
The Monthly Meeting

The monthly meeting is the fundamental unit of the Religious Society of Friends. It consists of a group of Friends who meet together at regular intervals to wait upon God in meeting for worship and meeting for business. Some groups use the traditional term “monthly meeting,” so named because meetings for business typically occur once a month, although other groups name themselves “Friends meetings” to be more generally descriptive.

Within our meetings, Friends are “joined with God and with each other” and in this there is order, unity, and power. It is upon this concept of a meeting that the good order of Friends is based. Through the corporate life of a monthly meeting, Friends order their lives in relation to God and, through that relationship, to the most profound realities of life: birth and death, marriage and family, community of spirit, concern for humanity and all of God’s creation.

The monthly meeting is the core of the community of Friends. It receives and records new members; terminates membership when necessary; provides spiritual and, when necessary and possible, material aid to those in its fellowship; counsels with members in troubled circumstances; oversees marriages; gives comfort at the time of death; collects and dispenses funds for its maintenance and work; owns or rents a place where worship is regularly held; witnesses to Friends testimonies; relates itself to its quarterly and yearly meetings and to other bodies of Friends and to other organizations with common concerns; and carries on any work or assumes any function consistent with the faith of Friends and not specifically the work of some other Friends body. Good records are kept of all its proceedings.

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’s orderly and effective operation, while allowing each person freedom, participation, and responsibility. Simple in its early stages, a meeting’s organization evolves with its needs. Experience shows that Friends leave in place the organizational structures which prove useful and either change or lay down those structures which no longer serve a vital function.

See Chapters 7 and 8, “Quarterly Meetings” and “The Yearly Meeting,” for the monthly meeting’s relationship to these larger bodies.

Background

I was moved to recommend the setting up of monthly meetings throughout the nation. 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 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 that they knew that Christ is present to all and in all; further, that each person perceives the Light individually and in such measure as God wills; 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 preaching by Fox and his followers, now known as the Valiant Sixty, organization was informal and used for communication and coordination. This organization depended chiefly upon the personal influence and incessant work of the early leaders. As the Society grew, there emerged a need for organized nurture of groups, for communication among groups, for dealing with internal problems, for a united response to government persecution, and for prevention of embarrassing public incidents. Fox recognized that a method had to be found for Friends as a body to make needed decisions, rather than having that responsibility assumed by a few outstanding leaders.

Being aware of the hypocrisy and worldliness of the religious hierarchies and institutions of his day, Fox was led to proclaim the "true Gospel 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, Scotland, and Ireland.

Fox perceived that, in the male-dominated society of his 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. Initially, men and women met separately to conduct business. When separate business meetings became unnecessary, they were laid down in favor of combined meetings.

The basic framework of the Society as it exists today is based on the system that Fox organized. It provides a channel for the Kingdom of God to be established on earth by providing both for the care and nourishment of God's people and also for the furtherance of God's will in the world at large. At various times one or the other aspect has been foremost, but both have always been present and are necessary for healthy meetings and for a healthy Society as a whole.

Meeting for Worship

The meeting for worship lies at the heart of the monthly meeting and the larger Religious Society of Friends. Worship together is central and fundamental to Friends. Worship is based on direct communion with God. The unprogrammed meeting for worship is a distinctive Quaker practice which has existed from the beginning of the Society and in today's practice remains grounded in expectant listening for Divine inspiration and guidance.

Meetings for worship are held at established times, usually once a week; specially called meetings for worship are arranged by the monthly meeting on the occasion of marriages, memorial services, or other events.

See "Expectant Worship, Vocal Ministry" in Chapter 3, "Friends Spiritual Disciplines," about the spiritual nature and experience of meeting for worship.

Meeting for Business

The meeting for business is a meeting for worship during which Friends attend to our corporate business. It takes place in the same expectant waiting for the guidance of the Spirit as does any meeting for worship. Friends conduct business in the trust that those assembled, when guided by the Spirit, can reach unity on decisions, directions, and concerns. Making business decisions becomes an experience of worship.

Care must be taken to distinguish between the monthly meeting, the fundamental body of the Religious Society of Friends, and the monthly meeting which is the occasion for conducting business.

