Being willing to work together accomplishes more than working alone. Humor can often ease the way. Treating one another courteously, with kindness and gratitude, nourishes the relationship. Marriage is not just about learning to be life companions, but about actively building trust and cherishing one another. At the same time, each partner must also be mindful to retain their own spiritual center.

27) Friends find resources to nurture marriage through their daily dependence on the Spirit, as well as finding support from one another and through the support and examples within their circles of community. Prayer and the sharing of spiritual insights and leadings can be strengthening.

28) Should a marriage come to include children or other members, there will be new sources of joy and new challenges. Building the wholeness of a larger family community is based on the same principles as building the wholeness of the marriage, and involves an awareness of the special joys and challenges of living with others. (*See The Family and Children Section, yet to be written.*)

## **Challenges in a Marriage**

29) It takes careful tending to keep a marriage fresh and strong. Time brings change: new jobs, moves, health or financial changes, the growth of the family, and changes in sexual feelings are all pieces of life that shift the dynamic of a relationship. Unexpected turns and the inevitable difficulties and sorrows of life require flexibility and mutual support. As people grow through their youth to middle age and beyond, their perspectives of how they are called to live in the world change.

30) Problems that arise need not come between a couple if they are committed to facing them together rather than feeling themselves to be on opposing sides. A couple that addresses challenges openly, listening to one another's concerns, may find clarity in addressing their difficulties. Couples may find support for balancing the demands of a shared life through marriage enrichment programs and couples' workshops. They may turn to the meeting community for a support or clearness committee if the need arises.



Professional counseling may be helpful during particularly challenging seasons. Over time, the love that brought a couple together may continue to grow and transform in ever richer ways, although not all marriages will be lifelong.

31) Friends encourage a struggling couple to ask the meeting for support. If a meeting finds it is unable to fully meet the needs of the couple, the meeting may help the couple find additional resources. (*See Pastoral Care chapter and the chapter on Separation and Divorce.*)

## **Conclusion**

32) For Friends the essence of marriage is a spiritual union expressed through vows made in wholehearted response to a Divine calling. All other matters are subordinate to this essential reality. The role of the meeting is to test, confirm, bear witness to, and support, the couple's faithful response to the leading to be married. With Divine assistance, our marriages may become a testimony to the love of God in the world.

## **Extracts**

*Note: Concerns were raised about the extract from Susan B. Anthony. We considered several alternative extracts by women, but we didn't feel we had sufficient time to discern on this matter. We therefore intend to bring the entire set of extracts back to the yearly meeting in 2023 for preliminary approval.*

1) Friends believe that the marriage ceremony is far more than the mere fulfillment of legal or social obligations. It is rather the consummation of a period of searching for God's will and purpose in two lives and therefore should be entered into joyfully, reverently and soberly. In the midst of a specially called meeting for worship, in the presence of God, surrounded by a loving community of family and friends, two individuals take each other freely and equally, asking for God's help in realizing their high hopes for a creative and lifelong partnership. We feel that it is an awareness of the Light within each person that gives this new and deepening relationship the special grace of steadfastness and trust, no matter what the future may hold. As we grow in love, constancy and forgiveness in response to God's presence in our lives, we find our marriages raised to new levels of courage and creativity. Within marriage it is in the promise to love, rather than in the external form of the relationship, that the potential for spiritual growth lies. What is required of us is our commitment, because whatever comes, will be change, often totally unexpected.



## **Living with Oneself and Others, 2001**

2) ...two young trees [are] planted close together in common soil at marriage. They send down roots together, and feed on many of the same nutrients. But as they grow taller and older, some of the roots shoot out in different directions, away from each other, seeking mutually alien soil. Nevertheless, the older original roots stay intertwined. Similarly with the branches above ground. Many of the branches intertwine and shape each other in the happy embrace of shared space.... But these trees are not only growing in one direction, toward each other, they are growing in all directions. Like the roots, some of the branches stretch far away from the common center, and breathe a mutually alien air. Each tree is in itself whole and individual and growing according to its inner design, yet shaped on the one side by its partner, and on the other side by the outside world.

**Elise Boulding, 1978**

3) Never marry but for love; but see that thou lovest what is lovely. ... Between a Man and his Wife nothing ought to rule but love. ... As love ought to bring them together, so it is the best way to keep them well together.

