

*Living with  
Oneself and  
Others*

New England Yearly Meeting  
Ministry & Counsel  
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# *Living with Oneself and Others*

Working papers on aspects of family life containing queries and advices for Friends meetings and individuals. First edition by the Family Life Subcommittee of the New England Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel Committee. 1979. Fourth edition by the New England Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel Committee, 2001.

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# 1

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## Growing as an Individual

If you would know God, and worship and serve God as you should do, you must come to the means He has ordained and given for that purpose. Some seek it in books, some in learned men, but what they look for is in themselves, yet they overlook it. The voice is too still, the Seed too small, and the Light shineth in darkness. They are abroad and so cannot divide the spoil; but the woman that lost her silver found it at home after she had lighted her candle and swept her house. Do you so too, and you shall find what Pilate wanted to know, viz., Truth. The Light of Christ within, who is the Light of the world, and so a light that tells you the truth of your condition, leads all that take heed unto it out of darkness into God's marvelous light; for light grows upon the obedient.

—William Penn, 1694,  
in Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 1995, #26.44

**I**ndividual growth is an indispensable first step in the formation of enduring relationships with others, and the individual and his or her spiritual journey is an essential unit of the Religious Society of Friends, whether that journey is taken singly or as part of a family. We each need to be encouraged and affirmed as a unique child of God. Only when we have found the unique self will we have a true self to give to another in a deep and meaningful way.

Many of us yearn for the meeting of minds and affection, the spiritual and sexual union with another that is true marriage, but whether or not we enter into such a relationship, we find that we must strive for wholeness in ourselves. To spend our energies in search for the perfect (or even nearly perfect) partner, or to think that happiness and self-fulfillment lie only in such a relationship is not the way toward wholeness. We must learn to take responsibility for our own lives. What is essential for the authentic life lies within ourselves, and we reach it through the power of that Spirit in which we live and move and have our being. It is important for us to find ways to use this power, through prayer, reading, meditation, journal-keeping, and other spiritual paths.

### **Queries for Individuals**

1. What are your priorities for living? Do you review your commitments and relationships in the light of spiritual leadings?
2. Where is the religious priority in your life? Where does spiritual growth and development stand in relation to your everyday pursuits? What part does prayer have in your life? Do you make time for it regularly along with meditation, reading, journal-keeping or other means of spiritual search and growth? (If these things are difficult for you to do alone, have you explored the possibility of asking a few persons in the meeting to meet with you on a regular basis to discuss these ways of deepening your spiritual lives and encouraging each other to use them?)
3. Do you strive, through your relationships, to be your own best self and to help others to achieve the same goal?
4. How well do you know yourself, your own strengths and weaknesses? Are you comfortable with change? Are you easily bored with routine? How large a part does regret play in your life?
5. Are you in touch with your feelings of anger, hurt, and resentment as well as love, affection, and respect; are you able to express them to others in non-destructive ways? Do you deal with your feelings in their proper places and in connection with their real sources? Do you recognize the danger of

repressing and storing up anger, hurt and resentment until they explode for what appear to be trivial reasons?

6. Do you have interests that you can enjoy by yourself? Do you wait for external events or other people to rescue you or do you make an effort to reach out to others? When you are unhappy or lonely, what steps do you take to change your situation?
7. Are you able to ask for support during difficult periods? Do you reach out to others when they need support? Do you try to remember, in periods of darkness and discouragement, that you may be standing in your own Light? Can you accept yourself as you are—and go on from there?
8. Do you seek new and creative ways of relating to your family? Have you established an identity other than your family identity as child, parent, spouse, etc., or are you dependent on your family role to give meaning to your life?
9. Do you enjoy a variety of different relationships with persons of different ages, interests, and gender? Are you mindful that there are many forms of intimacy, of closeness, to another person other than sexual? Do you strive to accept each member of your family, each of your friends and acquaintances, as a unique person, without demanding that he or she fill a particular, preordained, role in your life? Do you avoid stereotyping yourself in your own mind in terms of age or sex?
10. Do you strive to find a level of intimacy, caring and distance that is comfortable and appropriate for the various relationships in your life? Are you able to balance and choose among conflicting commitments? In making decisions do you find a balance between your wishes and the desires and expectations of others? Do you accept the tremendous variation in people's capacity for relating to others, both in number and depth?
11. How do you handle the disappointment of relationships that do not work out in the way you hope they will? Do you have the courage to look at a relationship realistically and if necessary to alter or end it honestly, gently and without blaming? Do you tend to deny your own needs for the sake of holding on to a relationship, or demand that the other do so?

12. Does love radiate through you in a way that includes others and quickens their awareness of God? Can you reach beyond finite judgments of incompleteness and failure, holding human choices up to God's infinite love? Do you try to share honestly and sensitively with others of differing views and ages to appreciate the Divine and human bonds such sharing brings? In seeking Divine guidance, do you realize wisdom can come through the words, actions or experience of others? Do you open yourself to these avenues as part of your religious journey?
13. In periods of change or crisis, when decisions are particularly difficult, do you seek a clearness committee to help reach and carry out a decision? (See chapter 13.)

**Queries for Meetings**

1. What can the meeting do to foster enduring relationships and friendships in general?
2. Does the meeting try to avoid categorizing people according to age and/or marital status? To what extent are our committee appointments based on stereotypes of sex, age, marital status, profession?
3. Do we interact with each other as individuals rather than as appendages to a spouse or family?
4. Does the meeting respond to each person who comes seeking companionship, counsel and a place to participate, as well as spiritual nurture?



# 2

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## Human Sexuality

Our sexuality is ultimately tied to who we are as spiritual persons. The spiritual life enhances our sexuality and gives it direction. Our sexuality gives an earthy wholeness to our spirituality. Our spirituality and our sexuality come into a working harmony in the life of the kingdom of God.

—Richard J. Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life: Christian Reflections on Money, Sex, and Power*, 1985

**S**exuality is something we are given; it is part of us as human beings, the physical aspect of the life force. We can choose to ignore it (as sometimes people choose to ignore their spirituality) but we all have it. Sexual behavior is how we consciously choose, or choose not, to express our sexuality. Alone or in relationship to others, we can choose from a wide range of possible expressions. Within that range, monogamous marriage has traditionally been the norm among Friends. Both the sexuality and the spirituality we are given can be ignored, or explored, discovered, and expressed in different ways; one developed at the expense of the other may leave either less deep, less understood, than it might be.

Our sexuality does not disappear as we grow older, and as we grow old. Becoming comfortable with our sexuality may make the aging process easier; if we have no quarrel with our bodies and their needs when we are young or as we mature, we may adjust more

easily to changes in our bodies brought about by aging. At all ages individuals differ greatly in their sexual needs, and these needs will change to some degree in everyone as we age. Recognition of changes and of continuing needs will also differ according to the individual and because of differences in condition (single, divorced, a partner who has died).

The working group writing the 1992 draft of this chapter was not clear about what or how much to include on sexual abuse. In 1994, publication of the pamphlet "Addressing Sexual Abuse in Friends Meetings," culminated the work of the Working Party on Sexual Abuse of New England Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel Committee.

### **Queries for Individuals**

1. Do you bring to the sexual area of your life, as to all others, the certainty, born of experience, that there is a good, acceptable and perfect will of God for you to come to know, when you are open to it?
2. Do you see a distinction between your sexuality as an integral part of yourself and your sexual behavior? What in your experience might help you to understand this distinction? Are you aware of the diverse ways that your sexuality can be expressed, both alone and in relationship?
3. How have your attitudes about sexuality been formed? How have your attitudes about sexuality been influenced by the society you have grown up in? How have your attitudes about sexuality been influenced by holding up your choices, ethics, goals and values to the Light? What new information has changed your ideas regarding sexual behavior over the years?
4. What do you do when you do not understand or you disagree with the sexual behavior of another Friend? Are you willing both to ask questions about their behavior and to articulate your concern with that behavior, in the faith that you are both seeking truth?
5. Do you accept yourself as a sexual being, rejoicing in and finding fulfilling expression of that God-given reality? Are you open to the possibility that such joy and fulfillment may be

expressed through celibacy as an intentional redirection of your sexual desires?

6. How does your experience of God influence your perception of your sexuality? How does your personal sexual experience influence your concept of and relationship with God? How have you sought God's will for yourself as a spiritual and sexual being? How do you test your insights with others in your religious community?
7. What spiritual values underlie the decisions you make about your sexual behavior? What helps you to understand sexuality and spirituality as related parts of a single wholeness? Do you feel Divinely led in the ways you have chosen to express your sexuality?
8. How do you define responsible sexual behavior? Where and to whom are you accountable for your sexual behavior? How do you distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate sexual behavior? How does your sexuality relate to your sense of personal power as an individual and in the culture? Do you participate in relationships that allow you to be disempowered as a person or allow you to disempower others?
9. In making decisions regarding your sexual behavior, do you carefully consider the consequences (emotional, spiritual and other) for yourself, your partner and others? Do you respect yourself sufficiently to protect yourself and to insist that your partner protect you from sexually transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancy? Have you found clear ways to communicate with your partner about the possibility or presence of a sexually transmitted disease in your relationship?
10. Are you and your partner spiritually and emotionally comfortable with your relationship? Do you experience mutual happiness, pleasure, caring, sadness and joy? Is there something in your relationship or within yourself or your partner that needs healing before your sexuality can be freely and joyfully expressed? Do you respect your differences and strive to find unity that is respectful of each of you as individuals? What do openness and honesty mean in your relationship? Do you speak the truth in love to each other? Is your communication good enough to determine this?

11. What expectations do you have of a close personal relationship? Do you know what expectations your partner has? How do these expectations affect your closeness, affection and sexual behavior? Do any expectations or demands that you place on your partner, or your partner places on you, stand in the way of your mutual joy? What might you offer to, or ask from, your partner that might make such joy more possible?
12. What does fidelity, or faithfulness, mean to you and your partner? Is exclusivity a gift that you need to offer to, or require from, your partner? What responsibility do you and your partner have to your community in making such decisions?
13. Have you considered the question “What will we do if we become pregnant?”
14. Are you comfortable allowing your partner to share in the decision of whether or not to terminate a pregnancy or carry it to full term? Are you able to accept your part of the responsibility for such a decision? Have you prayerfully considered the emotional, ethical and spiritual aspects and consequences of abortion or adoption? Would the creation of a new life be a present blessing for you as an individual, as a couple, for the child and for the larger community? Can sexual intimacy be appropriate if you cannot agree on whether or how to prevent pregnancy, or on what you will do if a pregnancy occurs?

### Queries for Meetings

1. Do we remind ourselves that it is not only our belief but our experience that all of life is sacramental, including our sexuality?
2. Does the meeting provide opportunities for study of the Bible and Quaker writings with a chance to discuss the meaning of such writings for us as sexual as well as spiritual beings? Are we aware of the various interpretations of what they say about sexuality and sexual behavior?
3. Do we accept that in sexuality, as in other areas of life, there may be diversity among us, but that we are a Religious Society because we have found together a unity more profound than that diversity?

4. How may the meeting consider with spiritual openness the variety of viewpoints and sexual experiences that exist within the Religious Society of Friends? Can the meeting provide an atmosphere where people who are not heterosexual and people who are not monogamous can feel safe sharing truth as they experience it? Can the meeting provide an atmosphere where people who have concerns about such relationships share their concerns without being labeled as oppressors or bigots?
5. Are we careful to confirm that any family structure may be Spirit-led? Do we make assumptions about families based on appearance rather than truth?
6. How may we help one another be faithful in expressing our sexuality—in solitude, in relationships, in worship, in our work and in our families? How can we help each other test whether our actions are rooted in faithfulness to spiritual guidance?
7. Do we take seriously the meeting as community, and know that none of us acts in isolation, but that what touches, uplifts, degrades, injures or inspires one of us is significant to all?
8. How can the meeting be helpful to its older members in recognizing and expressing their sexuality and sexual concerns?
9. How can the meeting help those in committed relationships celebrate and deepen their commitment to one another?
10. In what ways can the meeting nurture and provide resources for the development of loving interpersonal relationships that do not include sexually intimate behavior?
11. Does the meeting accept and support those in the meeting community who choose celibacy and those whose circumstances leave them without partners? Are such community members intentionally included in social activities in a manner that results in their feeling fully welcome? What other support for celibate people may be appropriate?
12. How do we nurture the lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals and families in the meeting community? How would gay men or lesbians who have been married under the care of another Friends meeting be welcomed and nurtured in the meeting? Does our experience in attempting to nurture heterosexual individuals and families help us to address these questions?

