Draft Text on Pastoral Care
Presented at the 2018 NEYM Annual Sessions

“Knowing one another in that which is eternal” is the ground and basis for walking with each other everyday and learning to care for each other.

Foundations of Pastoral Care

1) Pastoral care is a reflection of the loving concern for the spiritual and physical condition of Friends within a meeting. Thoughtful attention, careful listening, and prayer are at its heart. The impulse to offer such care grows out of the increased awareness, sensitivity and love for one another that flows out of shared worship and a sense of unity in the Spirit. It is an extension of the direct Divine care offered to each one of us. It happens most effectively in a meeting where members know and trust one another. As a religious community, we share the responsibility to be attentive to the needs and conditions of the members and attenders in our meeting.

2) Times of fellowship and shared work allow personal ties to form which help open the way for Friends to both ask for and to receive care from one another. We come to know each other as we worship together, do business, and work together on meeting committees. When we gather less formally in discussion and study groups, to share meals and to work on social service projects, the bonds of the community may grow into personal friendships. It is important for meetings to encourage such opportunities for fellowship across generations and between new and long time members and attenders. When our meeting community is gathered in fellowship and in the Spirit, we are more prepared to offer, or ask for, support when the need arises in our spiritual and personal lives.

3) There are times when Friends need more than the usual support that fellowship and friendship provide. In times of illness or grief, of transition or personal struggle, an individual, couple or family may reach out for more focused support from the meeting community. True care requires an open heart and a humble willingness to be of service. It is a journey taken together, each person open to leadings of the Spirit. The individual asking for help can then receive support without feeling diminished. When a meeting discerns that professional resources are needed, the meeting can support the individual in seeking them.
4) Whatever the size of the meeting and whatever form its structure takes, pastoral care is a vital part of a healthy meeting.

Practices Supporting Pastoral Care

5) Pastoral Care can take as many forms as there are needs, and these needs may change over time. Sometimes it may be as simple as a meal delivered or a walkway shoveled, and at other times it may mean ongoing prayer and meetings for clearness or support.

Spiritual Support

6) At times of crisis, prayer and spiritual companionship are especially important. While the meeting may also provide practical assistance, we have a particular responsibility to offer each other spiritual support. Listening carefully and patiently, without judgment, can be of immense help. Worshipping and praying together can help bring reassurance and grounding. Knowing that others are offering prayers at other times and places can provide comfort, strength and consolation.

Practical Care

7) Friends extend practical care to one another to the extent they are able. In addition to helping an individual, such care may ease stress for the person’s family members. Help with shopping, meals and transportation are all examples of practical care that can support an individual, or a family, at a difficult time.

Limits To What Friends Can Offer

8) At times it may become clear that professionally-trained help is needed to responsibly address practical or counseling needs. It is of the utmost importance for a meeting or individuals doing pastoral care to discern when this is the case. The often fractured quality of our society means that people may not have sufficient support networks when they are in crisis. Meetings today are seeing people in need of help that the meeting cannot provide. Even when professional help is needed, Friends may still, as a meeting, offer support through prayer, practical assistance, advocacy, and coordination of services.

Care Within The Meeting Community

9) Pastoral care is concerned with people of all ages and social conditions within the meeting. A healthy religious community will explore ways to keep all members engaged with the meeting’s life.
Pastoral care includes finding ways to keep connections with Friends who are unable to attend worship or social events for reasons that might include age, illness or personal crises. It may be appropriate to offer regular times of worship or discussion groups in their homes or other activities that help them stay engaged with the meeting. Remember that these Friends may also have practical needs.

There are Friends whose life circumstances prevent them from engaging as fully as they would wish in the life of the meeting. It is part of the pastoral care of the meeting to address as many of these impediments as possible. Solutions may range from fresh batteries in hearing assistance devices, to the creation of a mid-week meeting for worship, or childcare during committee meetings.