See “Discernment” in Chapter 3, “Friends Spiritual Disciplines,” about the spiritual nature and experience of Friends meeting for business.

It is a weighty thing to speak in large meetings for business. First, except our minds are rightly prepared, and we clearly understand the case we speak to, instead of forwarding, we hinder the business and make more labour for those on whom the burden of work is laid.

If selfish views or a partial spirit have any room in our minds, we are unfit for the Lord’s work. If we have a clear prospect of the business and proper weight on our minds to speak, it behooves us to avoid useless apologies and repetitions. Where people are gathered from far, and adjourning a meeting of business attended with great difficulty, it behooves all to be cautious how they detain a meeting, especially when they have sat six or seven hours and have a great distance to ride home.

In three hundred minutes are five hours, and he that improperly detains three hundred people one minute, besides other evils that attend it, does an injury like that of imprisoning one man five hours without cause.

John Woolman, 1758

Friends Method of Reaching Decisions

Friends conduct business together in the faith that there is one Divine Spirit which is accessible to all people, and that when Friends wait upon, heed, and follow the Light of Truth within them, that Spirit will lead to unity. No matter the size of the group, this faith is the foundation for any decision.

Quaker decision-making is based on our religious faith. Friends come to a meeting for business expecting to be led toward correct action. Unity is always possible because the same Light of Truth shines in some measure in every human heart. In practical terms this means that such meetings are held in a context of worship and that those present repeatedly and consciously seek divine guidance.

It is important that every meeting for discernment by a meeting, committee, or other decision-making body begin with a period of worship rather than with “a few moments of silence,” so that the spirit of worship will pervade the transaction of business. Friends return to silent worship as needed during the course of the meeting. To emphasize this interdependence, some Friends speak of “meeting for worship for business.” Only as Friends are aware that we are functioning in the Divine Presence does the Quaker method work.

The commitment to search for unity depends upon mutual trust, implies a willingness to labor and to submit to the leadings of the Spirit, and grows as members become better acquainted with one another. All members and attenders are encouraged to attend and take part in meetings for business.

Bringing Items of Business before the Meeting. A matter requiring meeting action may be brought before the meeting for business by the clerk, a committee, or any member. In the latter two instances, the clerk is informed in advance so that the matter can be included on the agenda. A written copy of the proposal is given to the clerk before or at the time of presentation to the meeting. Care in preparing the agenda and the clerk’s judgment of the relative urgency and importance of matters can help greatly to facilitate the meeting’s business.

Good Order of Friends during Meeting for Business. The Quaker method for reaching decisions involves searching for the right corporate decisions and arriving at the “sense of the meeting” or unity. Friends seek divine guidance, are patient with each other, and are concerned for the good of the meeting as a whole. Friends allow adequate time for deliberate and prayerful consideration of the matter in hand. Friends attend meeting for business open to the leadings of the Spirit.

During the meeting, Friends speak briefly and to the point, express their own views, avoid refuting statements made by others, and credit purity of motive to all. Before speaking, Friends seek

recognition from the clerk. It can be helpful to the meeting for Friends to speak directly to the clerk, and the clerk may request this. Friends hesitate to speak more than once on an issue. When someone has already stated a position satisfactorily, Friends need offer only a word or two expressing agreement.

Role of the Clerk. The clerk gathers and articulates the sense of the meeting, and is reluctant to state an opinion. If a view is being overlooked, the clerk may pose questions to draw attention to it. If the clerk has strong views on an issue, the assistant clerk or another Friend serves as clerk during its consideration. The grace of humor often helps to relax tensions so that new Light comes to the meeting. A period of worshipful silence can also help.

Sense of the Meeting. When those present become aware of a gathered insight or an inner sense of rightness, recognizing that a decision has been reached, the clerk will then attempt to articulate the sense of the meeting by proposing a minute. On weighty matters, once the sense of the meeting has been reached, it is promptly recorded as a minute and read back to the meeting for approval. The clerk and recording clerk may need time to compose a minute together and will ask those assembled to uphold them as they do so. Anyone may offer revisions to the proposed minute, and the meeting may approve, modify, or reject it. Friends have not completed the action until they have approved the minute. The group seeks divine guidance together as a faith community; therefore, only those present can experience the movement of the Spirit within the group.