13. Does the meeting encourage members of the meeting community with sexual or other relationship concerns to seek help? Are the committee members who are responsible for such pastoral concerns skilled, sensitive and willing listeners? Are they aware of their own degree of comfort, or lack of it, in discussing aspects of life that involve sexuality? How can listening skills about sexuality be increased in the meeting? Do the appropriate meeting committees understand the limits of what they can do, and are they knowledgeable about professional resources for referral?
14. Can the meeting's religious education program help young people explore and discuss their feelings and confusions about sexuality, without judgement or embarrassment? How can communication between adults and children regarding sexuality and sexual behavior be appropriately facilitated by the spiritual community?
15. How can we respond to questions about all aspects of sexuality in a way that provides confidentiality and openness to God's guidance?
16. Are we aware of sexually-related conflict, harassment and oppression existing in the lives of meeting attenders? Are we aware of sexually-related conflicts and oppressions that occur within the meeting community? If someone within the meeting feels sexually threatened, how does the meeting respond?
17. Is the meeting sensitive to problems that are not specifically brought to its attention, particularly in regard to matters involving sexually inappropriate behavior? What might be done to increase our sensitivity and capacity to respond?
18. Are those members of the community who are being sexually abused, or who have been sexually abused in the past, receiving the help they need? Is the meeting prepared and able to offer emotional support and physical protection when necessary? Is the community sensitive to a person who stays in an abusive relationship? Is the community sensitive to a violated person who may want to terminate a relationship to which s/he once committed themselves? How can the meeting be supportive of the individual in either case? How can the meeting further the healing process of all those affected by sexual

abuse? Is the meeting prepared to be helpful insofar as is possible to the person who has abused a loved one? How can we discover truth in such complex and sensitive situations?

19. When a person of any age is raped or otherwise sexually violated, is the meeting prepared to be helpful in comforting the individual and in assuaging feelings of guilt that often are a part of that person's experience? Is the meeting prepared to refer those affected by sexual abuse to reliable professionals? Is the meeting prepared to respond in regard to all manifestations of sexual abuse and harassment?

### **Queries for Adults Concerning Children**

1. Do you provide straightforward information about sexuality and sexual behavior to your children in ways appropriate to their ages and concerns? In what manner should sex education be supported in home, school and meeting?
2. Are you aware of the sexual values that you model? Do your children know what your sexual values are? Do they know the spiritual values that underlie your sexual decisions?
3. When talking with your children about sexual matters, can you share feelings as well as facts? Are you sensitive to adolescents' special need for open discussion of sexuality? Would it be useful to help your children find other adults to talk with in addition to yourself?
4. How can you help your children rejoice in their sexuality as a holy gift, at the same time that you try to educate them about the real dangers of epidemic disease, unwanted pregnancy, hurtful relationships and peer pressure? When you are led to counsel restraint in sexual behavior, do you also affirm the wholeness that we believe is inherent in right sexual expression?
5. How can you help children and young people learn to express affection physically without getting involved in intimate sexual behavior? How would you answer a teenager's question: "How and where do I draw the line?"
6. In your home, how do you treat the reality of the variety of sexual orientation and experience in the meeting and in the wider community?

7. In the emotional nurturing of children by their parents, siblings, other relatives and friends, do you affirm the value of appropriate encouragements, including physical affection?
8. How do you encourage appropriately affectionate physical contact between adults and children and also insure that all adults and children understand clearly that there is a line that cannot be overstepped? How do you clarify as individuals and as a community where that line is? How can you teach children to recognize and resist inappropriate sexual behavior directed toward them?
9. Are rules easier and safer for your children because they may make it unnecessary to make decisions again and again, according to circumstances? What risks and benefits might be involved in replacing rules with guidelines, so that more of the authority and responsibility of decision-making rests with the growing child?



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## Contemplating Marriage: Queries For Meetings

We ask all our Monthly Meetings very seriously to consider whether everything possible is being done to give timely, wise, sensitive and continuing help and guidance both before and throughout marriage, not only to prevent breakdowns but to build up and maintain the unity and happiness of enduring marriage.

—London Yearly Meeting, *Christian Faith and Practice*, 1959, #496

**F**riends 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, lifelong partnership. We feel that it is an awareness of the Light within each person that gives to 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 cre-

ativity. 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.

Because marriage is an important expression of the spiritual life of individuals and the community, we believe that a Friends meeting has a responsibility to take positive action in the spirit of love to support marriage and to try to assist marriages in difficulty. There are three avenues of action open in this area: First, to search for ways to educate people before they choose a marriage partner; to make available resources for people to learn about themselves, human relationships, and what marriage means—the problems, responsibilities and rewards that it brings—so that when they come to consider marriage Friends will be better prepared to make a mature and wise decision. Second, to be very careful in the guidance and clearness process with couples who seek to be married under the care of the meeting. Third, to provide whatever guidance and support possible to married couples as they seek to work out their life together. It is important that a meeting make known to a couple that the wedding is not the end of the meeting's concern for the marriage. Communication can be maintained even if the couple does not live nearby.

A meeting should distinguish in its policies between requests for marriage under the care of the meeting and requests for the use of the meeting house as a setting for a wedding that is not under the care of Friends.

These queries, questions and advices, are set forth with the hope that each meeting will have a tender care about the examples their families are setting for others, the nurture of individuals in the proper preparation for marriage, and an ongoing concern for a continuing happy marriage relationship.

We realize that there are both pastoral and non-pastoral meetings in New England Yearly Meeting. Pastors, at times, may perform the function of the committee on clearness. In such cases the pastor may find these materials helpful.

**Queries for Meetings**

1. Does the meeting have prepared material outlining Friends' marriage procedures, including appropriate questions (such as those that follow) to be made available to persons considering marriage?
2. Is the meeting familiar with the laws relating to the marital relationship in your state and the extent to which they often discriminate against women? Are we familiar with the laws governing marriage procedures under the care of the meeting?
3. Has the meeting recently discussed the responsibilities of the committees on clearness and oversight for a marriage? What training and guidance do we offer to persons asked to serve on such committees?
4. Is a clearness committee willing to work with a couple when it feels uncomfortable about any aspect of a planned marriage? Is the meeting willing to refuse oversight of a marriage because it has doubts about the soundness of the proposed marriage or the appropriateness of the arrangements?
5. Is the committee prepared to meet with the couple several times, if necessary, to achieve clearness? Are couples requesting marriage under the care of the meeting aware that more than one meeting is usually necessary?
6. In the case of remarriage, is the meeting aware that it, as well as the individuals directly involved, may have to do some adjusting to the new family pattern? Is the clearness committee prepared to take this into account in their work with the couple? If the meeting is still in a state of anger or grief over the ending of the former marriage or marriages, how can this be prevented from intruding on the help and outreach requested of a meeting in the case of remarriage? If the individuals concerned are still in a state of anger or grief over the ending of the former marriage or marriages, how can the committee prevent this from making the foundations of the new marriage unsound?
7. How do the committees on clearness and/or oversight (or the pastor) play a continuing role in the planning of a wedding?
8. How does the meeting help couples understand the process of seeking the Divine guidance invoked in the marriage promise?

9. Does the couple understand the relationship of a marriage to the stability and depth of the whole community?
10. How does the meeting encourage consideration of the concept of marriage, of what makes a marriage different from living together, and of what makes a marriage under the care of the meeting different from a civil marriage?

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## **Contemplating Marriage: Queries for the Couple**

It is a time of anticipation and joy when a couple approaches marriage, but it is important to realize that there cannot be a happy and satisfactory coming together unless there is mutual understanding and sharing of values and life styles. It is in this context that these difficult and probing questions are put forth - not to discourage or affright but simply to come face to face with reality; an acknowledgment that problems and conflicts are a part of life and are less formidable if faced honestly and frankly from the very beginning and not underestimated. Stresses understood and handled in this manner contribute to insight and growth not possible in any other way and can avoid much later misunderstanding and pain.

—“Queries to Those Contemplating Marriage”  
Hartford (Connecticut) Monthly Meeting

### **Queries for the Couple to Consider Together**

1. Does each of us see marriage as a sacred and lifelong relationship to be entered into with appreciation of its spiritual basis and its exacting demands of mutual consideration? Are we aware that a marriage relationship needs constant care and nurture to insure good growth?
2. What are our basic common values? Can we accept differences in our backgrounds, religion, temperaments or interests? Can

we meet these differences with humor, mutual respect, patience and generosity? Are we willing to resolve misunderstandings in a spirit of love? Have we the courage and the willingness to go together for outside guidance with any problem we are unable to solve?

3. Do we think of ourselves as trusted and equal partners in marriage, sharing the responsibilities and decisions of home and children? Are we mutually supportive of each other's goals for personal growth and fulfillment? Have we reviewed these goals together in the Light?
4. Have we considered together our desire for children, the problems as well as the joys they will bring, and our responsibilities for nurturing and guiding them? Do we expect to honor as well as to enjoy them, allowing the individual freedom for development due each of God's children within a family?
5. In the years to come, how do we plan to seek the Divine assistance we will invoke in our marriage vows?
6. How do we feel marriage will change our relationship? What are our expectations of marriage? Are our goals, lifestyles and expectations similar? How do we hope to be living in ten years? How do we hope to be living in fifteen years?
7. Have we lovingly and prayerfully considered the differences in values, needs and habits between us? Are we aware that differences need not be occasions for blame or accusation? If they become so, will we be willing to seek outside help? Has anger or hurt already flowed between us because of such differences? If so, has it been deeply felt and expressed? How has it ebbed? How can we use it in constructive ways?
8. Can we each speak our positive and negative feelings in an open and trusting way? Can we encourage each other to do so? Can we listen to each other?
9. Do we seek accord in the spiritual aspects of our lives? Is this search a source of guidance and strength in both good times and bad? To what extent do we share spiritual values? Are we careful not to force our individual beliefs on the other, or to make the other feel excluded if he or she does not share them?
10. Has our commitment to each other been tested by time, closeness, ordinary daily contact or distance? Have we had opportu-

- nities to experience both good and bad times together and appreciate each other's reactions?
11. Do we understand that achieving a good sexual relationship will take time, patience and a sense of humor?
  12. Do we recognize temperamental differences that could lead to difficulties but may also be complementary strengths?
  13. Are there cultural differences that might make for conflict? What are they? How well do we know each other's family?
  14. What do we identify as sources of potential conflict between us? When conflicts arise, how do we handle them? How do we set priorities? In the resolution of differences between us, are we committed to seeking new insights with God's help? Are we able to discuss such commonly difficult issues as money, property and use of time in a constructive manner?
  15. How do we feel about the traditional masculine and feminine roles? Have we discussed our individual responsibility for jobs in the home? What is the relative priority of our individual careers? In terms of time and attention, what is the relationship between home and career for each of us?
  16. Have we a financial plan for our life together, incorporating incomes for housekeeping necessities, education, recreation, medical needs, contributions, travel, etc.?
  17. Have we thoroughly discussed any health problems, both physical and mental, that each of us has or has had?
  18. Do we agree on the number, or absence, of children in our marriage? Are we in agreement on the timing and rearing (methods, discipline) of children, and the economics involved?
  19. Are we aware of the need for developing a variety of other friendships that contribute both to individual growth and to the marriage relationship? Have we explored and are we comfortable with each other's needs for such friendships, and about their nature and meaning?
  20. Do we realize that we will not be living an island-like existence after our wedding, but will be part of a community in which our relationship will make a difference to others? Are we aware that we can benefit from the friendly help and experience of others?