Sometimes it is unclear why a person is not attending meeting. When it is noticed that a Friend has been absent for some time, an individual may enquire if all is well. It may be that the Friend has found that the meeting is not the right spiritual home for them and their spiritual search has taken them elsewhere. Alternatively, if it becomes clear that a Friend is absent because of disaffection with the meeting, Ministry and Counsel may offer an in-person visit. Friends are called to overcome a hesitation born of uncertainty about how they will be received, or from a sense of inadequacy, or fear of being with a person who is angry or in crisis.

Friends also need to be alert to the subtle societal differences that can create a sense of exclusion for an individual in the community. Members and attenders come from a variety of social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds. Meetings where many members are affluent, for example, may not feel welcoming to those who struggle financially. People of color may find meetings ignorant of or unsympathetic to their experience. Those who feel there is disapproval of their choice of spiritual language may feel their spiritual insights are disregarded or unwelcome. It is important for meetings to actively examine their assumptions, expectations, and practices in order to ensure all who are committed to the search for Truth are welcome. It is difficult to be aware of our blind spots, but if our Society is to be genuinely inclusive it is essential that we do this work together. In some cases, the meeting itself may need pastoral care.

There may be times when Ministry and Counsel calls on the meeting to recognize ongoing revelation of Truth and places where falsity and discord persist in ourselves as individuals. This occurred in the past, for example, when
meetings examined the participation of their members in the slave trade and in
the ownership of enslaved peoples. Friends continue to be challenged in
addressing racism in our midst. Structural inequalities of privilege and other
deep concerns will continue to challenge the Society and provide opportunities
for an evolving understanding of Truth.

Tools For Maintaining Contact

15) Modern technology has increased the variety of ways we can keep in
touch – phone, email, social media, list serves, etc. These may be useful tools,
especially for keeping in touch with members who live at a distance. Some
people who need counsel either cannot, or would prefer not, to meet in person.
Long distance communication may be very welcome and helpful; however,
Friends should be aware of the possibilities of misunderstandings and breaches
of confidentiality when electronic communication is used. In addition, it should
be remembered that the ease of more indirect, though more immediate
communication, may also pose great risk if it is too frequently used in place of
face-to-face meetings with one another.

Structures Supporting Pastoral Care of Individuals

16) Meetings vary in the ways they structure the work of pastoral care and
this may depend on their size. Large meetings Ministry and Counsel may have a
Pastoral Care Committee under its charge. In small meetings Ministry and
Counsel may include pastoral care as part of its charge. In any case, the
committee seeks to identify Friends who are particularly gifted in this
area. Some New England meetings employ a pastor, part of whose work is to
share in the pastoral care of the meeting. It is helpful for Ministry and Counsel to
periodically remind the meeting whom to contact when pastoral care concerns
arise. Every type of meeting has structures that assist in delivering pastoral care:
clearness committees, support committees, and practical care committees, as
needed.

Clearness Committees For Personal Discernment

17) A Friend facing a major decision or discerning a leading may find it
helpful to ask for a clearness committee. The Friend may request a committee, or
a member of the meeting may propose this opportunity. Once it is requested,
Ministry and Counsel, in consultation with the individual, appoints the
committee. The intention of the committee is to help draw out Divine guidance.
The committee may need to meet only once or may need to meet several times
with the individual. Confidentiality is maintained.
Support Committees

18) One type of support committee is set up in a similar way to the clearness committee process described above. Its purpose is to help a Friend who is going through a crisis or a life transition. Support includes holding the Friend in prayer, listening, responding tenderly, providing encouragement, and discerning whether practical or professional care is needed.

19) Friends also form a support committee for a meeting member who has a defined ministry or position within the meeting, such as clerk. Similarly, support committees are formed for Friends whose ministry takes them beyond the meeting. Such a committee meets regularly with the individual to review how things are going, to listen to concerns, to pray with them, and to help them gain clarity on how to proceed. The committee seeks ways to help the Friend be faithful to their calling. It also serves as an intermediary between the individual and the meeting, letting the meeting know about and helping it understand the work the Friend is doing. It encourages the meeting to hold the ministry of this Friend in prayer.