Unity. Friends strive to achieve unity in the Spirit, rather than uniformity, unanimity, or consensus. Friends achieve unity because of our conviction that there is such a thing as corporate guidance where a group, meeting in the expectation of divine leading, may be given a greater insight than any single person. The unity which Friends seek and hope to capture in a recorded minute is God's will in relation to the matter under consideration. Assent to a minute, however, does not imply uniformity of judgment. Rather it is a recognition that the minute records what the group feels is right at a given time.

There may be Friends who would wish the meeting to move forward more assertively and others who seek moderation. Each might have wished the meeting to take a different course from that agreed upon, but nevertheless give assent to the sense of the meeting. The search for truth and unity is sometimes a long and difficult one, requiring much love, tolerance, and patience. Preparation and prayer prior to a meeting can clear away small issues and make the path to reaching unity easier. Quaker process will not work if members have not listened deeply to each other and to the Inward Teacher, or if they have been too impatient to allow unity to emerge. Nevertheless, Quakers have used this method with a large degree of success for more than three centuries.

Threshing Sessions. Friends do not avoid issues which may be difficult or controversial. It is better for the meeting to allow full opportunity for differences to be aired and faced. In dealing with such issues, or those of a complex nature entailing information with which some Friends may be unfamiliar, it is often helpful to hold one or more preliminary "threshing sessions" in which no decision is made, but through which the chaff can be separated from the grain of Truth. Such sessions can clear the way for later action at meeting for business. Full notice of a threshing session is given and special efforts are made to see that Friends of all shades of opinion can and will be present. To the extent that Friends of a given view are absent, the usefulness of such a meeting will be impaired. If factual material needs to be presented, persons knowledgeable in the area are asked to present such material and be available to answer questions.

It is best if the threshing session is moderated by a Friend not identified with any particular opinion on the matter. The moderator makes it clear at the start that the meeting not only expects but welcomes expressions of the widest differences. Friends are urged not to hold back whatever troubles them about the issues at hand. Hesitancy to share a strong conviction, because it may offend someone, reflects a lack of trust. The moderator's job is to draw out the reticent and limit the time taken by those

too quick to speak. It is useful to ask someone to take notes of the session for later reference. The threshing session may discern a new way forward. Some meetings schedule threshing sessions on a regular basis.

Serious Differences of Opinion. When there are serious differences of opinion and some remain strongly convinced of the validity of their point of view, it is frequently possible to find unity by recourse to a period of silent worship and prayer. The effect of this quiet waiting is often powerful, and a way to solve the problem may appear. Such a way transcends compromise; it is the discovery at a deeper level of what all really desire. If there continue to be Friends whose convictions make it impossible for them to unite with the meeting, the decision may be postponed to a later time or the matter may be referred to a small committee. Such a committee includes Friends of diverse views and is charged with revising the proposal in light of the objections and with bringing recommendations to a later meeting. If the matter is urgent, the committee may withdraw to return before the meeting closes or may be given the power to act.

In the process of reaching a decision, the clerk and the meeting quite properly take into consideration that some Friends have more wisdom and experience than others on a given issue. Some members have specialized knowledge and training in certain areas and therefore their conviction may carry greater weight when the matter at hand is related to their expertise; the meeting should not easily disregard the opposition of such Friends. The meeting must be on guard against always accepting words of weighty Friends as final, however, and must also be wary of accepting traditional patterns only because they are comfortably familiar. New and younger attenders often propose fresh and powerful insights. However, an individual who frequently expresses unyielding opinions in a disruptive manner may need to be approached by an elder. In the event that counsel is ineffective, the situation may be brought to the Pastoral Care Committee.¹

When a committee brings a recommendation for consideration, the meeting keeps in mind that the recommendation is the result of the concentrated attention of a small group and resists temptation to repeat the committee's work. The committee, on its part, avoids being so attached to its recommendation that it forgets that new insights can develop as the meeting considers the matter.

Sometimes after careful examination and patient listening to the meeting, a Friend may express misgivings about an action the body seems ready to approve. The clerk must be open both to the meeting's readiness to act and to any Friend's sense of discomfort with that action. The group may need to remain undecided for a while longer, holding the possibility that a previously unrealized way may open. Recording a minute of exercise to describe an issue and the various ways Friends see it can help a meeting to understand it at a later time, perhaps in the virtue of new Light.

