

## THE MONTHLY MEETING

*I was moved to recommend the setting up of Monthly Meetings throughout the nation. And the Lord opened to me what I must do . . .*

**George Fox, 1667**

The monthly meeting is the basic unit of the Religious Society of Friends and the body in which membership resides. The monthly meeting consists of Friends (members and attenders) who meet together at regular intervals to wait upon God in meeting for worship and meeting for worship with a concern for business. In a Quaker meeting, Friends are “joined with God and with each other,” and there is order, unity, and power. It is upon this concept of a meeting that the good order of Friends is based.

The monthly meeting encourages members and attenders to live their lives under the guidance of the Spirit. The monthly meeting receives and approves the membership of individuals, appoints committees and individuals for its needs, oversees marriage and memorial meetings, extends spiritual care and material aid to members and attenders, and responds in a spirit of love to members and attenders who depart from Friends’ testimonies. The monthly meeting has the authority to nurture and record spiritual gifts; to relate to its yearly meeting, to other bodies of Friends, and to other organizations with common concerns; and to carry out any work or assume any function consistent with the faith of Friends.

### **Development of Monthly Meetings**

George Fox preached the good news that “Christ has come to teach his people himself” and that the love and power of God are available to all people without the help of priests, ministers, or sacraments. Early Friends testified that they were drawn together by shared experiences of Christ, the Inward Teacher, and they knew that Christ is present to all and in all, but that each person perceives the Light individually and in such measure as God gives; yet, there is

but one truth. The Light operating through each individual results in a gathered fellowship, the mystical union of individuals with each other. In this welding of many persons into one corporate body, many single openings and insights are forged into a more complete and unified understanding of God's will.

In the first years of the preaching of Fox and the Valiant Sixty, those Quakers who were the first convinced by Fox and took up with him the ministry of spreading the truth to the world, organization was informal and was only as much as was necessary for communication and coordination among the Children of Light and for those traveling in the cause of truth. This ministry depended chiefly upon the personal influence and incessant work of the early leaders. As the Religious Society of Friends grew, there came to be a need for organized nurture of groups, for communication among groups, for dealing with internal problems, and for a united response to government persecution. Fox recognized that a method had to be found for Friends as a body to take up decision-making rather than for that responsibility to be assumed by a few outstanding leaders.

Perceiving hypocrisy and worldliness in the religious hierarchies and institutions of his day, Fox was led to proclaim the "true Gospel Order," an order of which Christ was clearly the head and in which all Friends participated fully according to the measure of Light they had received. Some meetings which were essentially monthly meetings were established in the north of England as early as 1653, but the systematic establishment of monthly meetings and quarterly meetings came in 1667-71 as Fox traveled extensively throughout England to set these up.

*And the Lord opened to me what I must do, and how the men's and women's monthly and quarterly meetings should be ordered and established in this and in other nations. . . .*

**George Fox, 1667**

George Fox and Margaret Fell recognized that, in the male-controlled society of that time, women could take their rightful

place in the Religious Society of Friends only when they were freed from the control and interference of men. Therefore, in the beginning and for many years following, men and women met separately to conduct business. When separate business meetings became unnecessary, they were laid down two hundred years later in favor of a combined meeting.

The basic framework of the Religious Society of Friends as it exists today is essentially the system that George Fox organized, though the terminology has changed. This framework exists as a channel for the “Kingdom of God” to be lived on earth. It provides both for the care and nourishment of seekers and also for the fulfillment of God’s will in the world at large. At various times in the life of the Religious Society of Friends, one or the other aspect has been foremost, but both have always been present and are necessary for healthy meetings and a healthy Society of Friends.

## **Organization of the Monthly Meeting**

The degree of organization of a monthly meeting depends upon its circumstances. Organization does not exist for its own sake but to provide what is needed for the meeting to function in right order. Simple in its early stages, a meeting’s organization evolves with its needs. Experience has shown that organizational structure which has proved useful should not be changed unless there is good reason to do so, but structure which no longer serves a vital function should be laid down. Each person in the meeting is responsible for ministry in word and action, for the good order and material needs of the meeting, visitation, and faithfulness in testimonies according to the measure of Light that each is given.

Each monthly meeting appoints whatever clerks, positions, and committees are necessary for the corporate life of the meeting. Once a position or committee is created, then the nominating committee has the responsibility to find a suitable person for the job, jointly with the candidates. While growing in strength and experience, a small meeting may be able to function with only a clerk and with the meeting acting as a committee of the whole. As soon as possible, the meeting appoints a committee on ministry and

counsel (or ministry and oversight) whose clerk is someone other than the clerk of the meeting. Provision for the religious education of children who come under its care is often an early concern of the meeting. Growth in the meeting may eventually lead to separating the committee on ministry and counsel (or ministry and oversight) into two committees, such as a worship and ministry committee and a care and counsel (oversight) committee.

The meeting selects its clerks and committee members from nominations. These nominations are made out of a joint discernment of gifts by the nominating committee and the candidates. The meeting is concerned not only with appointing a qualified person to each job but also with developing and using the talents and resources of all members and attenders. In asking people to assume various responsibilities, the meeting recognizes that different individuals have different gifts that are not equally appropriate for all positions in the meeting. Members and attenders should not be asked to take on inappropriate responsibilities out of a sense of “equality” or “taking turns.”

The meeting must also be able to trust its clerks and committees and spare the entire body from many small decisions. The monthly meeting provides general guidelines for committee functions. The committees are then empowered to make decisions within those guidelines. A clerk or committee should feel free to call upon persons in the meeting, other monthly meetings, and yearly meeting whenever necessary to help in carrying out a particular responsibility.