20) In the case of a paid staff position or a released Friend, care should be taken that the support committee for this ministry is separate from the oversight of the Friend’s job or ministry. See the discussion of paid staff at **** or released Friends at ****.

Practical Care Committees

21) At times Friends need practical assistance in their daily lives as they deal with illness, frailty, bereavement, or other challenges. Care committees are formed, as the meeting is able, to assist such Friends with things like meals for a period of time, transportation, and childcare. This may often be done in conjunction with the Friend’s family members and friends from outside the meeting. It is important for all involved to carefully discern to what extent it is wise for them to be involved, and to balance loving generosity with self-care.

Pastoral Care Of Children And Young People

22) Befriending the children and youth of our meeting is something each person can do to build up the young person’s sense of being cherished and of belonging to the community. Their needs and concerns may be heard as older Friends take the time to pay attention to their words and actions. There can be rich sharing and learning between the generations when adults are willing to approach such conversations in a vulnerable and honest way. Children and young people want to have their spiritual journeys taken seriously, they want to
be heard and asked challenging questions, and in turn, they want adults to be
open with them about their own journeys and questions.

23) Monthly meetings may also encourage families to involve their children
and youth in programs beyond the meeting. During the school year, the yearly
meeting offers weekend retreats for a variety of age groups and some quarterly
meetings host family retreats. There are programs for all age groups during
yearly meeting sessions. The yearly meeting camp, Friends Camp in China,
Maine, offers a series of programs during the summer.

24) Pastoral care offered by the meeting is usually within the context of the
family and with parental consultation. At a certain point, however, children and
young people may need confidential care separate from their parents or families.
Families experiencing divorce, substance abuse, illness, or death, for example,
may be overwhelmed and not equipped to provide the support a child needs.
Young people struggling with issues around relationships, sexuality, gender
identity, or peer pressure, to name a few, may feel more comfortable exploring
their thoughts and concerns with a trusted adult member of the meeting who is
outside of their family. When families request the help of the meeting to provide
pastoral care for their children it is critical to make boundaries and expectations
clear and explicit. When a child requests care on their own, they may request that
their concerns not be shared with their family. It is critical in these instances also
that boundaries and expectations be clear and explicit. When a child requests
care, and does not wish their family to know about the request, the individual or
meeting must proceed with caution.

25) All adults providing pastoral care to children, either formally or
informally, must be aware of circumstances where confidentiality cannot be
maintained, for example situations of abuse or self-harm. Familiarity with
mandatory reporting laws is essential. Safety of the child should always be the
first concern. Those providing pastoral care, especially those working as
individuals, should take great care never to put themselves in a position where
the safety of the child could be called into question. The Yearly Meeting has a
Child Safety Policy that should be carefully read and understood. Each state has
differing regulations regarding the responsibility of churches with respect to
child safety. Monthly meetings should be aware of the regulations in their own
state. The Yearly Meeting also has other support materials that may be useful to
monthly meetings and to others doing work in the wider Friend’s community.
26) The same structures used to support adults may be valuable in support of children. Clearness committees, support committees, visitation, and practical care can be effective in honoring and supporting young people as they face the spiritual challenges of their lives. As in pastoral care for adults, however, the meeting must also take care to recognize when a child’s needs are beyond the meeting’s ability to meet.

See Appendix 8B for further information on structures and procedures to support pastoral care of individuals.

Pastoral Care of the Meeting

Balance of Individual and Community Needs

27) Within a meeting the needs and desires of individuals are held in balance with the needs and integrity of the whole. It is a work of love that the meeting insure that no individual’s needs, behaviors, or assertiveness dominates the meeting community, while still providing openings for individual insights and community growth. Sometimes it is the individual and sometimes it is the meeting that needs to move to a new understanding.