A Friend with a deep concern about an action may also express willingness to "stand aside" from the proposed action, recognizing that the meeting has reached unity. The act of "standing aside" is an expression of community with the meeting as it seeks the divine will in the matter. It is an acknowledgement that the action being taken is how the meeting is led at this time. What we seek is not unanimity, but unity in the Spirit which is able to encompass discomfort with the approved action. The clerk may then propose a minute expressing the sense of the meeting. Once a concern is heard, it is no longer carried only by the individual who raised it. It now rests in the community and the name

¹ *"The Oversight Committee" is a traditional Quaker name for the committee that organizes memorials, handles requests for membership or marriage under the care of the meeting, and coordinates help and comfort for Friends in need. In many meetings this function is combined with care for the community's spiritual life, hence the common name "Ministry & Oversight Committee" —the name used by NPYM and its quarterly meetings. However, "oversight" has connotations of slavery for many Friends, and they may use some other name in their meetings, such as Ministry & Counsel for a combined committee. Each Friends group names its committees in its own way. Reflecting the concern about "oversight," this Faith and Practice uses "Pastoral Care Committee" for the committee in a local Friends group that has responsibility for memorials, memberships, etc.*

of an individual standing aside is not recorded. The concern may be recorded in the minutes and is part of the sense of the meeting.

On rare occasions, after spiritual searching to ascertain that personal feelings are not blocking divine guidance, a Friend may be unable either to unite with or to stand aside from the decision the body is ready to make. The person with the conviction presents their concerns, gives the reasons, and asks the group not to proceed. The meeting must discern whether that conviction has enough spiritual weight to require waiting for further light. The phrase “standing in the way” has been used to describe this request not to proceed, but an individual never has the power to prevent the meeting from acting. The meeting, however, may feel that the concern has enough weight to hold the matter over for further discernment or to abandon the action entirely. If the meeting, after prolonged laboring, is convinced that it is following divine guidance, it may set aside the objections and proceed. It may include reference to the objections in the minute recording the action. The growth of Truth among the members in the course of time will confirm the action or lead the meeting to a sounder decision.

State of Society Report

The State of Society report (sometimes called State of the Society report or State of the Meeting report) is prepared once a year by each meeting in time to be forwarded to the spring session of its quarterly meeting. In contrast to the informal reports of activities given to quarterly meetings at other times of the year, the State of Society report is a self-examination by the meeting and its members of their spiritual strengths and weaknesses and of efforts to foster growth in their spiritual life. Reports may cover the full range of interest and concerns but emphasize those that indicate the spiritual health of the meeting. After revision and acceptance by the meeting, the report is given to the quarterly meeting Ministry & Oversight Committee, and may be read at quarterly meeting. The yearly meeting Ministry & Oversight Committee also reviews the reports.

Meeting Officers and Committees

Organizational models vary widely throughout North Pacific Yearly Meeting. Groups use various names for offices and committees, and combine functions and responsibilities differently.

Organization evolves as times and needs change; each monthly meeting discerns the officers and committees currently necessary to carry out its concerns and business. A small meeting may be able to function with only a clerk and a treasurer, and with the meeting acting as a committee of the whole. Any but the smallest meetings will likely sense a need for a committee responsible for ministry and pastoral care, whose clerk is someone other than the clerk of the meeting. The religious education of children who come under its care is also an early concern of the meeting, as is help for young people seeking to be recognized as conscientious objectors to military service. The meeting also considers practical concerns, such as the need for insurance or legal incorporation, especially if it acquires property.

Meetings typically select officers and committees from nominations presented by a Nominating Committee (see below). The meeting is concerned not only with appointing the most qualified person to each job, but also with developing and using the talents and resources of all members and attenders. It is good practice for meetings to maintain job descriptions for officers and committees, outlining tasks and responsibilities and suggesting terms of service, so that all can understand what is expected in each role in the meeting structure.