It has been the custom among Friends for the clerk, the recording clerk, the assistant clerk, the treasurer, trustees, and the members of the committees concerned with worship and ministry, care and counsel (oversight), finance matters, and nominating to be members of the meeting. In small meetings, all other organizational positions and committee clerks can be made up of members or attenders. This is necessary so that the few members are not overburdened.

## **Clerks and Officers of the Monthly Meeting**

The meeting appoints suitable and willing members as its clerks for a definite limited term of service, as led.

### **The Monthly Meeting Clerk**

The clerk's basic function is to facilitate the business of the meeting. The clerk performs the role well by seeing to it that all pertinent business and concerns are presented to the monthly meeting clearly and in good order. Prior to meeting for worship with a concern for business, the clerk prayerfully considers those matters that might be brought before the monthly meeting. The clerk serves at the business sessions of the meeting, is responsible for the minutes of its proceedings (in concert with the recording clerk), and carries out the instructions of the meeting on all matters pertaining to the accomplishment of its business.

The following suggestions are meant especially for the clerk of a monthly meeting, but they apply generally to the clerk of any sort of a Friends meeting and may be useful guidelines for clerks of Friends committees.

The clerk faithfully attends meeting for worship, keeps close to the work of committees, and may need to attend meetings of the worship and ministry and care and counsel (oversight) committees in order to be aware of the condition of the meeting. (In some meetings, the clerk does not attend meetings of ministry and counsel. This practice has evolved for those meetings for the following reasons: It provides greater independence for the committee, and it frees the clerk from additional duties. In these circumstances, those meetings feel that the clerk is able to be adequately informed about sensitive matters without attending the meetings.)

The clerk should be a member of the meeting who has the confidence of its membership and who, in turn, has a real respect and warm regard for its individual members and attenders. The clerk should be spiritually sensitive so that the meeting for business may be helped to discover the leadership of the Spirit. Knowledge

of *Faith and Practice* is essential, and knowledge of other Quaker literature is also helpful. The clerk should be able to comprehend readily, evaluate rightly, and state clearly and concisely an item of business or a concern that comes to the meeting. In order to gather the sense of the meeting at the proper time, the clerk needs to be able to listen receptively to what is said.

The clerk serves at all meetings for worship with a concern for business; if unavoidably prevented from attending, arrangements should be made for a substitute, usually the assistant clerk or a previous clerk. The clerk prepares an agenda prior to the meeting and encourages committee clerks and others to provide ahead of time reports, concerns, and other proposals to be placed on the agenda. The clerk's judgment of the relative urgency and importance of matters and their best place on the agenda can help greatly to facilitate the meeting's business. When an action has been discerned, a minute is composed, often by the clerk, in conjunction with the assistant clerk or recording clerk. After a minute requiring action has been approved and recorded, the clerk notifies the persons involved, preferably in writing, and makes sure that they understand their responsibility in carrying out the action.

The role of the clerk, in general, is not to express his or her own views but to see that others who are present participate as fully as possible in the discernment of business and that a few do not dominate it. A clerk who feels strongly led to express an opinion on a controversial matter should ask the assistant clerk or another Friend to act as clerk and formulate the sense of the meeting before assuming the role of participant. The clerk is mindful of the Spirit to set the pace of the meeting, so that its business may be accomplished without either undue delay or undue hurry. A sense of proportion and a sense of humor are helpful.

The clerk signs all official papers, marriage certificates, and minutes unless otherwise designated by a monthly meeting minute. If there are both a clerk and an assistant clerk, it is good practice for both to sign, particularly if legal documents or action minutes are involved. The clerk prepares and endorses certificates of transfer, minutes for sojourning members, minutes of travel for religious

service, and letters of introduction as well as endorsing minutes or letters of visiting Friends. The clerk sees that correspondence which comes to the meeting is properly handled.

The clerk also has the responsibility to coordinate the activities of the meeting with those of the yearly meeting and other Quaker bodies of which it is a part. This includes seeing that the meeting is represented where necessary, that reports are written and sent to the proper persons, that business and concerns are sent at the proper time to the yearly meeting, and that items received from yearly meeting go to the proper persons and committees. It is understood that the clerk will call upon the assistant clerk and other meeting members to assist in all areas whenever necessary. For a fuller discussion of the clerk's responsibilities, see "The Role of the Clerk" in the chapter "Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business" (Chapter 6).

## **Assistant Clerk**

An assistant clerk may be nominated by the nominating committee or may be temporarily or permanently appointed by the clerk to act as an assistant to the clerk in whatever ways are mutually agreeable. The assistant clerk may be called upon to act for the clerk when the latter is unable to serve. Generally, the assistant clerk position serves as an apprenticeship in clerking.

## **Recording Clerk**

A recording clerk helps the clerk during meetings for business in preparing minutes and in preserving records of the minutes in an organized archival fashion. For a fuller discussion of the recording clerk's responsibilities, see "The Role of the Recording Clerk" in Chapter 6, "Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business."

## **Treasurer**

The treasurer receives and disburses funds as the meeting directs and keeps the account books and all financial records

of the meeting. The treasurer reports regularly to the meeting for business. The accounts should be audited at regular intervals in a manner decided by the monthly meeting. For guidance, contact the SEYM treasurer.

## **Meeting Membership Recorder**

The meeting membership recorder keeps an accurate and timely record of the membership as provided for on the form recommended by the yearly meeting. Copies of this form are available from the SEYM website ([www.seym.org](http://www.seym.org)) and also are found herein under Appendix G and Appendix H. Such records cover vital statistics, statements of conscientious objector clearness, dying, death, and bereavement forms, and so forth pertaining to the member and the member's immediate family. It is important that changes relating to membership, such as births, deaths, transfers, releases, or marriages, be promptly recorded and shared with the SEYM membership recorder. The meeting membership recorder prepares an annual list of the members and attenders of the monthly meeting for use by the SEYM membership recorder. This list is due each year to SEYM by winter interim business meeting or Jan. 31st.