Dealing With Conflict

28) It is important for the health of the meeting that it be sensitive to conflict and move to resolve it without delay, if possible. Addressing conflicts is an opportunity for growth. When there is an interpersonal conflict and the individuals have not been able to resolve the difficulty privately, a Friend, or small group of Friends facilitates listening such that each person in the conflict is supported in hearing the concerns of the other. It is essential that all individuals involved in the conflict, or in its resolution, be willing to engage in the process and be open to finding unity in the Spirit. The same applies to groups within the meeting that are at odds with one another. If a conflict is widely known within the meeting community, it is important for Ministry and Counsel to make a broad statement that the problem is being addressed with love, and to respect confidentiality in terms of names and problem specifics. The process of dealing with conflict, whether resolved or not, may leave meetings themselves in need of pastoral care.

29) Meetings are often reluctant to admit troubling internal differences and to ask for pastoral care for themselves from beyond the local meeting. Friends are called to care for one another and to offer loving support to a meeting just as they would to an individual experiencing difficulties. Support and prayerful
discernment can be sought from quarterly or yearly meeting ministry and
counsel, remembering that some conflicts require a long, slow healing process.

*Affirmations and Trust*

30) Care of the meeting also takes the form of building up a spirit of faith and
confidence. By reminding the meeting of those areas where unity and strength
have been evident, we affirm where the meeting has been faithful in the past in
following the Spirit’s leadings. In times of difficulty, reminding Friends of how
God has been present in facing the challenges of the past can restore a sense of
unity.

*A Shared Responsibility*

31) While meetings may have specific people overseeing pastoral care -
Ministry and Counsel, a pastoral care committee, a pastor – it is not intended that
they do it all. Rather, each Friend is encouraged to be alert to the spiritual,
emotional, practical, and physical needs of others and of the wellbeing of the
community as a whole.

**EXTRACTS**

1. *The direct pastoral care of God for each individual is expressed in the shepherd imagery of Psalm 23*

   The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
   He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
   he leadeth me beside the still waters.
   He restoreth my soul:
   he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.
   Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
   I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
   thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
   Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
   thou anointest my head with oil;
   my cup runneth over.
   Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
   and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

   Psalm 23, King James Version

2. The eternal God is thy dwelling place, And underneath are the
   everlasting arms.

   Deuteronomy 33:27, American Standard Version
3. 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.

   **Isaac Penington, 1667**

4. A message about pastoral care addressed to the young Christian churches:

   He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us.

   **2 Corinthians 1:4, The Message**

5. When I meet with a person, a couple or a family, in need or pain, I consider this meeting a special form of meeting for worship; a meeting where we gather to focus on the needs of the person or family and seek to discern the healing and guiding movement of the Spirit. Such a meeting is sacred. It is a place of meeting – of encounter – with ourselves, with each other, and with God. It is a place where we may be surprised by God, where we may be confronted by painful realities, where we may find a deep sense of relational connection and where we may discover healing, new life and empowerment....

   In this sense, we can say that pastoral care is sacramental. Pastoral care affirms the presence and power of the sacred in the everyday realities of our lives and struggles, and it affirms our capacity to experience that power and presence. Proclaiming the presence of a life-giving, healing power at the heart of life, it calls all present into the experience of the transforming power at the heart of our lives.

   **Maureen Graham, 2001**

6. The healing journey is not simple it is not easy. There is a deep restlessness to be totally well, totally healed. Yet I realize having gone through a threatening illness that what held me together was not my own strength, but the strength of a community that held me up in prayer and action. It was all-important. I needed that prayer. I felt it in core places physical and spiritual. At one point in Intensive Care I was in so much pain and unable to communicate...

   My world was filled with the endlessness of hospital noise. And I was trying to shut it all out, I was trying to shut down. It was just a draining experience. Then out of the darkness I heard two voices. Judy and Dave were in the room by my bed talking to me, holding me in the Mist of unity. And I had nothing to say.... Well, I had a lot to say but I was having a Zacharias experience—unable to speak, but excited because in that moment I was understanding a lot. My frustration deepened, but only for a moment. It
became not important that I could not communicate, that my words were
useless. I had an interior understanding and while I was frustrated in my
silence, it was in the depth of a deepening understanding that I grew to
understand the beauty of our Quaker silence. I gave myself up to it and I was
nourished — by Judy and Dave that day and by many other Friends on what
seemed like many endless days. I let that blanket of goodness cover me.