**William Penn, 1693**

4) One of the great illusions of our time is that love is self-sustaining. It is not. Love must be fed and nurtured, constantly renewed. That demands ingenuity and consideration, but first and foremost, it demands time.

**David Mace, 2016**

5) Single young adults, searching for a satisfying life style, need reassurance that their choices may be, and should be, made to suit their individual needs and not to conform to family expectations or societal pressures. Such pressures may push many into marriages for which they are not ready or not suited. Perhaps more people today have the courage to choose singleness and make a whole life. There have always been beautiful examples of this among Friends, and their lives shine.

**Family Life Subcommittee of New England Yearly Meeting, 1978**

6) I have casually referred to my second marriage in 1902, as though it were merely one event among the many events which came in succession. But it was very far from an "ordinary" happening. Every aspect of my life was touched and transformed by that initiation into a new and sacred fellowship. We promised in simple Quaker marriage custom to be "faithful and loving," but we little knew what a wealth of tacit commitments lay hidden under those three explicit words of promise. How little of life, especially of married life, can be pattern-stamped and groomed into line by explicit



agreements in advance. Every crisis of life brings situations which could not be anticipated or planned for beforehand, and for which there could be no contractual arrangements. Every occasion of our lives has brought into play the unformulated and tacit commitments which only love can supply.

**Rufus M. Jones, 1934**

7) Marriage, to women as to men, must be a luxury, not a necessity; an incident of life, not all of it.

**Susan B. Anthony, 1875**

8) *Job Scott writes to Eunice Anthony in 1780, shortly before their marriage:*

Having felt thee abundantly near this evening, I am free to write what revives for thy perusal, hoping it may be useful towards our rightly stepping along through time together. First, dearly beloved, let me tell thee, that however short I may be of strict adherence to the Light of Life; yet it is my crown, my chief joy, to feel the holy harmonious influences and in-shining's of the love of Jesus my Savior upon my soul; and I feel that without this I must be miserable indeed. I also believe that the true enjoyment of the marriage union consists eminently in both being engaged to draw near to the Lord, and act in his counsel; which I not only wish but in a good degree expect, may be our happy case. If it should, though we have as it were a dry morsel to partake of, as to the things of this life; yet we may joy in the Lord, and rejoice in the God of our salvation. Thou knowest I have no great things to invite thee to. May we, the remainder of our lives, earnestly press after resignation to the Lord's will, and above all things, strive to please him who only can give peace, in whatever circumstances we may be. Then, I trust, the guardian angel of his holy presence will encamp around us, and his everlasting arms be underneath to support.

**Job Scott, 1797**

9) Marriage is to be taken seriously, but not always in grim earnest; its problems take perspective from fun, adventure and fulfilment, and joy and sorrow are mingled together. We rejoice in success, but we must also be glad that we can console each other in failure. 'With my body I thee worship' is to many a blessed phrase: but while some find a perfect physical relationship easily, others reach it the hard way, and it is not less precious for that. It is wonderful never to quarrel, but it means missing the dear delight of making it up. Children bring joy and grief; some will have none and will miss both the grief and the joy. For some, there is a monogamy so entire that no other love ever touches it; but others 'fall in love' time and time again, and must learn to make riches of their affection without destroying their marriage or their friends. Let us thank God for



what we share, which enables us to understand; and for the infinite variety in which each marriage stands alone.

We thank God, then, for the pleasures, joys and triumphs of marriage; for the cups of tea we bring each other, and the seedlings in the garden frame; for the domestic drama of meetings and partings, sickness and recovery; for the grace of occasional extravagance, flowers on birthdays and unexpected presents; for talk at evenings of the events of the day; for the ecstasy of caresses, for gay mockery at each other's follies; for plans and projects, fun and struggle; praying that we may neither neglect nor undervalue these things, nor be tempted to think of them as self-contained and self-sufficient.