The meeting membership recorder makes sure that other important records of the meeting are being properly taken care of. Minute and record books in current use are kept by the clerk responsible for them. Committee minutes are preserved together with important correspondence and legal papers, such as deeds, conveyances, and trusts, in a permanent repository protected from fire and loss. All minutes and records should be on acid-free paper of high quality. Typewritten records are preferable to those in handwriting. Efforts should be made to convert those records to permanent digital form, such as CD or DVD format. Multiple copies should be made and a copy sent to the SEYM administrative secretary.

## **The Work of Committees**

Committees are tools the monthly meeting may use to facilitate its business. Meetings have found that much of their work can



be done more appropriately in small groups than in the body of the meeting or by individuals. Committees of the whole are used by very small meetings. Attention to the following guidelines will aid in making committees useful tools rather than burdens in carrying out the business of the meeting.

Each meeting decides which committees are necessary to carry out its business and concerns. Friends have found it useful to have three different types of committees: standing, temporary, and ad hoc. Standing committees are permanent. Temporary committees are generally the various types of clearness committees. Ad hoc committees are short-term, voluntary committees formed for a specific task. There is no obligation to create any committee, although most monthly meetings find standing committees on worship and ministry, care and counsel (oversight), and nominating committees essential. Other standing committees often found in meetings are those on religious education, finance and budget, peace and social concerns, property, and hospitality. Members of temporary committees are selected carefully for a specific purpose and length of service. Ad hoc committees are sometimes useful for a particular project or concern. When a committee is no longer needed, it is appropriate to lay it down.

Members of committees need to be selected according to their abilities and concerns. Appointments to a committee are for a definite limited term of service and often are arranged so that terms overlap, to insure continuity. Meetings customarily appoint experienced and capable members of the Religious Society of Friends to the committee on worship and ministry, the committee on care and counsel (oversight), the nominating committee, and as clerks of most other committees. The purpose of this practice is to assign those responsibilities to persons of spiritual depth who are familiar with Friends' faith and ways of organizing and conducting meeting work. Occasionally when meetings identify such persons, even though they may not be members, meetings may choose them for those responsibilities.

Friends conduct business together in faith that there is one divine Spirit that is accessible to all; when Friends wait upon and

heed the Light of Truth within them, its Spirit will lead to unity. This faith is the foundation for every group decision. In practical terms, this means that all such meetings are held in a context of worship and that those present repeatedly and consciously seek divine guidance. Committees conduct business in this same manner. It is important that members of committees attend meeting for worship with a concern for business regularly in order to assure smooth coordination between the committees and the meeting.

Committees are asked to keep minutes of their meetings and report to the monthly meeting for business regularly. All proposed action of committees in the name of the meeting requires prior approval by the monthly meeting. In bringing a matter to the meeting for business, it is useful for the committee to supply a concise summary of background material and a clear statement of the kind of response wanted from the meeting. In the meeting for business, Friends need to consider carefully the recommendations of a committee and at the same time not redo the work of the committee. Mutual trust between the meeting and a committee and faith in the power of God over all will help achieve the proper balance.

It is important that all committee members feel a responsibility to help the clerk or convener establish and maintain a right spirit in all meetings of the committee. The convener has the primary responsibility, but all members should cooperate in surrounding each meeting with a waiting silence, in beginning and ending with worship, in recalling Friends to worship during a meeting, and in remembering that any meeting is a spiritual exercise, one in which Friends hope to be channels for divine guidance by focusing Light on a concern and uniting in a decision.

### **Special Functions of the Committees on Worship and Ministry and on Care and Counsel (Also Known as Oversight)**

The closely related functions of these two committees are central to the life of the meeting. The primary focus of the committee on worship and ministry is the spiritual life of the meeting, while the committee on care and counsel (oversight) is mainly concerned

with the individual members, including their relationship to the meeting. Meetings should understand the different functions of these two committees and see that these functions are faithfully carried out. These committees have a special responsibility to watch over, encourage, and develop the care of members for each other and for the life of the meeting, though all in the meeting share in the responsibility for such care. In smaller meetings the functions of both committees are often combined into one committee; some meetings may call the single committee the committee on ministry and counsel with the term “counsel” covering the functions of the term “oversight” as is currently in use in some meetings.

## **The Committee on Worship and Ministry**

The function of the committee on worship and ministry is to foster and strengthen the spiritual life of the meeting by nurturing the meeting for worship and the spiritual growth of individuals in the meeting. Though this is a challenging assignment and one which is difficult to express in specifics, its importance to the life of the meeting cannot be overemphasized. The first responsibility of members of this committee is to deepen their own spiritual lives and their preparation for worship.

The worship and ministry committee includes members of varied ages and gifts who are faithful in worship and sensitive to the life of the Spirit. It includes both Friends inclined to speak in meeting for worship and those less inclined to do so. It also includes Friends of good judgment who have a gift for counseling with others concerning sensitivity to divine prompting.

The worship and ministry committee meets regularly to consider the meeting for worship and to keep it under constant review, prayer, and care. Their own example is an important means through which they can strengthen the meeting for worship. Their concern during the week, the promptness and reverence with which they approach the meeting for worship, and their faithfulness in responding to and staying within the guidance of the Spirit are the most effective ways through which they may deepen the quality of worship. Through self-examination, prayer, and mutual counsel

they also may help one another and the meeting to grow in worship and ministry. An ever-renewed dedication to worship is almost always the best cure for what may need guidance in a meeting for worship.