**Queries to Be Considered by Each Individual**

1. To what degree is my decision to marry based on: intense feelings; careful, thoughtful and prayerful consideration and mutual discussion; physical attraction; practical convenience; fulfilling the expectations of others (family, friends, meeting, culture); rebelling against the expectations of others?
2. Do I think that I will make a good partner? Can I compromise my plans and wishes out of respect for another's? Can I put myself in the other's position?
3. Is my desire to marry grounded in a network of existing friendships? Am I getting married because I don't have any friends, or perhaps as an escape from uncomfortable circumstances?
4. Do I try to be in touch with my partner's feelings and needs? Do we help each other in the sometimes difficult expression of them? Can I communicate my own feelings? If not, why not?
5. Do I find frequent and varied ways to express the joys of sharing with my partner? Am I sensitive to the timing of these expressions?
6. What is my present image of marriage? Am I open to changing this image as reality dictates? What relationship does this image have to my parents' marriage or to an earlier marriage of my own?
7. How free am I from old dependencies such as family, parents, grown children, friends or other emotional involvements? How do I expect to relate to each of these from now on?
8. Do I regard close relationships with people outside marriage as complementary or competitive with the marriage relationship? Do I expect to be all things to my partner? Do I expect my partner to be all things to me? To what extent does my partner meet my needs? How important are the needs my partner doesn't meet? Is it all right to meet these needs elsewhere?
9. Am I aware that accepting my own responsibility for change may be more fruitful than demanding change of my partner?
10. Do I know, or am I willing to learn, how to praise my partner and myself appropriately? Am I willing to struggle against my tendency to control my partner, or to be over-demanding? Am I able to share responsibilities comfortably and not insist that it be done my way?



11. Am I willing to recognize, accept, love and live with the individuality of another person? Do I look for and revere that of God in my partner and the individuality that makes him or her unique? Can I be a continuing factor in the expression of God's love in her or him?

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## Nurturing Marriage

Do you recognize marriage as a sacred, loving and permanent relationship requiring mutual consideration and adjustment? Are you an example to your children in your faithfulness to the ideals you profess? Do you practice the daily reading of the Scriptures in your family, giving time for reverent meditation? Do you make your home a place of friendliness, refreshment and peace, where God becomes more real to those who dwell there and to all who visit there?

—New England Yearly Meeting, *Faith and Practice*, 1985  
Excerpts from Queries #7 & #8

In the true marriage relationship the independence of husband and wife is equal, their dependence mutual, and their obligations reciprocal.

—Lucretia Mott, 1850

**W**e recognize the individual and his or her spiritual journey as an important unit of the Religious Society of Friends. We wish also, however, especially, in this time of differing cultural mores, to bear witness that the beauty and goodness of the marriage partnership, the sharing of mutual pleasures and joys, and the caring in sickness and health through the ups and downs of life can provide profound satisfaction and great opportunity for growth for oneself and for those whom we love and are responsible for. Within the covenant relationship of

marriage, the partners are free to love deeply and unreservedly, and to trust and nurture each other's growth. Much of what is said about nurturing marriage is equally applicable to any other enduring relationship.

**Queries for the Couple (either as individuals or together)**

1. Do you take time to affirm the other, to show appreciation for all the qualities and gifts that he or she brings to your relationship?
2. Are you willing to recognize, accept and nurture growth and change in your partner, allowing the other to develop her or his unique self? Do you offer tangible, as well as emotional, support in order to assist that growth?
3. What is most important to you in building an enduring relationship? Are your priorities the same? Have you reviewed them together recently in the Light?
4. Is your commitment not only to what is known, but also to the unknown? Can you use those times that stretch you to realize more fully a dependence on God?
5. In making decisions, do you hold choices up to the Light, trusting in the deeper leading of the Spirit, rather than being shaped by the rules and roles that others may thrust upon you? Do you seek to hold up to the Light conditions of stress or change in your life together?
6. Are you open in communicating your deep feelings to your partner, especially those feelings, negative or positive, that are persistently clear to you, being mindful that a creative, wholesome relationship is based on honest sharing of the needs and hopes of each of the partners? Do you seek to become clear about your own feelings, recognizing and allowing for those needs that are important for your growth as individuals and as a couple?
7. Are you able to express anger and hostility or frustration honestly but tenderly so that a creative resolution of such feelings may be sought? Do you try to share without unnecessary hurt, to forbear implying "I told you so" or striving to have the last word?

8. Are you open enough to the leadings of the Spirit and to each other to face in love those things that divide you? Do you try to listen creatively to each other, without interruption or contradiction? Do you seek to speak the truth in love, and to hear the truth in love? When conflicts arise, do you seek communication and mutual understanding rather than self-justification? Do you remember that openness is only a means, while the goal itself is trust? Do you remember that, when the sharing is hurtful to the other, it may be inappropriate?
9. Do you try to be sensitive to sources of conflict between you and willing to initiate communication toward their resolution? Have you considered new ways of looking at yourself, such as creative listening groups, professional or co-counseling, and couple enrichment retreats? Do you look to the meeting and shared worship together in this context?
10. Do you view all of life as sacred, including the sexual relationship, as the outward symbol of spiritual commitment, of inward love, trust, caring and sharing? Do you recognize that a good sexual relationship requires honoring one's own as well as one's spouse's sexual needs, and that it takes patience, time and a sense of humor as well as love?
11. Do you share equally the responsibility, burdens, and joys of parenthood and family planning?
12. Are you careful about holding in trust what has been shared deeply between you?
13. Are you mindful of each other's need for emotional and physical privacy? Are you able to combine independence and interdependence?
14. Do you seek to avoid possessiveness toward each other, recognizing each other's needs for a variety of friendships, as well as being mindful that human relationships need to be grounded in each individual's relationship with God?
15. Is there ample opportunity in your relationship for each partner to initiate as well as to follow? Are you prepared to take different responsibilities as conditions change?
16. Are you patient with one another, and do you make time for relaxation and play together, as well as your shared tasks, that you may maintain and enrich your knowledge of each other?

Do you take the time to share celebrations and small moments of joy?

17. Are you aware that your individual searchings and growth may not be concurrent, and that it may be important for each to be gently present to the other during times of searching and change?
18. Are you committed to working together on the changing process of this relationship, acknowledging that effort and care are needed to nurture any relationship if it is to grow and deepen?

### **The Meeting's Role**

Meetings have an important role in nurturing, supporting and celebrating the marriages under their care. Among persons of similar values and priorities, marriage partners can be sustained and guided in their efforts to build an enduring relationship. Communication among the members of the meeting is vital, however, and cannot be properly fostered if members only meet together for worship on First Day mornings and for business meetings. Celebrations, workshops and supportive discussion groups are all important within the life of the meeting.

There may be times of stress, even among the most stable of marriages, when special caring by the meeting may be needed. Such events may include:

- change of job or role for either partner;
- children—their arrival, rearing, and departure;
- illness;
- economic difficulties;
- times of loss;
- breakdown of communication within the family;
- devotion to a cause on the part of only one member;
- development of an individual and exclusive friendship;
- strain on the primal covenant relationship.

We should all be more willing to ask for help when we need it, learning to be more sensitive to others' needs and demonstrating that self-containment is not necessarily strength. Although there may be no one who has had the same experience as the one in present need, we have all experienced stress or crisis of some kind.

Many couples have been helped by a clearness committee at such a time. (See chapter 13.)

Meetings need to be supportive without being intrusive. While a meeting usually cannot offer professional counseling or therapy, it can offer loving concern. This, along with our witness to the never-failing love of God, is our gift. Friends should be aware that people give and receive help in different ways, so we must be open to the leading of the Spirit. For some, help might come from a small meeting for worship, called especially that we may search for truth together in the healing presence of God. For others, a listening ear and loving consideration are what is desired. Sometimes a simple neighborliness and helping hands will alleviate the stress. Even if an offer of help is rejected, it may still be appreciated.

### Queries for Meetings

1. Do we try to know each other well so as to be aware when help is needed? Do we seek to foster an atmosphere of spiritual oneness that encourages the development of trust among all members of the meeting?
2. Does the meeting provide opportunities to share the problems of living with others in a loving manner? Many people have found spiritually oriented creative listening groups, men's groups, women's groups or couples' groups very helpful.
3. Does the meeting have up-to-date books on family life, marriage and sexuality? Does it have a resource file of counselors, and therapists sympathetic to Friends' values who can be recommended to those requesting such help?
4. As a meeting, do we celebrate and affirm the efforts of couples within the meeting to build enduring relationships?
5. Does the meeting have workshops or retreats on topics relating to marriage and family living such as "couple enrichment" or "building enduring relationships"? If not, do we help and encourage our members to attend such events sponsored by other Friends' groups?
6. What special support do we as Friends offer those who are experiencing significant stress in their primary relationships? What role and ministry does the meeting have in such instances? Do we provide individual counsel?

7. Are we careful to avoid inappropriate interference and thoughtless gossip, offering instead help that is confidential, tactful and understanding? Do we seek to avoid taking sides or listening more to one party than to the other? Do we hold in loving care each of the persons involved?
8. In times of stress, do we seek together for guidance through shared worship by holding those concerns up to the Light?

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## Living with Children

Home and family are both a refuge from the hazards of the world and a path to a better world. In the loving home and family, young and old learn about equality and its limitations, simple forms of stewardship, integrity in its many guises, simplicity in all its complexities, and how hard but how satisfying it is to be peaceable.

—Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, *Faith & Practice*, 1997

**I**t is in the home that Friends' principles first become practices. The home is founded upon love, which reaches farther than words and is understood long before words have meaning. Love is expressed in the respect members have for each other and in confirming the Divine quality, that of God, in every person. Love binds the family together and yet allows freedom for all to develop uniquely. The testimonies and beliefs that make Quakers unique in the world community are primarily learned through experience and by example in the family. They are absorbed as children see their parents living their beliefs.

### **Our prayers for ourselves and our children are these:**

*to be open to the love and power of God within and among us,  
to respond to the leadings of the Spirit,  
to keep always in mind that each person is a special gift from God.*



**Queries for Parents**

1. Have you prayerfully considered your readiness for parenthood? Can you welcome your children into your life in an atmosphere of love and peace? Do you accept the responsibility for nurturing your children as appropriate throughout your life?
2. Have you considered the implications of being a Quaker parent? Do your religious convictions and your involvement in the Society of Friends enlighten your thinking and your behavior as a parent?
3. Do you seek out available sources of support and inspiration—family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, professionals, books? Do you also look to your meeting for the support you can use to meet your family's special needs?
4. Have you identified and worked towards resolving issues from your past that may impede your abilities as an effective parent?
5. Do you understand the spiritual and developmental requirements of growing children? Are you willing to make the necessary changes in your life to meet your child's evolving needs?
6. Do you share with your children your religious principles and those of our Quaker heritage, while leaving them free to develop as the Spirit of God may lead them? Do you help them to find that of God in themselves and other people, including people from other cultures? Are you an example to your children in your faithfulness to the testimonies you profess?
7. In your own life, do you teach your children directly and by example the various spiritual disciplines: meditation, devotional reading, prayer? Do you set aside time at home for regular worship-sharing within a family context?
8. Is sharing with and service to others, starting with family and friends, recognized as an important element in the life of your family?
9. Do you teach your children respect—for themselves, for you, for family members, for others, for the animal and plant life and other resources of this world?
10. Do you lead a disciplined life that expresses your values? Does your life convey to your children an integrity of beliefs and actions? Do you set limits for your children with love and patience and without becoming overly authoritarian?