**London Yearly Meeting Revision Committee, 1959**

10) God's love is ministered to most people through the love of our fellow human beings. Sometimes that love is expressed physically or sexually. For me and my lover, John, God's love is given through our homosexual relationship. In common with other people who do not have children to raise, we are free from those demands to nurture other vital things. This includes our meeting and the wider Society of Friends. We both draw on our love a great deal to give us the strength and courage to do the things to which God calls us. ... Our spiritual journey is a shared one. Sometimes the pitcher needs to be taken back to the fountain. In order to grow, I need my church to bless and uphold not just me as an individual, but also our relationship.

**Gordon Macphail, 1988**

## **Advices and Queries**

### **Advices for the individual:**

1. Share your spiritual needs with your spouse and support their spiritual journey. Make time for spiritual refreshment together.
2. Make space in your life to nurture the relationship with your partner so it may grow and unfold. Respect your spouse's interests and set aside time for enjoyment of each other.
3. Accept your partner as a whole, recognizing and accepting their vulnerabilities as well as their strengths. Remember that a loving relationship is built on respect, trust, and allowances for differences, and it requires time, flexibility, generosity of spirit and a commitment to remaining anchored in love.
4. Regard one another as equally important when considering the decisions of your lives.



5. Remember that all marriages have rough spots. Be willing to seek loving support from trusted Friends in troubled times, as many have done before you.
6. Remember there are times when a couple can maintain a mutually supportive, loving and intimate marriage without it being a sexual relationship.
7. Remember that your marriage, and any marriage, has an impact on those around you, on children and on other people in the meeting. Realize that in living out your spiritual values as a couple, you and your spouse will support others in doing the same. If you lose touch with the Inward Guide, it will also affect those around you.

### **Queries for the individual:**

1. Do my partner and I have a sense of spiritual connection? Are we able to seek spiritual solace together, through prayer or other means? What part do our individual spiritual journeys play in our relationship and is there mutual respect for the direction of those journeys? How do I keep my own spiritual center as I participate in this journey with another?
2. Have I considered the possibility that my partner or I may receive a leading that takes us away from our family, puts us in harm's way, or causes financial strain? Am I open to seeking divine guidance in such situations?
3. Do I seek Divine guidance together with my spouse in our life together? Are we open enough to that guidance and to each other to face in love those things that challenge us?
4. Have my spouse and I reflected on traditional roles in marriage, our attitudes toward them and toward modern variations? Are we aware that one can impose a role or expectation on the other without realizing one is doing so?
5. How does my faith inform my perception of sexuality within marriage? Do my partner and I understand each other's attitudes towards fidelity?
6. Am I ready to make adjustments to my personal life to meet my partner's needs with kindness and understanding? How?
7. Do my spouse and I share interests we can enjoy together? How do we show respect for each other's individual interests? What dreams do we each have? What dreams do we share? Do we allow time for enjoyment of each other, and of a variety of ways of nurturing one another and the relationship?
8. Do my partner and I have the willingness to listen and to be open and honest in our communication with one another, especially at times of unexpected life changes? Can we bear the consequences together of such changes? Have we discussed aging and the changes it brings?
9. How do I relate to my spouse's friends, parents and other relatives? How do I balance care of my marriage with maintaining close, supportive relationships with family members or close friends who may live far away (especially in case of illness or old age)?



10. Am I comfortable in my gender and sexual identity? If I am finding that my identity is shifting, am I able to share honestly with my partner? If my partner shares such reflections with me, can I listen with compassionate openness to God's direction for them and for our relationship?

*(Queries for couples to consider before marriage are in Appendix 6B.)*

**Advices for the meeting:**

1. Cultivate an atmosphere of trust in the meeting that promotes the willingness of couples and individuals to share their joys, sorrows, and difficulties.
2. Do not equate the thoughts and feelings of one member of a couple with those of their partner. Understand their uniqueness and the differences between them.
3. When troubles arise in a relationship, remember to keep confidences, and respectfully consider the needs of each person.
4. Honor the time it takes to resolve problems.
5. Just as a marriage of members is integral to the meeting community, recognize that a divorce will also affect the whole. Allow time for adjustment and healing.
6. Nurture those in couple relationships and those who are not. Recognize the value of single adults and support them, as well as those who are in couples.