*[Committee members] thus abiding in a simple and patient submission to the will of God, and keeping down to the openings of divine life in themselves, may witness a growth in their gifts, and will also be preserved from extending their declarations further than they find the power of truth to accompany them.*

### **Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of Friends held in Baltimore, 1806**

The worship and ministry committee is also responsible for details in connection with meeting for worship, such as providing for the welcome of visitors (also see the responsibilities of the hospitality committee, later in this chapter), for encouraging promptness at meeting, and for signaling the rise of meeting for worship.

The worship and ministry committee should at times hold meetings for all members and attenders to share their experience and search for insight concerning the meeting for worship and the meeting for worship with a concern for business.

The worship and ministry committee should nurture the meeting for worship by giving appropriate attention to the quality of vocal ministry and the ministry of stillness that springs from a centered silence. The committee encourages all Friends to give adequate time to study, meditation, prayer, daily worship, and other ways of preparing themselves for worship. One way to encourage this is by corporate review and discussion of the queries and advices. Committee members should be mindful that there are differences in background, fluency of expression, and power of interpretation among those who may be led to speak in meeting for worship. They have responsibility to give sympathetic encouragement to those who show promising gifts and to give loving and tender guidance to

those who speak unacceptably or at undue length or with too great frequency. They should endeavor to open the way for those who are timid and inexperienced in vocal ministry and should encourage all Friends in the ministry of listening as if listening to God. In trying to be helpful, they should be governed by a sense of the common seeking of human beings for right guidance rather than by an assumption of superior wisdom.

The worship and ministry committee should seek to deepen the spiritual lives of the individuals in the meeting and to encourage their varied gifts for ministry and service, whether through vocal ministry, teaching and counseling, or through aesthetic, social, and practical ways of expression. This committee should encourage private worship, prayer, meditation, and devotional reading which may promote growth in the spiritual life and prepare each individual for the corporate worship of the meeting. It may wish to obtain and circulate appropriate literature and arrange for retreats, study groups, and spiritual sharing groups.

The worship and ministry committee nurtures the religious education of all who attend the meeting. If there is a committee on adult religious education, worship and ministry should coordinate with it and develop a mutual set of priorities. Worship and ministry should be mindful of the quality of religious education being provided for the children. When concerns arise, it should consult with the religious education committee in charge of the children's First Day School to resolve these concerns.

## **Recognizing and Recording Gifts of Ministry**

The gifts of the Spirit are diverse. Friends' ministry may include pastoral care in settings such as hospitals and prisons. Friends' work in these areas may be especially benefited by the intentional recording as ministers of those so gifted, although all Friends are considered ministers. In SEYM, meetings are continuing to undertake the recognition of the gifts of the Spirit and beginning to discern a process for recording ministers. Friends' ministry is based upon the experience that the gifts of the Holy Spirit may be bestowed upon anyone at any time.

A monthly meeting may, upon the advice of its committee on worship and ministry, record as ministers those members whom they recognize as having a clear leading to vocal ministry, to prayer, or to counseling. This recognition is not one of status or privilege and should be reviewed at least every two years. It is an affirmation based upon loving trust. The meeting trusts that the individuals so recorded will, in all humility, diligently nurture and exercise the gift of ministry in order that the meeting as a whole may be nourished. The individuals trust that the meeting will encourage and sustain them, not only to liberate them to undertake the disciplines of prayer, study and retreat that help clarify the springs of ministry but also to lovingly and faithfully counsel them. Such nurture, encouragement, and discipline are of special significance for younger members who, out of diffidence or unawareness, may discount their gifts and let them wither.

For Gainesville Monthly Meeting's process of recording the gifts of ministry, see Chapter 16, Appendix A.

### **The Committee on Care and Counsel (Also Known as Oversight)**

The committee on care and counsel is responsible for the care of members, attenders, and the corporate life of the meeting under the guidance of the Spirit. In providing this pastoral care, the committee is concerned with the more outward aspects of building a fellowship in which all people find acceptance, loving care, and opportunity for service. Then all may grow in grace and, liberated from preoccupation with self, be helped to serve humanity creatively.

Membership on the committee on care and counsel calls for dedication, tact, and discretion and should be entered into prayerfully, with a willingness to be of service. The meeting selects members to serve on this committee who are representative of the varied make-up of the meeting and who are persons of experience, sympathy, and good judgment. Where possible, some members of the committee should have counseling skills. The committee should meet regularly, hold each person in the meeting community in the

Light, and carry on their work in a spirit of dedication and love.

## **Care of the Meeting Community**

- The care and counsel committee should become acquainted with meeting members and regular attenders and their gifts, visit them in their homes if possible, and maintain contact with all members and attenders in a spirit of affectionate interest and loving care. To foster the knowledge of one another in things both temporal and eternal, they encourage members and attenders to visit in each other's homes and stimulate the meeting to undertake activities that will deepen the meeting fellowship.
- They also encourage Friends to attend the annual gathering of the Southeastern Yearly Meeting and similar gatherings, advising on possible financial assistance for this purpose.
- The care and counsel committee considers and recommends action upon requests for membership, transfer, and withdrawal of membership (see Chapter 7 on Membership).
- They keep in touch with inactive members, seeking ways of furthering their interest in the meeting. If non-participation and disinterest continue for a prolonged period, the Friend should be encouraged to withdraw from membership.
- At least once a year, letters should be written to nonresident members to give them news of the meeting and its activities and to let them know that the meeting is interested in their welfare.
- When appropriate, transfer of membership of nonresident Friends to a nearby meeting should be encouraged. The committee notifies other monthly meetings promptly when Friends and faithful attenders move into their area, whether or not transfer of membership is involved.
- This committee, in cooperation with the membership recorder and the treasurer, is responsible for seeing that an

accurate list of meeting members and attenders is sent to SEYM every year by the date of the winter interim business meeting or as late as Jan. 31st.