“There come times when the Presence steals upon us, all unexpected
and not the product of agonized effort, and we live in a new dimension

We are called as Friends to this “new dimension” as we deal with War,
Immigration, Urban Violence, Gender Equality, Racism, Poverty, Prisons, Tax
Resistance. We are challenged to live a unique silence, an informed silence, a
silence of hope. The silence of our meeting worship, must invade our lives on
all other days. You and I must savor this reality. We must touch the “Deep” of
Silence.

Greg Williams, 2007

7. All of us deeply yearn to be known, to be “heard into speech,” as Parker
Palmer says. Each of us needs to be loved unconditionally, to be given space to
grow, to be forgiven, to be nudged gently open, and to join in some sort of
communion in awe and wonder. I believe this is what makes spiritual
community.

Gretchen Baker Smith, 2012

8. When (young people are) asked what they would find helpful, their advice
to adults is simple “Treat us like you’d like to be treated. Treat us with
respect,” says Ben “and don’t just make chit-chat. I’ve got views on just about
any issue, and I like people who actually can talk about things.” Youth want to
have significant relationships with meeting adults...

Patti encourages adults to move beyond their stereotypes about young
people. “Some people seem not to get beyond the fact that I’m only
eleven. Then there are people who just think of me as ‘my dad’s daughter’...I
feel like they don’t really try to get to know me…”

Patti continues “I think one reason why adults don’t try to get to know the
kids in the meeting that well is because they’re scared of us. Don’t ask me why.
And when they get scared it intimidates the kids and also makes the kids a
little shyer.”

Marty Smith and Carolyn Terrell, 1995
9. Our meeting had a member who had a very definite view of how things should be, and who was frequently critical of other members and of elements of worship and meeting life. As pastor I frequently heard the distress of those who felt attacked by her and was myself disturbed by it. I decided to sit with her and listen to all her complaints, responding only by briefly reflecting them back to her. Most of the time I listened in silence. After about 45 minutes of this deep listening what I heard was the sub-text “I really care about this meeting” and I was able to express this to her with gratitude. Toward the end of this listening session she started to reflect on her own behavior, to feel that she might try to change her way of dealing with things that disturbed her, and to be open to the possibility that others may care as much as she did but show it in different ways. In the months that followed, there were fewer incidents of the disruptive behavior and when they did happen, I had a better rapport with the woman to address them.

Maggie Edmondson, 2017

10. People who exhibit behavior which we describe as “difficult” make us uncomfortable, and it is a very normal human response to want a lessening of discomfort… Our discomfort is useful in letting us know that something is wrong, something needs attention – but what?

Is the person identified bringing a message that we need to hear but don’t want to listen to?

Is it what the person is saying which is troubling to us, or is it the manner in which it is being said?

Is there a message (in words or actions), or is the behavior irrational and not rooted in the reality in which most of us are grounded?

Individually and collectively, how might we be causing, or at the very least, contributing to the behavior we find unacceptable? Are we giving a consistent message to the person whose behavior is troubling that we find the behavior unacceptable, or do some of us directly or indirectly affirm the behavior?

These questions and others that you could add to the list, can help us to begin the process of hopefully finding common ground which can serve as a meeting place with the person whose behavior is troubling us…

And yes, we need to recognize how we take advantage of qualities which make a person well-suited to a committee assignment, such as being meticulous in the care of property, and then become impatient with them when they carry that to an extreme. I am not saying that we cause difficult behavior, but I am clear that there are ways in which we inadvertently intensify it.

Arlene Kelly, 2004
11. Seek to know one another in the things which are eternal, bear the burden of each other’s failings and pray for one another. As we enter with tender sympathy into the joys and sorrows of each other’s lives, ready to give help and to receive it, our meeting can be a channel for God’s love and forgiveness.