**Queries for the meeting:**

1. Does the meeting offer pastoral care in support of relationships, and resources such as marriage enrichment opportunities, clearness committees, discussion groups, and resource materials?
2. Has the meeting a full understanding of the expectations of the Quaker marriage process, and can the meeting gently lead a couple who is not ready for this process in another direction?
3. Has the meeting done the work necessary to wholeheartedly support a marriage without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity?

## **Appendix 6**

### **6A. Process for Marriage under the Care of a Meeting**

It is important to note that the process from first requesting marriage under the care of the meeting until a recommendation is brought to the meeting for business can take as



long as four or five months. Couples are encouraged to begin the process well in advance of their intended wedding date. Wedding arrangements should remain tentative until after the marriage has been approved.

1. The couple writes a letter of intention to the clerk of the meeting. The letter may be as short as a simple statement of the couple's wish to be married under the care of the meeting. The clerk shares the request at the next business meeting and refers it to Ministry and Counsel.
2. Ministry and Counsel appoints a clearness committee or two separate clearness committees, one for each member of the couple.
3. The couple and the clearness committee(s) meet one or more times to discern together whether all are clear that such a marriage may proceed.
4. The clearness committee reports its discernment to Ministry and Counsel.
5. Ministry and Counsel receives the report of the clearness committee and determines if the committee has carried out its charge faithfully. If Ministry and Counsel and the clearness committee are in unity that the marriage come under the care of the meeting, M&C makes that recommendation to the meeting for business. If Ministry and Counsel and the clearness committee are in unity that the marriage should not proceed, that information is not necessarily shared in the business meeting.
6. Meeting for business reviews the recommendation.
7. If the meeting's decision is to proceed, it appoints a wedding committee to have care of the wedding. Either at that same meeting for business or at a subsequent one, the meeting approves a called meeting for worship for the purpose of marriage at a date and location agreed upon with the couple.
8. The couple and the wedding committee make plans and arrangements for the wedding ceremony.

#### **6B. Queries to be Considered by the Couple before Asking the Monthly Meeting for Marriage under Its Care**

The covenant of marriage is both a joyful and a solemn obligation. The couple considering marriage under the care of a Friends' meeting should discuss frankly with each other the commitments and responsibilities assumed in marriage and in establishing a home. The questions that follow have no "right" answers, but are intended as aids to spiritual discernment.

Each question is here because someone found it useful. There may be questions which make one of you uncomfortable. If there is a worry or a discomfort that you have been pushing away, now is the time to look at it. It is the unrecognized issues which most



often cause problems. Try to take enough time to allow yourselves to enjoy addressing these questions, and others that may occur to you.

1. Why do we want to be married? What do we hope the commitment of marriage will bring to our relationship? Why are we asking for marriage under the care of the meeting?
2. Are we seeking a spiritual union, a legal union, or both? If we cannot have or do not want a legally recognized union, are we aware of the many legal contracts that can be drawn up to provide rights similar to those that are part of a legally recognized union? How open are we willing to be, beyond the meeting, about the fact that our marriage is not one that will be legally recognized?
3. Can we with integrity be married under the care of the meeting with the traditional vow that references the importance of Divine assistance?
4. Have we discussed continuing friendships outside of our marriage? Do either of us have emotional or other commitments to another person that could constitute a challenge to our marriage?
5. Have we been transparent about our personal financial situations? How are differences in our financial backgrounds likely to influence our plans for handling our finances?
6. How compatible are our attitudes on earning, spending, saving, and donating money? Will we share responsibility for our routine financial maintenance? Even if our earnings or wealth differ, do we expect to be equal partners in our financial decision-making?
7. Have we discussed whether either or both of us will change our names, and have we discussed what last name any children may have?
8. Does anything in my partner's behavior make me uneasy when I think about marrying them? Have I ever brought it up for discussion?
9. What are sources of potential conflicts between us? When conflicts arise, what tools do we have to deal with them? Are we able to disagree with respect, love, and concern for one another? Do we have experience of being able to reconcile and forgive each other?
10. Have we explored our attitudes and visions for family life including: Do we want children? If so, how many? How soon? Might we consider adoption or foster care?
11. If either of us already has children, what might be the impact of this marriage on them and of them on our marriage? How will we incorporate the children into the new marriage? How will we work with the children's other parent/s?
12. How might we raise, discipline, and educate children if we choose to be parents?
13. How would caring for children impact our jobs and our careers? How do we envision sharing family responsibilities?