- It is concerned for the nurture of the religious life of children and young people, their participation in the meeting, and their preparation for membership. When it seems right, it encourages application for membership from those who may be holding back through shyness or a sense of unworthiness.
- The care and counsel committee assists those contemplating and entering into marriage or ceremony of commitment under the care of the meeting and the laying down (divorce) of the marriage or committed relationship (see Chapter 8, Marriage and Commitment). It gives care and aid in needed arrangements at the time of death (see Chapter 9, Dying, Death, and Bereavement).
- The committee seeks to be of help in clarifying matters involving organization, practice, and procedure in the Religious Society of Friends.
- The committee seeks to be of help in clearing up misunderstandings and reconciling differences which may come about in the meeting.
- Committee members are concerned with the welfare of any who are ill, incapacitated, troubled, or in material need. The committee sees that they are visited, counseled, and assisted as may be required. The meeting needs to provide the committee with appropriate financial resources to be used at its discretion for this function.

## **Individual Counseling and Care**

The care and counsel committee has responsibility for any needed clearness and counseling within the meeting. The committee is advised to choose counselors fitted for its needs from among



themselves or other qualified persons in the meeting. Qualifications of a good counselor include approachability, warmth, empathy, spiritual insight without prejudice, the capacity to listen without judging, and ability to keep confidences. The meeting for worship can be a basic resource in counseling; through corporate worship, the strength and power of God's love may open a way that reaches to the hidden depths of personal problems, as we all strive to grow in spiritual and emotional maturity. However, the meeting for worship should remain worship centered; it should not become an occasion for dialogue on personal problems.

In dealing with particular needs, this committee keeps in mind that listening is a key part of the helping process. It needs to be sensitive to those who may not recognize their need for counseling or who hesitate to seek help. To listen helpfully and creatively involves faith in the person and in God, a desire to understand, patience, and avoidance of giving advice. The counselor or committee may suggest new ways of looking at the problem and possible solutions, but decisions are always left to the person involved in acting on their concern. Growth, independence, and standing on one's own feet are to be encouraged. Emotional support in a hard decision can be most helpful. Where a meeting ultimately determines that individual behavior precludes further involvement with the individual, then the meeting no longer allows the individual to make the decision about participation.

*If there happen any difference among Friends, either with Friends or between Friends and the world, let it be put to reference [let it be referred to a third party], if it can not be ended between themselves: and all that are concerned to end any difference, let them have but one ear to one party, and let them reserve the other ear to hear the other party; so that they may judge impartially of matters, without affection or favour, or respect of persons.*

**George Fox, 1679**

A problem may be too serious for the committee on care and counsel to handle alone; in which case a referral to professionals

is appropriate. Members of the committee need to have knowledge of resources for counseling assistance in the wider community, such as clinics, family and social services, physicians, and psychiatrists. The committee may call upon the meeting to be of assistance when professional help is required. Practical assistance such as Friends offer in other times of stress, illness, or sorrow may be appropriate. Standing by, listening, and helping to plan without dictating outcomes can also be of great help in a critical time.

When an individual, family, or other group is facing a difficult situation, a committee on clearness (or a committee of concern) may be requested or suggested by members of the meeting or the clerk. The committee on care and counsel assumes responsibility for setting up the clearness committee in consultation with the individual or group concerned. Situations in which clearness is sought may include adjustments in marriage, separation, divorce, stands to be taken on public issues, a new job, a required move to a distant area, a concern for personal witness, traveling in the ministry, and other personal decisions. The committee and the individual or group meet together in worship to seek God's guidance. Valuable insights often result from the worship sharing in one or more sessions. (See "Clearness Committees," Chapter 10.)

## **Joint Responsibilities of Worship and Ministry and Care and Counsel**

Some meetings have both a committee on worship and ministry and a committee on care and counsel. Although these committees usually meet separately, it is important that they keep in touch with each other. A joint retreat, for a day or a weekend, can be of benefit for the life of the committees and that of the meeting. They should meet together at least twice a year to review responsibilities and concerns.

These committees share two responsibilities:

- These committees are sometimes asked by a monthly meeting to share in the nurture of worship groups and preparative meetings under its care, although more often a separate committee may be appointed.

- In the fall, they begin to prepare the annual report of the spiritual state of the monthly meeting. The spiritual state of the monthly meeting report is prepared in time to be approved by the meeting for worship with a concern for business before being forwarded in early January to the SEYM administrative secretary. This report is included in the “Documents in Advance” for the annual yearly meeting sessions. The spiritual state of the monthly meeting report should be a self-examination by the meeting and its members of their spiritual strengths and weaknesses and of efforts to foster growth in the spiritual life. Reports may cover the full range of interests, concerns, and statistics but should emphasize those indicative of the spiritual health of the meeting.

To facilitate the preparation of this report, the committee on worship and ministry and the committee on care and counsel may meet together and explore the spiritual condition of the meeting. They may then formulate a series of queries for a response from the meeting as the basis of the report or may ask one or more of their members to draft a preliminary report for searching consideration by the meeting. Another approach is to use the queries from SEYM as the basis of preparation of the state of the meeting report.