11. Do you teach your children to communicate their thoughts and feelings effectively and appropriately? Do you lead them in being sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of other people, including yourself?
12. Do your children have opportunities to explore and experiment? Do you encourage them to develop their interests without taking control of them yourself? Do you discuss the need for good judgment in their choices of companions and activities?
13. Do you encourage your children to develop close, but not narrowly exclusive, friendships with others from an early age? Do they see you in more than superficial relationships with others outside the family?
14. Do you give loving oversight to your children's activities? Can you promote their safety, balancing their need for protection with the risks of being overprotective?
15. Do you find effective ways to introduce difficult issues and ideas to your children, appropriate to their age and understanding?
16. Do you share the spiritual bases of your economic values and priorities? Do you help your children learn that the way we earn our livelihood is as important as the possessions we acquire in the process? Are you candid with your children about your financial resources?
17. Do your children participate appropriately in the decisions and responsibilities of the home? Do you ensure that they take a meaningful part in the work of the home?
18. Do you acknowledge your feelings of hostility, anger, fear and guilt—both your own and your children's? Do you refrain from physical, sexual and emotional abuse? Do you prevent your children from being physically or emotionally abusive to you and to others?
19. Are you prepared to handle with honesty and love the conflicts that inevitably arise among family members? Are you open to the indications of needed changes that conflicts often carry? Do you offer guidance when needed in ways to solve problems without resorting to violence?

20. Do you strive to simplify your life so you regularly have uninterrupted time to spend with each of your children?
21. Do you involve yourself with your children's schooling?
22. Do you respect each other's privacy?
23. Are you aware of the emotional and spiritual needs of your children during times of crisis? Do you help them to deal in a healing way with trauma or grief?
24. Do you share the spiritual basis of your sexual values with your children? Can you support your child as he or she develops responsible sexual behavior and a healthy sexual identity?
25. Do you offer loving guidance in your children's teenage years, knowing when to hold firm and when to let go?
26. Will your home continue to be a home for your children long after they have left it?
27. Are you open to learning about God from children?

**Queries for Meetings**

1. Does the meeting welcome children into our spiritual community? Do our children and young people feel that they are loved and respected by Friends?
2. Do we appreciate the spiritual gifts as well as the needs and problems of the children and young adults of the meeting?
3. Does the meeting provide opportunities for children and adults to come together in worship, in service, in social gatherings and for special occasions? Do families in the meeting also have opportunities to help one another? Do we observe and support important occasions in people's lives, such as birth, marriages, deaths and other milestones?
4. Does the meeting help children and adolescents recognize what is sacred of their physical, intellectual and social selves?
5. Does the meeting provide First Day School classes in which children and young Friends can learn about Quaker beliefs, practices and history? Are the goals of the different classes coordinated so that children will be exposed to a broad overview of spiritual values over the years? Does our meeting show appreciation to the teachers of First Day School?
6. Is the meeting welcoming and helpful to single parent families?

7. Does the meeting recognize and respond to the unique needs of each family?
8. Has the meeting made every effort to insure that persons with responsibility for children are spiritually grounded and able to relate to children in a healthy and safe manner?
9. Does the meeting provide counsel and assistance in times of crisis or hardship for particular families? Do we offer clearness or support committees as a way of strengthening the family and the meeting?
10. Do we maintain a library of relevant writings and resources, encouraging children and their parents to use it?
11. Does the responsibility for religious education rest on the whole meeting, not just on the parents or the religious education committee?
12. As children grow older, are they encouraged to attend business meetings and to conduct their own with adult guidance? Are they invited to participate on committees and to share otherwise in the work of the meeting?
13. Does the meeting maintain relationships with its young adults as they move away from home?
14. Does the meeting provide times for worship, recreation, meals and work when all ages are together?
15. Does the meeting provide classes and special activities for children, and help them find opportunities for contributing to the life of the meeting?
16. Does the meeting make sure that parents have worship and study opportunities, with child care provided?
17. Does the meeting keep in touch with families regularly, so that needs such as those arising from illness or stress may be met?
18. Does the meeting assist families in developing their spiritual practices both at meeting and at home?
17. Does the meeting make sure that persons of all ages are welcomed, talked with and made to feel valued?

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## Contemplating Separation or Divorce

We need to encourage an understanding, and action upon, our marriage testimony...we have to consider how to help those whose marriages are in crisis to deal with their spiritual responsibilities....We must not give up the ideals just because acting on them is difficult. So we cannot say that the breaking of marriages is right. The attempt to reconcile, to forgive, to start again, must always be of first priority. However, from time to time, there may be situations where a couple have genuinely tried but have come to feel that their marriage is no longer sustainable. At this point, we have to recognise that Christianity places people and their needs before the keeping of rules.

—Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 1995, #22.75

Marriage is undertaken seriously, before God and the community, with a promise of lifelong commitment. The strength of the institution of marriage is important for the community, for the children and for the individuals involved. The marriage commitment requires sacrifice, patience and mutual consideration. No marriage should be broken lightly or quickly, without serious and prayerful consideration of the welfare of everyone in the family. A divorce or separation is the last resort, to be used when it is clear that it is impossible for the marriage to continue.

Some Friends feel that to discuss separation or divorce is to condone and encourage them. Others feel that to ignore the reality of divorce among Friends is to be hypocritical and that our silence rejects those undergoing the anguish of marital stress, separation or divorce. In our silence we also seem to assume that divorce is a mutual choice, when one of the couple may see it instead as a choice between divorce and abandonment. Queries seem inadequate to deal with such suffering, especially as we feel how limited our insights are.

### **Queries for Individuals or Couples**

1. What bound you together at the beginning of your marriage?  
What has happened to those ties?
2. What is your present image of your marriage relationship?  
What provision could you make for rediscovering and renewing it? How do you reconcile the tension between stability and flexibility?
3. How do your experience in marriage and your faith in God enrich each other? How have Biblical teachings and Christian traditions about marriage and divorce affected your decisions?
4. Are you open enough to God and to each other to face in love those things that divide you? Have you the courage and imagination to neither fight nor give in, but to find instead ways of being helpful to each other?
5. Do you struggle against any desire to control each other? Are you able instead to substitute caring and follow the leading of the Spirit? Are you able to avoid being over-demanding?
6. Have you shared your dreams as well as your fears with each other? Do you try to help each other in the sometimes difficult expression of them? Are you communicating your feelings and needs to each other? If not, why not?
7. Being aware that one's own unmet needs may get in the way of seeing and meeting another's needs, have you assessed your own needs and the extent to which they are not being met? Are you aware of your partner's needs, especially those that seem not to be met? Would it be enough if your partner should become better able to understand and meet your needs, or would you be likely to find some other reason for dissatisfaction?

8. Can you allow space to be separate within the marriage without thinking you are inevitably headed for divorce?
9. Have you thoroughly discussed any health problems, both physical or mental, that may be a source of trouble in the relationship? Are you careful not to ascribe physical or mental disabilities to your partner without professional backing?
10. Is your sexual relationship mutually satisfactory? If not, have you sought appropriate medical or psychological advice?
11. If you are strongly attracted to another person, can you be honest about it? Can you honestly face up to such an attraction, in hopes that your honesty can flow into revitalizing changes for your marriage?
12. If your spouse is strongly attracted to another person, how do you handle it? Can you talk about it and try to learn if the reason lies in dissatisfaction with your relationship? Can you ask for and try to accept honest answers?
13. Is each of you willing to recognize, accept, love and live with the individuality of the other?
14. Do you want to continue to share your lives? Are you willing to make changes so that you can?
15. How alike in basic personality are you and your partner? Is this likeness or unlikeness a source of conflict? Are the things you wish your partner would be and do things you can reasonably expect from a person of that personality type? Must your partner develop a different nature in order to meet your needs and be acceptable to you?
16. Are there things in your personality that make it hard for your partner to respond to you, things you want to change and with help can change? Are the things you would need to change such integral parts of your personality that they do not lend themselves to change?
17. Did you marry with a hidden agenda of changing your spouse to suit you? Can you now understand that this may be impossible?
18. Is there still a solid base of mutual love, caring and respect on which to rebuild? Is the damage so deep, the differences so irreconcilable, that an ending would be the beginning of healing?

19. Have you considered an experimental separation for a short, agreed upon time, rather than assuming that any separation will be a permanent one?
20. Have you participated in marital or family counseling or mediation? If not, will you consider it?
21. Can hurt pride be kept from getting in the way of reconciliation if a decision to separate is later reversed?
22. Do you realize that, especially where children are involved, separation and divorce do not end the difficult emotional and spiritual issues or the need for hard work and continued communication?
23. Are you prepared to continue a home-life for your children as a single parent?
24. Have you considered asking a clearness committee to meet with you?

The decision to seek the legal dissolution of a marriage is a weighty one. A specific desire for some regular means of approaching the meeting with a request for help has been expressed by people in trouble, resulting in the request to New England Yearly Meeting's Ministry and Counsel that such procedures be discussed, implemented and evaluated. One possible way that meetings might respond to such requests for help is through a special committee appointed by the Ministry and Counsel of the monthly meeting in conjunction with, and at the request of, the parties seeking help in making this decision. The committee is to listen without prejudice, facilitate communication, mediate but *not* prescribe, and provide as much impartial emotional support as possible. It is a time of seeking together for Divine guidance in working through one of the most difficult and painful times individuals can face. It is essential that an aura of love and concern surround those involved in their search for clarity. If dissolution of the marriage is the decision of the couple, the committee may be in a position to help minimize the traumatic effects on all concerned. (See chapter 13.)



Clearness committees for divorce could serve the same purposes as clearness committees for marriage. If couples in love may be blind to their incompatibilities, couples in trouble may be blind to latent possibilities in their relationship. Just because two people claim that their marriage is over does not mean that it necessarily is. A substantial proportion of decisions to divorce are ultimately reversed, even after couples have filed suit for divorce. Thus, a couple who informed their Meeting that they were contemplating divorce should no more be assumed to have made the right decision than a couple who informed their Meeting that they were contemplating marriage...

—Bob Blood, 1972,  
in New England Yearly Meeting, *Faith & Practice*, 1985

Friends must be careful to avoid judging or blaming one another. No one except the individuals involved knows all the circumstances. The final decision of what is right must be left to the individual conscience. Balancing compassion and conviction is a challenge for many of us. We must try to offer guidance and help to each person, to be open to the Light, and to grow in our understanding of God's will.

### Queries for Meetings

1. How can we as individuals or as a meeting express our religious convictions about marriage without coercion? Does our fear of being coercive inhibit our expression of these convictions? Is it appropriate to give advice based on these convictions?
2. Has the meeting explored ways to help couples to see the value of working through a long-term relationship?
3. Does the meeting hold or encourage attendance at workshops and retreats such as those on building relationships, nurturing and enriching marriage, conflict resolution, etc.?
4. Does the meeting have available resources such as a list of family and marital counselors who are sympathetic to Friends' views?
5. Does the meeting encourage members whose marriages have survived marital crises to be tender to those who have made other decisions?

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## Separation or Divorce

One of the realities of our meetings these days is that sometimes two people, whom we have come to know as a couple, are unable to sustain their relationship and decide to separate....It is important to affirm our love for all those who are directly affected, especially if there are children known to the meeting. The task of supporting an abandoned partner may call for special sensitivity and a willingness to be available during the dark moments. But the need to show our care for the other partner should not be overlooked either. Above all, the meeting must try to affirm that of God which is in all of us, whatever our feelings about who is to blame. This is a time for great prayerfulness, unobtrusive caring and gentle support. We must trust that, with grace, we may all find paths to grow, leading us out of the painful experience.

—John Miles, 1994,  
in Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 1995, #10.23

**T**hrough all the workshops and meetings that have addressed the question of separation and divorce, it has been clear that there is a great variety of opinion about divorce in our meetings. The increase of divorce concerns us all. Many people have begun coming to our meetings after divorce or separation, and we have tried to respond in love to their needs with varying degrees of success. The tension between our belief, as a Society, in marriage as a life-long commitment and the reality of divorce among our members has often been a more difficult situation for us to respond to, causing much agonized seeking by individuals and meetings. In both these situations we are committed to Jesus' commandment to "love one another as I have loved

you” and to continue a shared search into how to make this love visible in ourselves and in our meetings.

**When a Marriage is Dissolving**

Among Friends, marriage is entered into as a life-long commitment. Nevertheless, some marriages may become so painful and destructive to the persons involved that they can find no better solution than separation/divorce. The dissolution of a marriage that began in faith, love, and joy saddens us all. However, the recognition of this dissolution through divorce or separation may be the beginning of a process of healing and new growth. Even those of us who disapprove of divorce can feel an obligation to nurture and support the individuals.