14. What might be the relationship of the family we are forming to our families of origin and to the meeting?
15. How well do we understand each other's economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds? How do our family backgrounds affect how we feel about marriage and having a family? How do our extended families feel about our marriage, and what expectations do they have for how we will interact with them? How do these factors impact us as individuals and as a couple?
16. Are we in agreement on the role of sexuality in our marriage? Are we able to be honest with each other in our sexual desires? How do we maintain the trust needed to navigate times when our sexual desires or preferences for intimacy differ?
17. Do each of us envision our marriage as an exclusive sexual relationship? If not, what other possibilities have we discussed?
18. Have we considered that a couple can maintain a mutually supportive, loving and intimate marriage without it being a sexual relationship?
19. Do we know each other well enough to have considered the above questions frankly, openly, and without hurry? If not, should we wait—six months, a year—before proceeding with marriage?

#### **6C. Possible Queries to be Considered by the Couple with Their Marriage Clearness Committee**

1. What does marriage mean to you? Why do you want to be married?
2. Why do you want to be married “under the care of the meeting”?
3. What do you expect your relationship as a married couple to be with the meeting?
4. If your marriage is going to be a spiritual union but not a legally recognized one, have you been open about that yet with the meeting?
5. Are you free enough from prior relationships to enter fully into this marriage?
6. Have you discussed the possibility of raising children together?
7. If applicable, how will you bring children from a prior relationship into this marriage?
8. Have you shared enough information about your past and your present situation to enter into your marriage with integrity?
9. What are the strengths in your relationship that will support you as you deal with the inevitable changes and difficulties you will experience as a couple?
10. Which of the queries you considered together prompted the richest sharing? Which prompted the most discomfort?



11. Will you be using the traditional language of the Friends' marriage ceremony when you exchange your vows? If not, what changes have you considered?
12. Have you considered what Friends mean by the "dignity, reverence, and simplicity" of a Quaker wedding?

#### **6D. Possible Queries for the Marriage Clearness Committee to Ask Itself**

1. How well do these two people know one another?
2. Are these two people embarking on a spiritual union?
3. Does the couple understand the implications of being married under the care of the meeting?
4. Are there any obstacles to this couple marrying? Is there a role for this committee in addressing them?
5. Is marriage under the care of the meeting right for this couple and for the meeting?

#### **6E. Wedding Committee Checklist**

1. Meet with the couple to discuss plans for the wedding, and for the wedding reception if it is to be held at the meeting house. Include the choice of individuals to open the worship, to read the certificate, and to close the meeting. Inquire if the couple wishes to have a printed program that introduces the wedding ceremony to the guests.
2. Bring a recommendation to the monthly meeting for business for the date and place of a meeting for worship for the wedding if this was not done at the time of approving the marriage.
3. Review the vows with the couple. See that the wedding is accomplished with dignity, reverence, and simplicity according to the practices of the monthly meeting.
4. For a union that will be legally recognized, ensure the legal requirements of the state where the wedding will take place have been met, including:
  - the proper license has been obtained;
  - the meeting has designated a specific member to attend the wedding and sign the license;
  - the completed license has been filed in good time.
5. Arrange for the care of the certificate following the meeting for worship and see that it is signed by all who are present as witnesses.
6. Deliver a high-resolution digital image or print copy of the signed certificate to the recording clerk or statistical recorder of the meeting.
7. Report to the monthly meeting that the marriage has been suitably accomplished, that any applicable legal requirements have been satisfied, and that the certificate



has been properly recorded. Also, report any name changes resulting from the marriage.

## **6F. Sample Introduction**

Welcome to this joyful occasion of \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_'s wedding. Love has called us all here today; the family, friends and especially \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_.

In the Quaker tradition it is understood that no one performs the marriage, that two people marry one another, and that it is the Spirit which seals the union.

The ceremony will be very simple, in the manner of Friends, or Quakers, as we are better known. We will enter into a shared worship, in which we intentionally center ourselves silently together in the presence of God. This does not come naturally to everyone, but try to gently let go of any discomfort or extraneous thoughts and simply bring yourself back as many times as necessary to the quiet and the beauty of this place and this occasion and to the Spirit in which we all live and move and have our being.