## **The Nominating Committee**

The nominating committee handles one of the most important functions of the meeting and serves throughout the year. The meeting depends upon this small group of Friends to discern the most appropriate persons to fulfill meeting responsibilities and to use to best advantage the capabilities of meeting members and attenders. The nominating committee should be representative of the meeting and its members. Committee members should serve overlapping but short terms to ensure continuity and avoid loss of experience while at the same time providing broad sharing of Friends in the nominating process. If appropriate for the meeting, the monthly meeting clerk may choose an ad hoc “naming committee.” The ad hoc “naming committee” will nominate people to the nominating committee, subject to the approval of the monthly

meeting, after which the ad hoc “naming committee” is laid down.

Members of the nominating committee should be familiar with the function and structure of the meeting and with the “good order of Friends.” They should be aware of the interests, talents, proven experience, latent gifts, and potential leadership of meeting participants. The committee must begin its work well in advance of the date when its nominations for new clerks, positions, committees, and committee clerks are presented to the monthly meeting. As the committee meets in worship, names may rise up to serve the meeting, as the Spirit leads. Nominees are asked if they feel led to serve. After the first reading of the proposed slate of nominations, the meeting postpones action for a month, during which time any member may seek clarification or suggest changes in the nominations to the nominating committee. This committee continues to serve as a standing committee throughout the year to nominate persons to fill vacancies that may occur or to fill new positions which the meeting may establish.

## **Advices to the Nominating Committee**

The best interests of the meeting and its participants will be served if the nominating committee keeps in mind the following suggestions:

- In approaching a person, the committee sees that details of the nominating process are understood by the potential nominee, including the fact that the meeting, not the committee, is responsible for the ultimate appointment.
- The approach to a potential nominee should not be made casually. The duties involved in any position should be fully understood by the nominating committee and relayed to the person approached for nomination, including expected length of term of service. It is strongly recommended that a written job description be prepared and given to a prospective nominee.

- Not all Friends are equally qualified for a particular responsibility, so “taking turns” and rewarding long service are to be avoided in making nominations. Friends are asked to remember that service is based on leadings and being faithful to the Light.
- The clerk of a committee may be consulted about members proposed for that committee. When two persons are to work together closely, they may both be consulted about the proposed arrangement.
- If a committee clerk cannot be identified by the nominating committee, a convener may be named to help the committee members discern, as the Spirit leads, who is best able to clerk the committee. Where appropriate, assistant clerks may be appointed to be in training to assume responsibility at the end of the term of service of the current clerks. New committee clerks are encouraged to look for a mentor for help when assuming new responsibilities. Early in his or her term of service, the committee clerk tries to identify the gifts of committee members that can be nurtured, with the intent of preparing a committee member to become the next clerk or assistant clerk.

## **Religious Education Committee**

Religious education is a lifelong endeavor. It begins in the family, as parents take responsibility for their own religious education and that of their children. Monthly meetings have a continuing responsibility to foster understanding of the beliefs and practices of Friends to members, attenders, and children under their care, enhancing full participation in the life of the meeting. Meetings are expected to offer religious education programs for young and adult members and attenders, drawing on the many resources of the religious education committees of the yearly meeting, Friends General Conference, and others. A thriving religious education program can also include study groups, conferences, retreats, service projects, and libraries.

The worship and ministry committee and the care and counsel committee both have responsibilities linked to the religious education of the meeting, so it is important to develop a way to jointly agree on priorities while acknowledging the differences between adult and children's education.

## **Peace and Social Concerns Committee**

Participants in the meeting may feel a responsibility to address a variety of issues in their community, state, nation, and world, for example, homelessness, health care, and migrant concerns. Ways of giving life to these leadings include the following:

- Maintaining a committee to address peace and social justice issues. This committee may recommend particular action to individuals and to the meeting itself.
- Planning and carrying out service projects as corporate activities of the meeting.
- Encouraging members and attenders to participate in the work for social change by larger Quaker groups or other bodies or to independently pursue leadings to social actions consistent with Friends' testimonies. Members and attenders who appear to be moved by a genuine prompting of the Spirit may be supported in leadings that not all share.
- Contributing services or money to help free a member to pursue a social concern as a "released Friend."

## **Finance Committee and Trustees**

Monthly meetings solicit, maintain, and disburse operating funds for their own purposes and raise funds for the yearly meeting and other bodies they may decide to support. They may hold and maintain real property. They may hold and maintain trust funds. These tasks and responsibilities are entrusted to a treasurer and a finance committee and, if needed, trustees or other committees. The books of those holding funds are audited or reviewed at

least annually. The treasurer is an ex-officio member of the finance committee.

The finance committee discerns the financial needs and resources of the monthly meeting. It prepares a budget or financial outlook for each year. It makes regular reports to the monthly meeting regarding the budget and financial outlook and, in conjunction with the treasurer, the current financial health of the meeting. From time to time the finance committee communicates with the members and attenders of the meeting regarding the financial needs of the meeting.

Trustees are entrusted with managing and disbursing long-term investments, trusts, and real property. The finance committee and trustees are charged with seeking, investing, and using the financial assets of the monthly meeting in accordance with accepted Quaker principles, approved minutes of the monthly meeting, and the expressed instructions of contributors of restricted donations, if accepted by the monthly meeting. Managing the financing of the acquisition or improvement of real property may be under the care of the finance committee, trustees, or temporary committees set up for these purposes.

## **Outreach Committee**

By extending a welcome to people in the community and interpreting our faith to them through words and example, we practice a traditional form of Quaker ministry. Outreach is everyone's responsibility in the meeting. In larger meetings, an outreach committee can assist in the care of seekers, attenders, and new members, helping to include them in the life of the meeting and encouraging them to join in community. Another facet of outreach is to seek appropriate ways to publicize the existence and purpose of the local Friends meeting to the larger community.

## Hospitality Committee

“The Quaker Practice of Hospitality” (based on an article by Nancy Fennell in the October 2005 *Friends Journal*, used by permission of the author.)