Britain Yearly Meeting, Quaker Faith and Practice, section 1.02, No. 18

ADVICES AND QUERIES

Advises for Individuals

1. Accompany one another as spiritual companions. Encourage one another. Be willing to speak up in love when you see another go astray, and to humbly receive loving admonition when your own behavior is in question.

2. Pray for one another. Listen carefully and with openness. Practice mindfulness of one another’s joys, concerns, burdens, infirmities, and sorrows. Cultivate an inward resolve to respond in compassionate, helpful and practical ways.

3. When offering spoken prayer in the presence of someone in need, trust that the Spirit will provide the words. Remember that the resources of the Spirit are vast and you may be the vehicle the Spirit has chosen to bring comfort and healing.

4. Be aware of the spiritual journey of the children and youth of the meeting. Remember, experience of the Spirit has no age barriers. Consider how we give and receive support across generations.

5. Inter-visitations has traditionally been important to maintaining loving connections. Do not discard meaningful traditions simply because new technologies may be more convenient. Intangible benefits accrue when we gather face-to-face in the Spirit.

6. Give freely of your time and your attentive presence to the extent that the duties and callings of your own life allow.

7. Keep in mind the needs and well-being of the whole meeting community and balance this with the needs of individuals, including yourself.

Queries for Individuals

1. How do you stay in fellowship with Friends you find difficult?
2. How do you interact with the youth of your meeting?
3. Where do you need to practice forgiveness or at least more spiritual generosity?
4. What stops you from offering help?
5. How do you discern what your work is to do?
6. Are you attentive to others in the “small things” so that you are prepared to be of service when called for larger pastoral care work?
7. Do you cultivate the humility necessary for the time when you will need to ask for and receive pastoral care yourself?

APPENDIX 8: PASTORAL CARE AND CLEARNESS COMMITTEES FOR PERSONAL DISCERNMENT

8A. Advices and Queries for Pastoral Care Committees

Advices

1. As a meeting, we accept a degree of responsibility and concern for one another. We would not wish to turn aside from one another in times of need.
2. As members of pastoral care committees we wish to ensure that all members of our community are able to draw upon the meeting’s care and concern. Useful ways to give support will necessarily vary from one situation to another. As we offer help we strive to be sensitive to one another’s spiritual, emotional, and material condition, and to the need of each of us to maintain our personal dignity and protect our privacy.
3. Pastoral care committees should be careful not to act beyond their competence or beyond the limits of their proper responsibility.
4. Our feelings and motivations necessarily color our decisions and discussions about individuals. We need to be especially aware of our feelings about a person and that these may overcome our ability to discern God’s will. We should be prayerful in maintaining this awareness and, as necessary, remaining silent in our meetings.

Queries

1. Do we reach out to ensure that contact is maintained with all of our meeting community? Do we make clear that we are available to offer mutual support—spiritual, emotional, and material? Are all encouraged to seek and accept the support of the meeting?
2. Do we take care that each member of our community is held in sensitive awareness, with respect for personal dignity and privacy? Are we tender...
of one another’s feelings? Do we maintain confidentiality, avoid gossip, and refrain from unnecessary and inappropriate exchange of information?

3. How do the often-invisible cultural norms of our meetings keep some Friends at a distance?

4. As we offer pastoral care, do we each maintain awareness of our own needs and motivations and the effect these may have on our own care-giving? Are we careful to distinguish personal feelings about individuals—positive or negative—from our charge to care for them? In striving to help others, do we seek the Spirit through prayer and silence?

5. Are we sensitive to the limits of our capacities and the limits of our responsibilities? Are we prepared to express these limits and recommend professional resources?

6. Do we remember to faithfully hold in prayer those to whom we offer care? Do we as members of pastoral care committees hold ourselves mutually accountable to the spirit of these queries?