Most people enter into marriage with sincere intentions of building a life-long partnership, trying very hard to resolve or accept the problems that develop and to build a strong and durable relationship. When, despite this effort, a separation or divorce is seen as necessary, feelings of anger, failure, grief, guilt and resentment are very common. Those who feel they married in the presence of God, promising in their vows to seek Divine assistance, may also face a spiritual crisis when their marriage no longer seems workable.

In coping with all these feelings, divorced or separated people may benefit spiritually and emotionally from help that is offered in an atmosphere of trust, openness, loving support and shared faith. The meeting should seek to provide that atmosphere, as well as companionship and practical help to all those involved in a separation or divorce in the meeting community, much as it would have done if the marriage had ended in death. Some Friends are afraid that this response may lead to support of divorce in the same way that we support marriage. But the support asked is for persons, just as in the case of widowhood. In the extended family of the meeting there is, or should be, concern and support for individuals. All within the meeting should be sensitive to each other.

If a clearness or support committee has been working with the couple, it may be able to help them with preliminary arrangements in terms of property division, child custody and support, alimony, etc. The committee should consider the queries relating to children

and close relatives (if they are appropriate to the situation) and search for ways in which they can communicate their concerns.

A clearness or support committee may need to be willing to hear and to allow expression of the deep distress and bitterness that a couple and their children may feel at the time of the break-up of the marriage. Some people must express negative and hostile feelings before they can creatively move on with their lives.

It may be that one partner has completely finished with the marriage while the other still wants to continue the relationship. Members of the committee (and the meeting) must be careful to respect the feelings of both individuals as they deal with this most difficult of situations. If there is another person intimately involved in the separation or divorce, special problems may be present, especially if that person is also part of the meeting. It may be necessary to include that person in the efforts of the committee of concern. Although for some Friends, it is possible for all parties to attend the same meeting, other divorced Friends may seek to worship in different communities. Meetings may find themselves grieving the loss of a member.

Offers of support and help should be given, even though they may be rebuffed. Such offers may be valued or help accepted even where there is not openness to sharing problems. Some couples may find it difficult to share the break-up of their marriage with a designated group. Therefore individual Friends need to be open to those they know well whom they may be able to help by sympathetic listening. We are all members, one of another, and the disruption of a marriage may disrupt the meeting as well, often with spreading circles of resentment, grief and anger. It is hard to hold to the steadfast principles of Christian love at such times, and yet it is then that they are most needed.

### **Queries for Meetings**

1. Has the meeting had open discussions of marriage and divorce in which all can share their views?
2. Is the Ministry and Counsel committee ready if one or both partners of a troubled marriage seeks help?

3. Are members of the meeting and Ministry and Counsel aware of the functions of clearness or support committees and how they can be used in situations of this nature? (See chapter 13.)
4. Does Ministry and Counsel actively and sensitively reach out to persons or couples who may be troubled?
5. If the couple so desires, can we provide them with a list of good professionals in personal and family counseling who understand and are sympathetic to Friends' views? Are Friends familiar with divorce-mediators or lawyers in their geographical area who will seek to avoid an adversarial position and assist the couple in seeking the least detrimental and most economical means to legally end a marriage, if that is their decision? Does the meeting have information regarding state divorce laws and procedures, particularly on the rights of women and minor children?
6. Can the meeting as a community reach out in love to all persons involved, helping them to grow past their animosities? Is the meeting careful not to be judgmental in family disputes? Does the meeting recognize that extra support may be needed at this time and possibly for some time to come?
7. Can members of the meeting avoid taking sides at the expense of one partner or the other? If the meeting finds itself too emotionally involved to help, will it consider calling on the quarterly or yearly meeting for resource persons? (See chapter 13.)
8. Can the meeting accept whatever solution the couple decides is best for them after careful exploration?
9. Are members of the meeting and Ministry and Counsel (or any special committee) clear that the decision for or against divorce rests wholly with the couple, and is not to be taken as approval of divorce by Ministry and Counsel or the meeting?
10. Can the meeting help with the special needs of children at this time?
11. Are there practical ways in which the meeting can be supportive, such as locating new housing, moving, child-care arrangements, etc.?

**Concerning the Children of a Dissolving Marriage**

Children need help at this time in seeing each parent as humanly fallible yet worthy of their love; the meeting has the challenge and opportunity to model this behavior. Parents and other Friends must recognize that for healthy emotional growth the child needs to love and respect both parents. In the break-up of a marriage, often one of the children's worst fears is that they may have been in some way responsible. Assurance that this is not so is of vital importance. Children also need to know that although the parents may no longer love each other, they still love their children.

It may be difficult for some children to recognize that their parents still love and care for them even though a two-parent home is no longer a reality. Some material comforts may have to be sacrificed. Tempting as it is (even unconsciously) to try to buy a child's love with lavish or numerous gifts, parents must remember that love, affection and deep personal interaction are far more important at this time than new toys or clothes. It is sometimes difficult for a parent to avoid attempting to enlist the child on his or her side. A child cannot be asked to make a judgment against a parent without doing great emotional damage to himself or herself.

Children respect and need honesty from their parents. Fears may only be heightened by secrecy about the situation. Children are very perceptive, and even a small child senses when all is not well between parents. Children neither need nor want to know the full details of parents' problems, but false smiles and hearty assurances that the child need not worry or be anxious may damage his or her belief in parental honesty or in the validity of his or her own perceptions. It is usually sufficient to tell the child that problems do exist and that the parents are trying to solve them. If there is reasonable doubt that the marriage will survive, the physical separation of one parent from the home can be better borne if it is somewhat anticipated. The shock of abrupt departure may give rise to fear and distrust of the parent who leaves as well as excessive clinging to the one who remains.

Parents can share their grief to some extent. The dissolution of a marriage is very painful for both parents and children. Sharing this pain and hurt can strengthen the bonds between the child and each parent. It allows the child to see that her or his own emotions are

valid ones. The eventual adjustment to new modes of living gives the child a chance to grow creatively and to see that problems which may seem insurmountable can be overcome. Parents and children who share grief can also share growth and joy.

...where people are married and especially where there are children, the commitment to be loving and faithful cannot be canceled but has to be renegotiated for a new situation. The partners still have a responsibility to each other, to care about and support each other...

—Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 1995, #22.75

### **Queries for Divorcing Parents and Others**

1. As individual parents, are you committed to the reality that, while a divorce may sever the marriage tie, you are still co-parents to your children and must find creative ways of living this commitment?
2. Are you mindful that even though your own pain and suffering may be great, your children are also in pain? Can you give of yourself at this time even though you may feel it is all you can do just to keep yourself together? Can you avoid both shutting your children out of your pain and leaning on them too much?
3. Can children be creatively involved in helping with some of the practical problems created by the separation and given a chance to express their own particular needs and wishes?
4. Are you mindful of the needs of your children for a continuing loving relationship with each parent?
5. Are you mindful of the special love between grandparents and grandchildren and do you endeavor to further strengthen that bond in spite of your own dilemma? Do you realize that although legal ties between spouses may be severed, this in no way affects the legal ties of the children to both families?
6. Can parents and other Friends recognize that children may naturally feel deprived and bitter at this time and allow for the expression of these feelings?
7. Should the children have a voice in selecting the persons who will take care of them temporarily if their parents are unable to do so?

8. Can parents and other Friends keep in mind the special needs of children for contact with others of their own age and time for play and recreation? Is companionship with other children in the meeting feasible and useful as a release from tension?
9. Can children of divorce be supportive of one another?
10. Can you guide and encourage your children in seeking their own Inner Light and in seeing that of God in both parents?

### **Queries for Relatives of the Separating Couple**

1. Do you recognize that your kin is the one who must directly live with the marriage or divorce and knows all the aspects of the situation more fully than anyone outside the marriage, no matter how close?
2. Are you scapegoating the other spouse because you are defensive of your own family member? Are you more critical of your own relative than of your in-law?
3. Are you judging your relative by your own values and attempting to impose your standards?
4. Do you try to give loving support freely and resist giving unsolicited advice?
5. Do you understand that you may have to do some patient listening before you can be heard?
6. Are you mindful of the need of the children to retain love and respect for both parents?
7. If you have a warm relationship with a former in-law, can you preserve it with patience and creativity without putting undue pressure on the former spouse and the children?
8. As parents of a separating spouse do you try to offer loving support while resisting the temptation to bring your child back into an emotionally dependent relationship with you?



# 9

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## After Separation or Divorce

“We all know of the heartache and sometimes the liberation that divorce brings....As a result, there are many people who are in great need of imaginative and ongoing support from their meeting. There will be feelings of bereavement, as of losing part of ourselves, of loneliness, frustration, resentment and anxiety...but it is then that we often discover new strengths in ourselves, and the value of true friendship...The ability to forgive and to accept the forgiveness of others may be the doorway that leads to new beginnings.”

—Rosalind Priestman, 1985,  
in Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 1995, #22.74

**A**s Quakers, we affirm that there is a power of love to draw on that is greater than ourselves, a love that transcends the anguish and bitterness of human failure and hurt. We are called to love our neighbor and our enemy, to care for and about the other, beyond all the issues of conflict or self. Though a change in relationship may mean that one is no longer the direct or immediate channel for the love that is nurtured between husband and wife, we are still called to acknowledge the “Thou” of the other in relation to God and to hold each other in the Light.

The period following a separation or divorce is a time of adjustment for all concerned. Children accustomed to seeing both parents every day may feel deprived in a new and unfamiliar situation. The

parent who has moved out will have radical adjustments to make in terms of new living space and limited time to be with the children. The parent who remains in the home may have to adjust to reduced income, a new job, the emotional burdens of single parenthood, etc. Children may, however, be a blessing in keeping a parent functioning. Those who do not have children may find themselves very distressed while they learn to adjust to living alone and making new friends. If one does not have the responsibility of either work or children, this can be a very difficult time indeed. Older persons experiencing divorce may find the adjustment to single life excruciatingly painful. Through all of this, supportive Friends can be most helpful.

When a divorce has been completed, the meeting may assist in announcing or formally recognizing the couple's new status, in accordance with their wishes. Community support may help minimize embarrassment or awkwardness at this time. Some people may wish to ask the meeting for a called meeting for worship following the divorce action. Such a meeting should not be interpreted in any way as approval of the divorce by the meeting; rather it is a recognition of an accomplished event and the individuals' continuing need for spiritual relationship.

Meetings must realize that adjustment may take a considerable amount of time, and great patience may be needed. Taking care to include singles and single parents and their children in social events may help divorced persons avoid the social isolation that often plagues them. Stress and deprivation in terms of the reduced amount of time a single parent can spend with children needs to be considered as well as possible reduced financial means. The meeting should be attentive to such special needs. Various special funds of monthly or yearly meetings for assisting attendance at conferences and yearly meeting sessions might be brought to the attention of the divorced person.

### **Queries After Separation or Divorce**

1. Do you seek Divine guidance in the conduct of your personal life?
2. Can you look to the meeting as a place for both a new beginning and a continuance of the positive aspects of the past?

3. Can you see yourself as an individual loved by the meeting?
4. Are there people in whom you can trust and confide who can help you grow as you move into this new part of your life?
5. Can you avoid asking the meeting or individual members to take sides?
6. Are you able to acknowledge the depth and intensity of your own feelings of anger, hostility, even violence? Do you try to repress or deny those feelings, or do you try to find appropriate ways to cope with them, to express them in ways that will not be destructive to yourself, your family or those around you? Do you seek to keep God's love as a vital force in your life to help you deal with these negative feelings?
7. Do you try to avoid hurting your former spouse or your children in your relationships with others, either in or out of the meeting?
8. Can you use this new situation for constructive self-assessment, for reexamining your values and goals, for finding and cultivating new interests, for growth and development of your mind and spirit?
9. Do you seek Divine guidance with your children in solving the problems of everyday life? Do you continue to attend meeting and encourage your children to do so?
10. Can you keep your personal bitterness, guilt and resentment from obscuring the needs of your children and the importance of their relationships within their immediate and extended families, as well as with persons in the meeting?
11. Can you encourage the continuing love of your children for their other parent?
12. Can you avoid making moral judgments against your former spouse and transmitting these judgments to your children?
13. Do you try to avoid making disparaging remarks and asking your children prying questions about your former spouse?
14. Are you using your children as a weapon or threat against your former spouse?
15. Are you wary of treating your former spouse as a convenient baby-sitter, rather than considering his or her needs for adult social contacts?