In asking people to assume various responsibilities, the meeting recognizes that each individual has unique gifts which may not be equally suitable for all positions in the meeting. The meeting does not ask members and attenders to take on inappropriate responsibilities out of a sense of equality or “taking turns.” The meeting trusts its officers and committees so as to spare the entire body from many small decisions. However, ministry in word and act, responsibility for the good order and material needs of the meeting, visitation, faithfulness in testimonies—all these things, in the measure of Light that is given, fall upon each person in the meeting.

Leadership is the role of facilitating and listening closely for unity and the sense of the corporate body, rather than pursuing an individual agenda. Leadership can be demanding. Some people hesitate to ask for help when struggling and some don’t realize they need it. Friends may approach a leader and ask what would be helpful, such as a Support or Anchor Committee. Friends stay tender to one another and work in the spirit of mutual understanding and faith. All of us are part of the meeting, and we support it when we prayerfully uphold the clerk, officers, committee clerks, and committee members.

An officer or committee member wishing to resign from service sends a statement in writing to the committee clerk, the clerk of the Nominating Committee, or the clerk of the meeting as a whole. Whichever clerk receives the resignation statement informs the other two promptly, and the resignation goes before meeting for business. Only the body which made the appointment can withdraw it, so the resignation is not final until the meeting accepts it. If led to do so, the clerk of the meeting or clerk of Nominating Committee meets in loving concern with the officer or committee member to discuss the circumstances of the resignation.

Officers

Monthly meetings appoint individuals to serve as officers and to carry out specific functions, such as presiding over meetings, keeping records, maintaining stewardship of property and funds, and nurturing the community. Names for the offices vary. It is important that responsibility for all necessary functions be assumed by willing and capable individuals. The officers are appointed for defined terms of service using the nomination process described below under “Nominating Committee.” An effective officer is one who, while assuming a particular responsibility, is committed to the leading of the Spirit in discerning what needs to be done and who seeks to engage others in the meeting.

Clerk. The clerk is called to attend to the guidance of the Spirit in all aspects of the life of the meeting. The clerk is also called upon to speak on behalf of the meeting to the broader public. In an emergency, the clerk is the central point of contact for the meeting and the public. Because of the clerk’s weight of responsibility, especially in a larger meeting, they may be encouraged to have a Support Committee. The clerk’s most visible role is facilitating 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.

The following suggestions are meant especially for the clerk of a monthly meeting; they apply generally to the clerk of any Friends body and may be useful guidelines for clerks of committees. Some groups have co-clerks who share the tasks.

Suggestions for Handling Challenges in Leadership

When an officer or committee member (or a whole committee) seems unable to work effectively, the meeting can respond in a variety of ways. Possible actions include:

- The clerk of the meeting or clerk of that particular committee speaking informally with the officer or committee member to ask what’s happening;
- Eldering in loving concern—deep listening and spiritual laboring together with the person;
- Waiting until the person’s term ends;
- Appointing an assistant clerk or additional committee members to help fulfill the obligations;
- Offering the possibility of a Clearness Committee on the question of continuing service;
- Asking the quarterly or yearly meeting’s Ministry & Oversight Committee for advice or for help in eldering;
- Asking for the person’s resignation.

The clerk is a member of the meeting who has the confidence of its membership and who, in turn, has deep respect and warm regard for its individual members and attenders. The clerk is spiritually sensitive so that the meeting for business may be helped to discover the will of the Spirit. Familiarity with *Faith and Practice* is essential and awareness of other Quaker literature is important. The clerk is able to comprehend readily, evaluate rightly, and state clearly and concisely an item of business or a concern which comes to the meeting. In order to gather the sense of the meeting at the proper time, the clerk listens receptively to what is said.

The clerk faithfully attends meeting for worship and keeps close to the work of committees, especially the Worship & Ministry and Pastoral Care Committees. The clerk sees that correspondence that comes to the meeting is properly handled.

The clerk presides at all meetings for business; if prevented from attending, arrangements are made for a substitute. The clerk prepares an agenda prior to the meeting and encourages committee clerks and others to provide ahead of time such reports, concerns, and other proposals as ought 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. The clerk requests that appropriate background material accompany each issue presented.

A chief art of the clerk is 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 may call a special meeting for business to consider a specific item. The clerk provides advance notice of such a "called meeting," which considers no other business.

After action has been taken, the clerk communicates with the persons involved and makes sure that they understand their responsibility in carrying out the actions.