When \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ are ready, they will make their vows to one another. After they say their vows, they will sign the wedding certificate. At that point the certificate will be read aloud by \_\_\_\_\_. Then we'll move back into silence, and during that time anyone may speak who feels moved to do so - You may have words of blessing to share with the couple, prayers for their future, perhaps thoughts on marriage, or words which share the joy of this time. It's a time for quiet contemplation and the joy of being in worship together. What you say doesn't need to be polished or eloquent, just from your heart and fairly brief. There will be time for storytelling and congratulations after the ceremony.

We find that allowing a little silence after someone speaks allows their words to be held, considered and appreciated. So, please leave a little space between speakers. If no one feels moved to speak, we will simply remain in shared silence. The silence can be as powerful as words.

I will indicate the conclusion of the ceremony when I offer my hand to the person next to me, and all are then invited to shake hands and greet one another.

After the ceremony, everyone present, including children, is asked to sign the traditional Friends' wedding certificate, creating a cherished record of all who are present today as witnesses to this marriage.



## 6G. Traditional Vows

*Below are samples of the vows and the certificate. Any changes the couple wishes to make should be reviewed with the wedding committee.*

In the presence of God and before these friends, I take thee, (Name), to be my [husband/wife/spouse/partner], promising, with Divine assistance, to be unto thee a loving and faithful [wife/husband/spouse/partner] as long as we both shall live.

## 6H. The Quaker Marriage Certificate

The certificate needs to include:

1. Names of the individuals being married.
  2. Date and location of the wedding.
  3. Meeting under whose care it is held.
  4. The vows.
  5. Space for signatures of the couple, pastor (if appropriate), and those attending.
- Sufficient identification should be used to unambiguously identify the couple and the meeting.

## 6I. Traditional Quaker Certificate of Marriage

*(Below is a traditional certificate. Any changes the couple wishes to make should be reviewed with the wedding committee.)*

Whereas (Name) of [city or town], County of [county], and State of [state], [son, daughter, child] of (Name) and (Name) of [city or town]; and (Name) of [city or town], County of [county] and State of [state], [son, daughter, child] of (Name) and (Name) of [city or town], having declared their intentions of marriage with each other to [monthly meeting name] of the Religious Society of Friends held at [city or town], [state], according to the good order used among them, their proposed marriage was allowed by that Meeting.

NOW THESE ARE TO CERTIFY that for the accomplishment of their marriage, this [day in words] of the [word for month number] month, in the year [year in words] they, the said (Name) and (Name), appeared in a duly appointed meeting held at [city or town], [state], under the oversight of [monthly meeting name] of the Religious Society of Friends. Taking one another by the hand, (Name) and (Name) did on this solemn occasion declare that they took each other as [wife/husband/spouse/partner], promising, with divine assistance, to be unto each other a loving and faithful



[wife/husband/spouse/partner] as long as they both should live. *(Some certificates run through the vows as said by each member of the couple.)*

And in further confirmation thereof, they, the said (Name) and (Name), [taking the surname of G\*] did then and there to these presents set their hands.

(New name) \*

(New name) \*

AND WE, having been present at the solemnization of the said marriage, have as witnesses thereto, set our hands.

(Witness)

(Witness)

(Witness)

*\*Couples vary widely in the names that they take after they are married. In all cases their signatures on this certificate are the first place that their married names are used, these signatures being their final step in their wedding.*

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6. Rufus M. Jones, The Trail of Life in the Middle Years, 1934, pp 86-87.
7. Alma Lutz, Susan B. Anthony: Rebel, Crusader, Humanitarian, Beacon Press, Boston, 1959, p 224.



8. Job Scott, *Journal*, 1797, pp 74-5.
9. London Yearly Meeting Revision Committee 1959.
10. Gordon Macphail, "The Pastoral Care of Gay Friends," *The Friend* (London), vol 146, 1988, p 1371.







# 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

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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

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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

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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."

Beckey 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, elderring, 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



speaking 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)  
\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk

Further endorsed by \_\_\_\_\_ Quarterly Meeting, (date)  
\_\_\_\_\_, 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) Beckey 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.