16. If possible, can the children see and visit the non-resident parent as much as both desire? Is visiting with the non-resident parent encouraged regardless of any financial support provided by that parent?
17. Can you accept and work through with them the anger and hostility the children may feel toward their parents for their changed lives?
18. Are you careful not to allow your new social situation to absorb you to the detriment of your children's well-being? Do you avoid upsetting your children by introducing too many new people into their lives too fast? Do you consider the sensibilities of your children in selecting the companions and settings of your new life?
19. Do you expect too much of your children in terms of responsibility for themselves or for their siblings? Do you expect too little of them and over-protect them from the difficulties of the new situation?
20. If you or your former spouse form new relationships or remarry, do you encourage your children and your new partner to treat one another with courtesy, respect and love? Can you allow for the expression of natural feelings of bitterness and hostility that children may have out of loyalty to their other parent?

#### **Advice from Children to Children (and Concerned Adults)**

"Sometimes a divorce can be a relief for the kids."

"Love your parents as individuals. When they have a good partnership, love and appreciate it. In a divorce it isn't there any more and that is what hurts, but you can still love them."

"Don't expect a whole lot. Divorce isn't the end of the world, but it won't solve all a family's problems, either."

"There really isn't a whole lot that anyone outside the immediate family can do."

"Kids aren't always so hurt by divorce."

"Sometimes it's even hard to end up loving both parents."

“Parents continue to owe their kids emotional support.”

“Joint custody and flexible living arrangements are best.”

“If they’re mature enough, kids should choose who they live with.”

“Whenever he wanted to see us, we were supposed to be at his disposal. I resented that.”

# 10

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## Living without a Partner

The amount of solitude which is attainable or would be wholesome in the case of any individual life is a matter which each of us must judge for himself...A due proportion of solitude is one of the most important conditions of mental health. Therefore if it be our lot to stand apart from those close natural ties by which life is for most people shaped and filled, let us not be in haste to fill the gap; let us not carelessly or rashly throw away the opportunity of entering that deeper and more continual acquaintance with the unseen and eternal things which is the natural and great compensation for the loss of easier joys...Our wisdom therefore must lie in learning not to shrink from anything that may be in store for us, but so to grasp the master key of life as to be able to turn everything to good and fruitful account.

—Caroline E. Stephen, *Light Arising*, 1908,  
in Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 1995, #22.30

**F**riends who are single, for whatever reason—whether by choice or by chance, whether never married, or separated, divorced or widowed bear a particular witness to the conviction that the individual and his or her spiritual journey is an essential unit of the Religious Society of Friends.

Many of us yearn for the meeting of minds and the affectional, spiritual and sexual union with another that is true marriage, but having failed to find it, or having found it and lost it, we need, as all persons do, to affirm ourselves and to be affirmed as children of

God. We find, as the married Friend must also find, that we must strive for wholeness in ourselves.

**Queries for Individuals**

1. Do you appreciate the privacy, freedom and flexibility that being single offers? Have you considered the opportunities for growth and service that are available to persons without family responsibilities?
2. When you are lonely and unhappy, what steps do you take to cope with or change your situation? Do you have interests that you can enjoy by yourself? Do you wait for external events or other people to rescue you? Do you make an effort to reach out to others for companionship?
3. Do you realize the importance of inner stability and guidance? What part does prayer have in your life, or meditation, reading, journal-keeping and other ways for spiritual search and growth? Have you explored the possibility of asking a few persons in the meeting to meet with you on a regular basis to discuss these ways of deepening your spiritual lives and encourage each other to use them?
4. Do you view marriage or intimate relationships as the only way to find emotional support, nurturance, companionship? Have you explored other ways of meeting your emotional needs, such as small worship groups or extended families? If you think of children as an important part of your life, do you look for ways to spend time with children in your meeting or community?
5. Can you accept the fact that some persons find a partner early in life, many do so at a later time, and some not at all? Do you try to determine your own life pattern independently of what others around you are doing? Do you take yourself seriously as an adult? Do you tend to stereotype yourself? Can you accept being single as a positive life pattern without being defensive or aggressive about it?
6. How do you handle the disappointment of sexual or other relationships that do not work out in the way you had hoped they would? Do you have the courage to look at a relationship realistically and, if necessary, to alter or end it? Do you tend to

deny your own needs, or demand that the other do so, for the sake of holding on to a relationship? Do you view past relationships as failures or as opportunities from which to learn and grow? Can you let go gracefully? Can you treasure particular friends for particular reasons without expecting them to fulfill all your needs?

7. Are you able to ask for support during difficult periods? Can you try to remember, in periods of darkness and discouragement, that you may be standing in your own Light? Can you accept yourself as you are—and go on from there? Have you tried reaching out to others when they need support?

All of us, partnered or single, need to feel that we belong, that we are valued and included—we need affirmation and recognition of who and what we are—we need, in our meeting especially, to make sure that this happens.

—Jennifer Johnson, 1990,  
in Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 1995, #22.31

### Queries for Meetings

1. Does the meeting try to see people as individuals rather than categorizing them according to marital status? Are the meeting's committee appointments free from stereotypes, e.g., sex, age, marital status?
2. Does the meeting include single persons, and persons in unconventional relationships, in the social life of the meeting? Do we take for granted that no one is excluded from the spiritual communion of the meeting for worship?
3. Does the meeting respect single persons as responsible adults? Do we offer them opportunities to serve on committees, to host fellowship meals, to share in child care, teach First Day School, welcome new members, join small study groups?
4. Is the meeting sensitive to the special needs of single adults for emotional support in times of trouble—and for sharing in times of joy?



5. Does the meeting plan holiday gatherings and other celebrations that may be particularly welcome to persons who live alone, especially those without close family ties? Individually and collectively, do we include single persons in aspects of family life?

# 11

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## Remarriage

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,  
in New England Yearly Meeting, *Faith & Practice*, 1985

If a couple have failed, and broken away, and suffered; and if there comes into their lives a new hope of building a home, and they approach it responsibly, gravely; then it is surely right...to stand by them in love and sympathy and hold them up before the Lord...It is thus that the sanctity of marriage is asserted, rather than in the denial of a new start.

—Harold Loukes, 1962,  
in Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 1995, #22.76

**W**hen a divorced or widowed person wishes to remarry, it is a time for rejoicing. Remarriage is a new commitment to the ideal of life-long partnership and it takes much faith, strength and courage to remarry following the traumatic loss of a spouse. While there are many differences between losing a partner by death and by divorce, there are also basic similarities and problems. Anger, hurt, resentment, loneliness, feelings of failure and unreal expectations are only a few of the specters from the past that may haunt a remarriage. Realistically coming to grips with problems and seeking solutions before the wedding may give a remarriage the solid base it needs.

**Queries for Couples**

1. How much time has elapsed between your divorce or the death of your spouse and your new relationship? During that time, what has been the quality of your life? Has it been a happy time? Has it been a productive period of self-discovery and growth, or a time of living in a precarious emotional or financial state? If the overall quality of this time has been negative, how much is this a factor in your desire for remarriage?
2. Have you prayerfully explored, together and individually, your first marriages: similarities, differences, life styles, work and recreation habits, goals, priorities, etc.?
3. How many times have you been married? What was the quality of each marriage? What effect might this have on your proposed marriage?
4. How long have you known your intended spouse? Do you truly know her or him well? What are the similarities and differences between your former and future spouses? What are the qualities you most admire? What are the qualities you most dislike? Can you learn to live with those qualities you dislike, or are you expecting him or her to change after the marriage? How realistic are your expectations? Do you avoid making unfavorable comparisons between your former and future spouses?
5. Can you speak freely with each other about sex? Are your attitudes similar? If early inhibitions and prejudices had an adverse effect on your sexual adjustment in your first marriage, have you worked these out so that the pattern is not repeated?
6. Are you ready to learn new patterns of communication with your future spouse, and set aside the patterns you developed with your previous spouse? Can you openly discuss these old habits to avoid miscommunication?
7. Are you prepared to explore behaviors that are reminders of a previous spouse, and in particular negative responses to such reminders, in a spirit of inquiry rather than blame?
8. Can you maintain a sense of humor regarding such errors as calling your future spouse by your former spouse's name or remembering trips or events and forgetting which spouse you had at the time?

9. What is the difference in age between you and your future spouse and how will it affect your future? If you have children by a previous marriage, do you wish to have additional children in the new marriage? Do you agree on this issue? If one of you definitely does not wish to have children, does the other feel comfortable with that decision?
10. If you have a career, how does your future spouse feel about it? How committed are you to your own career? If either of you were offered an excellent job in a distant location, what would happen? Would the decision for one of you to give up your career be mutual?
11. If you have known one another for many years, do you perceive and understand the differences between the old relationship and the new one?
12. How have you worked out legal details such as inheritances, insurance policies, ownership of property, etc.? If either of you has an independent income, how will this affect your personal as well as financial relationship? What will happen to a house or personal effects in the event either of you dies? Have you each prepared adequate wills, and are you familiar and comfortable with the terms of each other's will?
13. Have you considered how you will divide earnings, household chores, child care, etc.?
14. If you each own a home, where will you live? Is it possible for you to feel comfortable in a home formerly shared with another? How do you each feel about using furniture, china, utensils, etc., that belonged to a former spouse? How do you feel about your new spouse using items that belonged to your former spouse? If you have children, how do they feel? Would you be more comfortable in a new location?
15. Do you share a common religious faith? If not, are you tolerant and accepting of each other's belief and the actions that stem from them? Are you careful not to force your own beliefs on your new spouse or to make him or her feel excluded? Can the meeting or individuals in the meeting help you with this?
16. Do you strive to direct your heart and mind to the future and not dwell on the past? Are you willing to open yourself fully to love with the knowledge that you may again be hurt? Do you

treat your future spouse with consideration, respect and tenderness? Are you mindful of the joys of a shared life and concentrate on them, rather than on the difficulties? Are you aware that love deepens and matures with time and careful, sensitive nurturing? Do you endeavor to hold each other in the Light?

**Remarriage Involving Children**

The problems encountered by those couples with children from a previous marriage and still living in the home are quite different from childless couples or those with grown children. Learning to cope with, care for, and love children whom you have not known from infancy calls forth tremendous resources of patience, humility, strength and faith. Time and again children will cause anguish and pain in a new marriage, often because they did not want the marriage to take place. Even in instances where the marriage may have seemed desirable to the children, the remarriage of their own natural parents would have been preferable. Children can so easily be the rock upon which the remarriage founders. Parents, striving to create a family where one or two separate families existed, are lovingly urged to build a strong relationship with each other that can withstand the onslaughts of jealous, hurt, fearful children. The paradox that often exists is that the children so desperately need the very relationship between parent and step-parent that they seek, consciously or unconsciously, to destroy. Especially at this time, a shared religious faith can be of utmost value.

One of the first problems encountered by those with children will be the creation of a very extended family. Some people have found it useful to draw their current family tree and their family tree after marriage, including all living relatives with whom they will have any contact. If widowed and still in contact with in-laws, include them. If divorced, include the ex-spouse and his or her new spouse and family, if any.

**Queries for Individuals**

1. How do you feel about each relationship from past and current marriages? Are you comfortable with taking all of these people into your life? How often do you see each person? What are your current arrangements for holiday get-togethers and how

will your remarriage affect these plans? How far away do the relatives live? How comfortable are your relationships with your former in-laws? Is your future spouse comfortable with his or her relatives and with your relatives?