Friends want to be welcoming to all who attend our meetings, whether they are attending for the first time, are invited guests, or are regular attenders. Therefore, we don’t leave this matter to chance; we make regular practices that intend to convey our sense of hospitality to all who come to our meeting.

Hospitality is a serious ministry, and it rests upon a deep base. When a guest or visitor walks through our meetinghouse door, some reflection of Spirit has arrived in our midst. One whom God loves deeply and infinitely has come to be with us; a gift has been sent. So we approach to receive our gift with open hearts and great joy; we seek to connect with that of God in our visitor.

There are four aspects of meeting hospitality we practice:

- Preparation
- Sharing
- Serving
- Follow-up.

The steps below specifically apply to hospitality for people who are new to the meeting, but they apply more broadly for all attenders.

- Preparation for hospitality includes ensuring that when folks arrive at meeting, there will be a welcoming environment. Many small steps contribute to this, including the following:
  - a. Having the meetinghouse set up and ready so we can attend to visitors and not housekeeping duties.
  - a. Having name tags, markers, guest books, and literature readily available.
  - a. Ensuring that someone greets and quickly establishes some sense of who the newcomer is and to



what extent he or she is familiar with our worship or needs more in-depth explanation. Everyone in the meeting should take on this responsibility, although some may feel too shy to comfortably meet strangers. We have found that if only one or a few meeting members are responsible to greet visitors, there are too many times that the visitor goes unwelcomed or later is left uncomfortably alone.

- a. Ensuring that directions to the meeting are available so interested visitors can find us. Web sites are increasingly used by searchers, but standard information also should be available in *Friends Journal* and similar publications. Meetings that have phone numbers listed should ensure that those phones are answered and that messages are responded to.

If we are fully prepared to attend to a visitor, we make a powerful statement that “we thought about you ahead of your coming; we honor you as you are honoring us by being here.”

- Sharing with a stranger who comes to our meeting for worship includes the following:
  - a. In the initial introductory phase, we greet the visitor and share our name, our attention, and our interest. We share respect by listening deeply and solely to our visitor. We share companionship.
  - a. Secondly, we share that which is most precious to us—our worship. Being thoughtful about this, we do not leave our visitor to worship by himself in a back row, outside the circle, or isolated by several vacant chairs on either side. Instead, we symbolically close the gap by narrowing physical space between the community and the newcomer and invite her to join close with us.
  - a. Thirdly, at the rise of meeting for worship, we see that the visitor is introduced to all and introduce ourselves in return. We ask the guest to tell how

he came to be with us and seek bits of information that allow us to connect and relate. When there is a time for socializing, we share the time with the visitor and ensure she is not left alone.

We must be especially sensitive to the situation when the visitor has something important to share with us; it could be a Spirit-led message, a personal problem, or an unexpected concern. Our practice should be to welcome the sharing a stranger brings, recognizing that it may call for special abilities to address concerns that come up. During our sharing, we must be alert to not use “Quakerese” or references to Friends’ organizations or practices that the visitor may not know about or understand.

- Serving may simply be the offering of food and drink that often accompanies a social time following worship. Other aspects of serving may include addressing special concerns a visitor brings. Many meetings have been visited by people who need assistance with food and shelter, so providing assistance in an appropriate way is another aspect of serving. True hospitality is serving the needs of the visitor.
- Follow-up with the newcomer is simply the act of getting in touch with him at some later time (a few days at most) to ensure that the greetings and welcome we attempted to convey were successful and that the visitor understands we were grateful for his presence and interest and would welcome a return visit. This isn’t understood to be an effort to convince or proselytize. We have asked guests to sign our guest book to enable us to make these follow-up contacts, so we should use the information as intended and make some contact. The meeting needs to be organized about the follow-up so it isn’t forgotten or assigned to someone who wasn’t present.

Once the meeting has taken an honest look at how well it is doing with hospitality, changes can be addressed and improvements made. Hospitality involves action; it is a doing and a practice.

## **Meeting Place, Property, or Building and Grounds Committee**

This committee has care of the meeting's space and care of the property if the meeting owns any real estate. The meeting should appoint one or more Friends to have care of the meeting's material property, contractual agreements for rental space, and maintenance and cleaning of meeting-place premises whether owned or by contract if rented.

## **Other Committees**

Additional committees may be selected by meetings as needed.

## **Volunteers and Paid Staff**

Friends have been reluctant to deviate from the tradition of volunteerism that has marked the Society from its beginnings. Volunteers, as they work together for the meeting, often find their religious lives mutually strengthened, their sense of community deepened, and their commitment as members affirmed. These dividends of volunteerism diminish when volunteers find themselves overcommitted. Some meetings have found themselves strengthened spiritually when they have employed staff to perform a few essential functions, such as child care, general secretarial work, or maintenance of buildings and grounds.

## **Traveling Friends**

From the beginning, Quakers have felt a special bond that has transcended geographical and cultural boundaries and has made easier the offer of hospitality to traveling Friends on the one hand and the quiet confidence of welcome on the other. Friendly intervisitation, whether formal or informal, has for more than 350 years provided an important opening for understanding and cooperation in the affairs of Friends and for mutual ministry and spiritual

growth. Friends are encouraged, therefore, as they travel on business or holiday, to allow time for visits with meetings or with individual Friends and families in the regions they may pass through. Friends General Conference maintains a directory of Friends who offer hospitality to traveling Friends which is obtainable from the FGC Bookstore.