8B. Guidance for a Clearness Committee for Personal Discernment

A clearness committee meets with a person who is unclear how to proceed in a keenly felt concern or dilemma, hoping that it can help them reach clarity. It assumes that each of us has an Inner Teacher who can guide us and that the answer sought can be found by the person seeking clearness. It also assumes that a group of caring friends can help 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 listen, setting aside their own prejudices or judgments, to help clarify alternatives, to help communication if necessary, and to provide emotional support as an individual seeks to find truth and the right course of action. The clearness committee works best when everyone approaches it prayerfully, which does not exclude an element of playfulness.

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 and Council who invites the person to name people they feel may be helpful and Ministry and Council may suggest others. Ministry and Council then appoints the clearness committee.

2. In advance of the meeting, it is helpful for the person seeking clearness to describe the matter in writing, identifying it as precisely as possible and giving
relevant background information. This should be made available to committee members.

**Conducting the clearness committee**

At the beginning of the meeting, a clerk and a recorder are appointed. The clerk opens and closes the meeting and keeps a sense of right order in between, making sure that agreed-on guidelines are followed and that everyone who wishes to speak may do so. Any member of the committee may intervene if necessary to ensure that guidelines are followed. The recorder writes down the questions asked and perhaps some of the responses and gives this record to the person seeking clearness after the meeting.

1. The clerk invites the committee to prepare for its work, reminds everyone of the guidelines to be followed and makes sure there is a common understanding of the degree of confidentiality about the meeting.

2. All settle into a period of centering silence.

3. When the person seeking clearness is ready, they begin with a brief summary of the question or concern.

4. Members of the committee hold to a discipline of asking brief, probing question as led by the Spirit, resisting urges to present solutions or give advice. It is crucial that these questions be asked not for the sake of satisfying the questioner’s curiosity, but for the sake of drawing out the person’s clarity. The pace of questions should be kept deliberately gentle and relaxed to encourage reflection. Committee members should also 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 response generates more questions. It is always the person’s absolute right not to answer. The more often a person can answer, the more they and the committee have to go on, 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 that time remains for more 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 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, a mode of seeking clarity other than questions. The recorder continues to record during this time. Possibilities include:

a) silence out of which anyone may speak
b) silence out of which people share images as they concentrate on the person seeking clarity

c) continued questions from the committee
d) reflection on what has been said
e) affirmation of the person’s gifts
f) questions to the committee from the person seeking clarityness

8. Before the session ends the person may wish to share any clarity which has come to them. They and the committee consider together whether another meeting is needed and, if so, schedule it at this time. It may be that the person will not need to meet with the committee again. Alternatively a support or oversight committee may be appointed to help the person remain clear and/or be accountable to their discernment.

Members of the clearness committee are free to release themselves from further commitment, or to offer to serve on such committees.

**8C. Queries for Those Asked to Serve on Clearness Committees**

Questions

1. Is this your work to do at this time?
2. Can you devote sufficient time and energy to this committee, knowing that it may take several meetings and many weeks or months to clarify the problem and provide support while the decision is made and carried out?
3. Do you feel sufficiently at ease with the person seeking clarityness 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 it is a decision to be made by more than one person, can you set aside your own prejudice or bias as you listen to each person involved?
5. Are you willing to keep the committee discussions confidential and avoid gossiping or referring to them outside the committee unless those requesting the help of the committee are comfortable with a wider sharing?
6. Can you keep an open heart and an open mind about the outcome?
Advices for Those Who Have Agreed to Serve on Clearness Committees

1. While the convener takes care of the practical details of setting up the meeting and keeps a sense of right order while it is in progress, 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. It 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. If the meeting is for more than one person, try to give equal attention to each person present, whether adult or child.

3. In the case of difficulties or joyful complexities, remember that people are capable of change and growth. Focus on the situation that is prompting the need for discernment.

EXTRACT REFERENCES

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8) Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Pastoral Care Newsletter March 1995, “Nurturing Families and Children in Meeting” by Marty Smith and Carolyn Terrell
9) Maggie Edmondson, unpublished 2017
11) Britain Yearly Meeting, Quaker Faith and Practice, section 1.02, No. 18