2. Are your former in-laws concerned that they may be supplanted by your remarriage in terms of the children? Do you recognize that despite your remarriage, your children are still legally and often emotionally attached to your former in-laws? Can you allow and encourage continuation of these existing relationships?
3. Are you both fully aware that your new marriage is not only to each other but to each other's children as well? Does your relationship with your future spouse have the depth and breadth to encompass the stresses of a "ready-made" family? Are you mindful that children form a small part of your total life together? Are you comfortable with each other without the children?
4. If both of you have custody of minor children, how will the two families merge? What are the similarities and differences in ages, interests, hobbies, etc., of the children? How will you handle the natural jealousies that will occur between the children? If the children do not like each other, how do you propose to improve the situation?
5. If both of you have custody of minor children, are you and your future spouse in agreement on child-rearing practices, discipline, morals, religious training?
6. How do you feel when your future spouse interacts with or disciplines your children? Do you intercede for the children or allow those involved to work out the problem? Can you and your future spouse speak openly and honestly on this subject? Can you compromise, if necessary? If you have allowed or encouraged your children to assume certain responsibilities that you would now like your future spouse to assume, how will your children react?
7. If you or your future spouse has never been a parent, how will the adjustments be made to life with children? Does the non-parent like children and understand all the difficulties as well as rewards of living with them? Have you spent enough

time together as a family to see what demands the children make on your relationship, and can you both realistically meet those demands?

8. Are each of you comfortable with the number of children you now have? Would a decision to have more children be mutual? If one of you has not had children, how would a new baby affect your relationship with the existing children? Can you discuss this issue with the children? If their response is negative, how will you react?
9. What financial arrangements have been made for the children from the former marriages? Is your new spouse expected to pay partial or full financial support for his or her children? Your children? Can you afford additional children if you are paying child support or alimony to a former spouse? How do you both feel about such payments?
10. Are you able to seek advice and help from those in the meeting as well as professional counseling or mediation, if necessary? Do you seek Divine assistance both alone and together in working through the problems you face?

#### **Queries on Marriage After the Death of a Spouse**

1. Are your in-laws or future in-laws concerned that their deceased relative will be forgotten by the children? How can you lovingly handle this situation?
2. If there are children still in the home, have they been given sufficient time to grieve and mourn the loss of their parent?
3. Can you speak with ease about your former spouse without forgetting his or her frailties as well as virtues? Can you assist your children in remembering the deceased parent as she or he really was? Can you encourage your children to integrate their past and present lives? Can you help them walk the delicate path between fond remembrance and unhealthy longing for the past?
4. Can you encourage the children to find joy and love with the new parent and aid them in seeing that love and affection for a new parent is not at the expense of the deceased parent? If appropriate, can you honestly assure them that the deceased parent would have wished them to love the new parent?

5. If you are marrying into a family that has lost a parent, are you tender of the loyalties the children may feel for the deceased parent? Can you move slowly into your new role, recognizing that time is necessary for children to accept you into their hearts and lives? Are you able to speak freely with your future spouse about these issues?
6. If the children have been living with relatives or a favorite housekeeper, how will you and your future spouse help them make the transition into the new living situation?
7. How do your children feel about your future spouse? If your children are grown, how much do they still influence your life?
8. If you are acquiring grandchildren by remarriage, are you tender of the feelings of the children for their lost grandparent?

#### **Queries on Remarriage After Divorce**

1. Have you deeply and prayerfully examined your former marriage and understand the reasons the divorce occurred? Can you view your past marriage dispassionately and see your own failures as well as those of your ex-spouse? Can you forgive yourself and your ex-spouse for the pain and suffering that you may have inadvertently or deliberately caused each other?
2. How much time has elapsed between your separation and divorce, and between your divorce and proposed remarriage? Are you remarrying to escape living alone, or to insure financial security, or to share the burdens and responsibilities of raising your children?
3. Has your former spouse remarried? Is this a factor in your desire for remarriage?
4. How much interaction do the children have with the non-custodial parent? What is the quality of these interactions? Are the visits regular and planned, or sporadic? Do your children feel they cannot like your future spouse out of loyalty to their other parent? How can you handle such feelings? Can you openly, honestly and lovingly discuss such problems with your future spouse?
5. If your future spouse does not have custody of his or her children, what are the visitation arrangements? Are you jealous of the time your future spouse spends with his or her children?



6. What is your role to be with your future spouse's children? Are you comfortable with that role? Are you fully aware of the joy, as well as the pain, hurt and humiliation you may suffer because of the children?
7. Are you comfortable with the expectations of your role with the children of your future spouse and his or her ex-partner? How will you meet those expectations or modify them, if necessary? Can all parties involved openly discuss these matters?
8. Are the children a point of issue between parents? Is either parent seeking to modify or completely change custody arrangements? Are there limitations written into the custody agreement that prohibit moving to another state or area? Are you aware of other possible continuing legal or financial entanglements remaining from the previous marriage? Can you give loving and creative support in constructively working through these problems with the knowledge that these pre-existing obligations may limit new directions of your marriage?
9. If you are confronted with a manipulative and jealous ex-spouse, can you continue to make decisions and live a married family life in a spirit of love and concern for the welfare of all involved, including the troublesome ex-spouse?

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## As We Grow Older

Here is the unfailing attraction of the life in Christ. It is a life, which even to old age, is always on the upgrade; there is always something calling for a joyful looking forward....

—William Littleboy, 1917,  
in Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith & Practice*, 1995, #21.44

“I’ve gone to many kinds of schools, but of all the courses in the university of life, the course in old age is the hardest; the one with the most lessons to learn. Your generation is gone. You can no longer count on your intellect or your memory. Your hearing lets you down. You can’t keep track of things and you’re always misplacing them. But you learn so much. You learn to accept help and to remember with your heart. To live always with the generations that went before, with those alive now, and with the generations to come—all that we must surely learn. In one way life is like a mountain climb, and we keep going steadily upward toward our death. And when we meet it, when Brother Death comes and gives us permission to go on across the frontier, then we must meet him with thankfulness, only with thankfulness.”

—Emilia Fogelklou, 1985,  
in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, *Faith & Practice*, 1997, #190

**S**ome people find increased interests and zest for life as they age. Some people experience an increased spirituality as they grow older. For some, old age is a lonely time when spouse and friends have gone before. Others may be over-

whelmed by pain, by agitation, or the humiliation of a checkbook that won't balance. In our wider culture, as with the very young, older members of society are not honored and may be discriminated against by the mere fact of being a certain age. While medical advances have made it more likely that we will live longer, they do not address how to make our later years satisfying and spiritually beneficial to ourselves and those around us, or how to find the respect and support that we need. As at every stage of life, we approach these problems in a wide variety of ways. Some are grateful to let go of more and more practical responsibilities, happy to spend time in contemplation and prayer. Others find a need to keep busy and appreciate the extra time that retirement allows for social activism, volunteer work, and spending time with grandchildren. We need to seek a balance between giving up too easily when faced with lessening physical and mental capabilities and denying the existence of such changes to the extent that we are unrealistic about what we can safely and reasonably accomplish on our own. The meeting community can be a great support for its elders as they face physical and emotional challenges, as it is enriched by their experience and history. Including elderly Friends in meeting activities may require the same care and creativity as including the very young. In an era when people are often segregated by age, this care rewards us with a heightened sense of the wholeness of life.

**Queries for Individuals**

1. Do I seek for continuous inner growth throughout life? Do I value each stage of the life span?
2. Do I strive for insight into each new stage, with its inevitable losses yet its opportunities for spiritual growth?
3. How can I experience aging in terms of creative use of freer time, fresh opportunities for service, wider social relationships and deeper understanding of myself and of my world?
4. Do I actively pursue intergenerational relationships and experiences? Do I travel freely among persons of all ages—giving, receiving, sharing?
5. As I grow older, what living arrangements do I envisage? Am I considering all the options my inclinations and finances permit?

6. Do I expect change? Can I accept losses in physical vigor, vision and hearing, and yet plan and keep a balanced regime of good nutrition, exercise of body and mind, health care and spiritual nurture?
7. Do I recognize that I must make a gradual transition from independence to increasing dependency? Am I willing to ask for and graciously accept help as needs arise?
8. Am I learning to dispose of extraneous possessions and clutter? Am I a good steward of material possessions?
9. Can I express my feelings of grief and accept the death of close friends and relatives?
10. Do my expectations of life include my own death?
11. Have I made clear my wishes regarding treatment in the event of terminal illness?
12. Have I taken care of the practical details in planning for my own death? Have I recorded my wishes and pertinent information with my family and my meeting?

### Queries for Meetings

1. Is the meeting a good one to grow older in?
2. In what ways does the meeting encourage intergenerational gatherings and relationships?
3. Does the meeting show a continuing care and concern for the spiritual and practical needs of our older members, especially those who live alone and lack close family ties?
4. How can the meeting utilize the talents, time and experience of our older members in the work of the meeting?
5. Are we aware of the losses and role changes of old age? (Examples: sensory losses, physical handicaps, loss of spouse or friends, change in professional status.)
6. When we speak in meetings for worship, business or other gatherings, can our messages be heard?
7. Does the meeting act to modify or eliminate architectural barriers in the meeting house?
8. Are we sensitive to the difficulty some older Friends may have in asking for or accepting help, such as with transportation?
9. How can we be helpful to parents and adult children as they adapt to changing roles—dependence, independence, interde-

- pendence? Are we aware of appropriate counseling and support services?
10. Is the meeting learning how to help those facing terminal illness?
  11. Does the meeting encourage all members to plan for death and memorial arrangements and keep needed information on record?
  12. How does the meeting give both short- and long-term support to bereaved individuals and families, and assist them in their grief?
  13. What committee or persons is/are responsible for implementing the meeting's concerns for our older members?

**Queries for Adult Children**

1. Do you have the wisdom to know when independent living is no longer in the best interest of the aging parent and/or the caretaker?
2. When you must make decisions, do you consider what your parents would choose were they able to do so?
3. Do you have open communication on practical matters and present and future problems such as finances, wills and disposal of family or personal valuables?
4. Do you encourage family history sharing between generations?
5. Do you accept parents' increasing limitations realistically, helping them seek appropriate services, glasses, hearing aids, dentures and other medical care?
6. Are you prepared for some dark times: frustration, resentment, hostility, anxiety? Are you aware that moods fluctuate and physical vigor is variable? In your relationship, do you respond with love?
7. Are you careful to know your own physical and emotional limitations? Do you remember to balance your own family's needs with those of your aging parents?

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## Clearness Committees for Personal Discernment

**T**he spiritual strength of a meeting finds important expression through the loving community of its members. Out of awareness and responsiveness of its members to each other grow the bonds of trust and love that allow the meeting to find coherence in its spiritual life and unity in its actions.

It is appropriate to the development of this spiritual life that members of the meeting should feel free to approach the meeting for assistance in dealing with major turning points in life, including such matters as career decisions, lack of funds to live on, terminal illness, withholding of taxes, difficulties in relationships. One way that meetings could respond to this desire for help is through clearness committees, which offer support during difficult times, and discernment committees, which assist in making a decision. Both types of committee can be appointed by Ministry and Counsel of the monthly, quarterly or yearly meeting in conjunction with, and at the request of, the individual or individuals seeking help.

A discernment committee to consider marriage under the care of the meeting or a request for membership in the meeting is established for a particular reason, and has the goal of joint discernment between the couple or individual and the meeting; the meeting chooses the members of such discernment committees. In contrast, the

individual(s) requesting a clearness committee for personal discernment can choose or suggest members of the committee.

A clearness committee for personal discernment meets with the individual or family, not as professional counselors nor as friends discussing a problem and giving advice, but rather as caring Friends, drawing on the resources that bind us together in our meeting for worship. Maintaining a spirit of openness and prayerful waiting, the committee seeks to help the individual become clear about an impending decision by serving as a channel for Divine guidance. The members of the committee are there to listen without prejudice, to help clarify alternatives and their implications, to facilitate communication if necessary, and to provide emotional support as an individual or family seeks to find God's will. The size of such a committee and the number of times it meets with those seeking to make a decision depend on the circumstances. However, care should be taken that a clearness committee does not turn into an ongoing support committee with an indefinite term. The committee is normally made up of people from within a monthly meeting, but there may be times when members of the monthly meeting find themselves to be too close to the decision to be helpful, or when special resources available at the quarterly or yearly meeting levels would make a committee drawn from a larger body more appropriate.