## **Letters of Introduction**

In making such Friendly visits, many have found letters of introduction from home meetings to be helpful. Such letters, prepared by the monthly meeting clerk at the request of those members planning to travel, usually state the fact of membership, give some indication of participation and witness in the affairs of our Religious Society, and express such greetings as are deemed appropriate. Since Friends travel for a wide variety of purposes, letters of introduction do not suggest specific obligations either on the visitor or on those visited and may be issued by the clerk without formal consideration by the meeting. The letter is usually presented by the traveler to meetings or other Friends visited, who may choose to write a return greeting on the letter, which is presented to the issuing meeting upon return. When appropriate, the meeting may also grant a letter of introduction to a faithful attender.

## **Minutes of Travel for Religious Service**

Friends may find themselves under a sense of divine leading to travel in support of an important cause or to nurture the religious life of Friends' families and meetings or of other groups. In carrying out such leadings, they find it supportive to take with them a formal minute for religious service from their monthly meeting.

A meeting should issue such a minute only after the concern has been favorably recommended to the monthly meeting by a clearness committee and approved by the monthly meeting. A minute of religious service, signed by the clerk, should state clearly the nature, scope, and duration of the proposed service. It should

affirm the meeting's support of the Friend(s) involved and release the Friend(s) from meeting responsibilities until the service is at an end. The monthly meeting issuing a minute of travel for religious service should see that insofar as possible the proposed service is not hampered by a lack of funds or other support.

After adoption by a monthly meeting, a minute of religious service is usually submitted for approval, endorsement, and support by the yearly meeting committee on worship and ministry, especially if the minute will be used beyond the bounds of the yearly meeting.

Friends traveling with such minutes are welcomed by those among whom they visit and are invited to lay their concerns before appropriate gatherings. It is customary for minutes to be endorsed at the conclusion of the gatherings by the clerk of each gathering. After the completion of the service proposed, a minute for religious service should be returned promptly with a verbal or written report to those meetings who had earlier reviewed the concern and minuted their support.

A Friend who proposes to travel under religious concern may find, as have Friends in the past, that it is a source of strength and comfort to be accompanied by another Friend who is sympathetic to the concern and able to give counsel and encouragement.

## **Annual or Biennial Queries for Monthly Meetings**

Friends have found that the regular consideration of the following queries is helpful for maintaining good order as the meeting community seeks to fulfill its responsibilities. These queries would be most helpful if addressed to meeting for worship with a concern for business on an annual basis.

## **State of the Meeting**

- Is the meeting in a right-ordered state of spiritual and material health, its problems manageable with its own resources? If not, has it considered calling on the yearly meeting or other meetings for assistance?

## **Committees**

- Do committees have written descriptions and a clear understanding of their responsibilities assigned by the meeting? Are they right-ordered and functioning in ways that meet the needs of the meeting, and do they report regularly to the meeting?

## **Economic Resources**

- Are endowments and working capital invested in socially responsible ways? Is the meeting aware of the services of organizations such as the Friends Extension Corporation, the Friends Meeting House Fund, and the Friends Fiduciary Corporation? Is the income of restricted donations or endowments put to the uses specified or the concerns indicated by the donor?
- Since title to real property may be held in one of several ways, is it
  - a) held by the meeting as a permanent corporate body? If held by an individual or group, what are the meeting's plans for assuming title?
  - b) held by the Friends Fiduciary Corporation? If so, is the meeting aware of the potential inconveniences?
  - c) held by trustees? If so, are the trustees appropriately serving the meeting?
- Are fire and liability precautions and insurance in good order, as appropriate?

- Is real property managed with care for nature's integrity? Are burial grounds, if any, simple in style and carefully maintained, with accurate records in the hands of a responsible committee?
- Are policies and practices for hiring and dismissal of employees consonant with Friends' belief? Do employees receive caring oversight and equitable compensation?
- Are patterns of spending and consumption socially and environmentally responsible?

## **Finance**

- Does the monthly meeting have a long-term financial plan? Does it establish clear policies, including an annual budgetary process, for the raising, custody, and spending of money?
- Are the accounts of custodians of meeting funds regularly audited or competently reviewed and reports made to the monthly meeting? Does the meeting require bodies under its care to undergo regular audits or reviews and to send the reports to the meeting?
- Are the financial records in good order, up to date, and kept on archival paper?
- Have the meeting's treasurer and finance committee observed all state and federal regulations governing the incorporation of the meeting and the handling of its finances? Where there is doubt, has the yearly meeting or legal counsel been consulted?
- Is the burden for financial support appropriately carried among the members and attenders of the meeting?
- Does the meeting have a process for extending financial aid to members suffering as a result of a witness to Friends' testimonies or for other reasons?

- Does the meeting foster activities or programs such as volunteer work days, fundraising, bake sales, garage sales, and so forth that strengthen its ability to devote financial resources to good works?

## Records

- Are official membership records in good order, up to date, and kept on archival paper? Are they reviewed at least annually by the committee on care and counsel (oversight)?
- Are records of members and attenders kept in good order on a formal basis with periodic backup of data? Records may be kept in a computer database or databases, from which can be drawn useful information for building the meeting community, such as newsletter mailing labels, lists of children by age groups, and telephone numbers.
- If the meeting is incorporated, are its records maintained and its corporate procedures conducted in accordance with good practice and legal requirements?
- Are minutes of the monthly meeting and of significant committees accurately and neatly kept on acid-free paper and sent from time to time to the SEYM archives committee or other suitable Quaker archives for their protection and storage in accordance with their procedures?

For those Friends wishing to understand in full the detailed responsibilities of the yearly meeting clerks, officers, standing committees, and representatives to SEYM-affiliated organizations, in addition to the *Faith and Practice*, please consult the *SEYM Operational Handbook, Procedures, and Job Descriptions* available from SEYM Publications and [QuakerBooks.org](http://QuakerBooks.org).