### **Forming a Committee**

Committees may come into being in different ways depending on the situation. Those seeking clearness should feel free to use whatever method seems easiest and most comfortable. Examples of possible methods that could be used include the following:

- a. *Through the meeting as a whole.* Those seeking clearness may initiate a committee while the meeting is gathered for worship or business. The nature of the problem or decision should be described to the group and a request made that those willing to serve on a committee meet briefly afterwards.
- b. *Through the clerk or any other member of Ministry and Counsel.* The individual or individuals seeking clearness may ask the clerk or another member of Ministry and Counsel to arrange a committee for them. In these cases, an informal conversation between those seeking clearness and the person asked to form

a committee can serve to clarify the reasons for asking for a committee and suggest potential members. The clerk or another designated person would contact the suggested members and arrange for a first meeting. When this method is used, more potential members should be suggested than will be needed, since some may not be available. The person asked to form the committee need not be asked to be a member of it, and those who are asked to serve should not feel compelled to do so.

### **Conducting a Committee**

1. At the first meeting a clerk will be appointed to facilitate the meeting and do any follow-up that may be necessary. It is also important at this meeting for the committee to come to common agreement with those seeking clearness on the approach to be used and the approximate time period before evaluating the usefulness of continuing to meet.
2. Members of the committee should respect the needs for confidentiality of the individual or individuals seeking clearness. The degree to which confidentiality is desired should be agreed upon at the initial meeting.
3. Members of the committee may choose to meet without the person, couple, or family seeking clearness in order to clarify among themselves what has been said and what issues need to be addressed.
4. After one, two, or three meetings, the committee, together with the person or persons seeking clearness, should determine whether continuing would be useful or whether a support committee or an oversight committee should be appointed to aid the person in keeping clear and/or in being accountable to the clarity reached. In contrast to clearness committees, which are short-term, support or oversight committees meet on some ongoing basis. Members of the clearness committee are free to release themselves from further commitment or to offer to serve on such committees. A third question might be whether professional counseling should be recommended. It is important to recognize when the problem or the need is beyond the



resources of the committee so that other approaches may be initiated.

5. It should be understood by all concerned that the decision finally reached with the help of a clearness committee for personal discernment is neither sanctioned nor condemned by Ministry and Counsel or by the meeting. The clearness committee may help with the process, but the final decision is the responsibility of the individual or family concerned.

### **Queries to Consider in Forming a Committee**

1. Does the committee have a good range of age and experience?
2. Is the committee too large or too small to be effective?
3. Can members of the committee work well together and put aside personal biases?
4. If it is a family decision, do all the members involved feel comfortable with the committee? It is not always necessary that all members of the family be in accord with seeking the help of a committee in reaching a decision, but the committee must keep all members of the family in mind and be careful not to take sides, or even to appear to take sides, against a family member who refuses to participate in the process of seeking clarity through a committee of this nature.
5. If there are children involved, is there someone on the committee especially concerned with their needs? Is it appropriate for some or all of the children to meet with the committee?

Consider asking persons outside the meeting community, such as members of yearly or quarterly meeting Ministry and Counsel or others with special resources, to serve on such committees. This may be the best procedure when a meeting is too emotionally involved in the problem to be helpful to those seeking clarity. If part of a couple or family is not a part of the meeting, consider asking some non-Friends to serve on the committee.

### **Queries for Those Asked to Serve on a Committee**

1. Do you feel sufficiently at ease with the other members of the committee to work with them? Can you labor with them to truly provide an atmosphere in which Divine guidance can be sought?

2. If it is a family decision, can you listen without prejudice or bias to each member who is involved?
3. Can you devote sufficient time and energy to this committee, knowing that clarifying the problem and providing support while the decision is made and carried out may take several meetings and many weeks or months?
4. Can you 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 wider sharing of their problem?
5. What questions can you ask, or issues can you raise, that a non-religious counselor could not appropriately raise?

#### **Advices for Those Asked to Serve on a Committee**

1. Consider that persons are capable of changing and growing. Do not become absorbed with reasons for present problems. Focus on what is happening now to maintain the situation and explore what could be done to change it.
2. Notice the concept of blame, whether it is directed at self or others. Point it out when it occurs and discuss its consequences.
3. Do not give advice; do not present solutions to others. Do not create dependency by taking over responsibility. Remember that it is your task to help clarify the problem, not to make the decision.
4. Do not take sides if it is a family problem. Each person contributes to the problem, its continuation, and its solution.
5. Truly listen to the other persons present, not just wait until it is your turn to talk. Watch for verbal and non-verbal expression.

Committee members should be sensitive to the issues but not personally involved. All share responsibility, but the primary responsibility is the clerk's, who should:

1. Convene the meetings at mutually agreeable times and places.
2. Surround each meeting with a waiting silence; begin and end with worship.
3. Give equal attention to each person present, whether adult or child.

# Appendix

This fourth printing (2001) is presented as a revision of previous printings, and was guided by the Ministry and Counsel Committee of New England Yearly Meeting. The changes throughout are attempts to: 1) make *Living With Oneself and Others* consistent in its format, and 2) delete outdated bibliographies. *Living With Oneself and Others* was initially printed in 1978; second (1985) and third (1993) editions each added new chapters to the document. The “Statement of Purpose” and “How These Papers Came to be Written” that follow appeared as introduction and preface in previous printings.

## **Statement of Purpose**

These “Working Papers” were presented after several years of long, hard, thoughtful, prayerful work by the Marriage and Family Life Subcommittee of the Committee on Ministry and Counsel, New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and the many Friends of New England Yearly Meeting who helped in its preparation. The purpose of these papers is to provide some guidelines for individual Friends, and for meetings struggling to help their members and attenders, as they face periods of change or stress in their lives. Support and guidance, human as well as Divine, at such times can help us make these periods occasions for growth and for spiritual deepening. They are difficult to face alone; loving care and support are needed. To those Friends who think that all we need for guidance is the Bible and *Faith & Practice*, we can only say that, for many modern Friends, these do speak generally to their condition, but that further practical guidelines are helpful for applying these principles in their own lives. These papers represent an effort to build such a bridge, and we say in all humility that we believe they have been written, at every stage, with loving concern and in the Light. Not all Friends will approve of every word in these pages; the committee itself has differences of opinion.

In recent years the acknowledgment of Friends’ growing concern about the breakup of marriages in our midst has made it possible to confront more openly problems that touch us all, whether or not we

are personally involved. Friends can no longer ignore this aspect of the human condition in modern life. The number of divorced persons in our meetings, and of divorces within meetings, has increased, but the usual spontaneous response of Friends to people in trouble has in many instances been checked by, at the very least, puzzlement as to appropriate action. Some meetings began to voice concern and to be involved in such situations, but there were no guidelines, no word in *Faith & Practice* (beyond a warning about the remarriage of divorced persons), and in most cases no help was offered and nothing was done. We hope sincerely that sharing these queries will be of help.

Social attitudes divide people into categories—single, married, divorced—and treat them in subtly different ways, with an acceptance of marriage as a norm from which single and divorced people deviate. Such attitudes, we believe, have no place within the Society of Friends. We need to be careful to treat all persons as worthy of love and respect, and be sensitive to their needs as individuals. In our meetings “we are all members of one another.”

Four of these papers are addressed to those who choose a commitment to marriage as the way in which they can grow spiritually, personally, and in community, and for meetings as they seek to nurture this commitment. We hope that married Friends will also read the papers on “Growing as an Individual” and on “Living Without a Partner.” Much of the material in them applies equally to all individuals. In the section on divorce, our interest has been to consider how we can lovingly support and sustain each other in times of pain, as well as in times of joy, and how we can help to bring new life and love and faith out of stress. We realize that not all Friends will be (or have been) sympathetic. We share the concern for our testimony on marriage “as a sacred, loving and permanent relationship,” and recognize the tension inherent in holding such a corporate testimony and facing the reality of divorce and remarriage within our meetings. We know that there are those who regard Jesus’ words on divorce as, for all time, unequivocal and incontrovertible, and, at the other end of the spectrum, those who question the validity of the whole traditional concept of marriage. We must seek God’s help to deepen our understanding and compassion and to hold each other, and ourselves, in the Light.

### **How These Papers Came to Be Written**

This series of papers began with a concern, explained in our statement of purpose. To understand how it has all come together, some recapitulation of history may be useful.

In the fall of 1972, New England Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel Committee sent two couples to Marriage Enrichment training sessions at Pendle Hill. Beginning in 1972, Marriage Enrichment weekend retreats have been regularly scheduled, and many couples from New England meetings have attended them. At Yearly Meeting in 1973, two workshops, one on "Marriage" and one on "Sex Roles," evoked much interest. Early in 1974 Ministry and Counsel sponsored a one-day conference on "Friends' Responsibility for Human Sexuality," at which participants were invited "to share your light (and your confusions) with us as we seek to clarify our testimonies." The warm response of many single, married, and divorced Friends did help to clarify both the concern and the responsibility. As a consequence, at Yearly Meeting in 1974, Ministry and Counsel sponsored a workshop on "Human Sexuality" that again provoked lively discussion, continued by the "back-porchers," an informal group that met in the late evenings.

Out of this came plans for a series of Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel-sponsored weekend conferences on "The Problems of Being Single Again," which were well attended, sensitively directed, and answered an obvious need. Participants found that they could share not only problems but insights. They were unanimous in their desire to understand those problems and live their new lives in the context of their meetings and the spiritual ground they found there, and were particularly concerned about their place in their meetings, how the meetings had or had not been of help to them, and what meetings might appropriately do.

These concerns led, in turn, to a Yearly Meeting workshop in 1975 on "Meeting's Responsibility in Separation and Divorce." Here emerged the idea of some guidelines for meetings on the care of separated and divorced persons and the handling of divorces which occur within the meeting.

The original concern had rapidly expanded into a larger concern for all aspects of living in relationships. We soon began to realize that we could not discuss divorce without discussing marriage, and

that perhaps Friends might do well to consider (or reconsider) just what was, or should be, involved in “marriage under the care of the meeting.” Accordingly, one of the recommendations to Ministry and Counsel from the 1975 workshop was that meetings be asked to consider seriously questions concerning their responsibilities in preparation for marriage, marriage procedures, care of marriages, troubled or broken marriages, and divorce, and to write “queries and advices” on these subjects out of their own experience that might be of help to other meetings.

A gratifying (not to say staggering) amount of material flowed in, and in March of 1976 a workshop at Hartford Meetinghouse, “Toward a Quaker View of Marriage,” spent a day sorting it all out and compiling a rough first draft, which was distributed for comment to all New England meetings. Comments received ranged from outright disapproval of Friends even considering the question of divorce (lest we should seem to condone or approve of it), to suggestions for expansion far beyond what was then intended. Most comments were solidly supportive of this effort. Another Yearly Meeting workshop, in 1976, compiled a second draft, which was again distributed to New England meetings (and beyond) for use and comment. These comments, in turn, culled by another workshop at Hartford in November of 1977, influenced the third draft, which was published as the first edition.

Many attenders at the “Single Again” weekends had, meanwhile, begun to ask for a “next step,” and in January 1977 the first of a continuing series of retreat-workshops on “Building Enduring Relationships” was held.

To all of the concerned, caring, hard-working Friends who have participated in this document go the sincere thanks of the Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel Subcommittee on Family Life. For all of us the process has been as helpful as we hope the product will prove to be.

The preparation of these papers, throughout, was encouraged by Ministry and Counsel of New England Yearly Meeting of Friends, and all drafts were accepted as working tools, representing neither our final nor our corporate testimony, in Friends’ search for clarity and Light as we face changing social mores.