The clerk signs all official papers and minutes. It is good practice for both the clerk and another designated officer to sign any legal documents. The clerk, or assistant clerk, prepares and endorses certificates of transfer, minutes for sojourning members, traveling minutes, and letters of introduction, as well as endorsing minutes or letters of visiting Friends.

The clerk also has the responsibility to coordinate the activities of the meeting with those of the quarterly and yearly meetings 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 officers, that business and concerns are sent at the proper time to the quarterly or yearly meeting, and that items received from those meetings go to the proper persons and committees.

Assistant Clerk. An assistant to the clerk, who may be called an assistant clerk, helps the clerk during meetings for business, in whatever ways are mutually agreeable. In a larger meeting, another listening presence can aid the clerk during meeting for business. The assistant acts for the clerk when the latter is unable to serve. In some meetings this clerk also serves as an archivist.

Recording Clerk. The recording clerk records the minutes of the meeting for business and is responsible for compiling all the reports and documents that pertain to the minutes.

Recording Minutes. The recording clerk writes minutes mindful that they preserve the history of the meeting. While the method for taking minutes varies somewhat by monthly meeting, there are some basic, standard practices. Friends reading the minutes later find it helpful if they include: the title of the minutes with the full correct name of the meeting and the day, month, and year of the business meeting session; the time meeting commenced; the number of those present; the name of the clerk and the recording clerk; and any query read. The recording clerk also includes any unique details of the day. For individuals with the same names, the recording clerk finds ways to distinguish them in the minutes. The recording clerk records the names of individuals only when they are making a report or fulfilling a duty, not when they are speaking to issues being

considered. The recording clerk uses proper titles for organizations referred to, and their constituent parts, such as “Pacific Northwest Quarterly Meeting.” The recording clerk accurately notes marriages, births, and deaths of those associated with the meeting. These records become part of the meeting’s archives.

The minutes of the monthly meeting for business include information and reports, as well as records of official action that a meeting takes. Minutes aim for completeness and succinctness. When the monthly meeting comes to a decision on an issue, it is recorded in the minutes. When the clerk states the sense of the meeting on that issue and the meeting agrees that the statement is correct, the recording clerk may ask that it be repeated so that it can be recorded exactly as approved by the body. After recording the decision in a minute, the recording clerk may then immediately reread the minute to the meeting for approval. Also, for important issues, it is useful for the recording clerk to include succinct details that convey the difficulties involved, including a brief history of the matter. Some meetings use the process of approving minutes item by item during the meeting for business for all parts of the minutes. Others approve only important minutes immediately. Others publish minutes in their newsletters or by email, and seek approval of the minutes at the next occurring meeting for business. If necessary, at the close of meeting for business, the recording clerk may confer with those giving reports or making recommendations, to ensure that the minutes correctly reflect what was said.

Memorial minutes are those reflecting on the life of a recently deceased Friend. They are usually prepared in advance of the monthly meeting for business and read during the meeting. The recording clerk attaches memorial minutes to the minutes for the meeting for business. Further discussion of memorial minutes is found in Chapter 11, “Death and Memorials.”

Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer. The treasurer collects contributions and payments due to the meeting, makes deposits and pays bills in a timely manner, balances the checking and savings accounts, and disburses funds as the meeting directs. The treasurer keeps the account books of the meeting, tracks expenditures against the budget and keeps records of payments made, and prepares monthly reports for the meeting. They record donations and prepare end-of-year contribution statements. In consultation with the Finance Committee, the treasurer prepares the annual budget and investigates and recommends possible investments for the meeting. An accountant or bookkeeper may be engaged to assist them. The accounts should be audited at regular intervals. An informal audit is acceptable when performed in a transparent manner.

An assistant treasurer to work with and help the treasurer may be appointed when there is need, such as in larger meetings.

...That collections be timely made for the poor ... as they are moved, according to order, for relief of prisoners, and other necessary uses, as need shall require: and all moneys so collected, an account thereof to be taken; from which every need may be supplied, as made known by the overseers in every meeting: that no private ends may be answered, but all brought to the light, that the gospel be not slandered.

Epistle from the Elders at Balby, 1656

Archivist. While the minutes and records of committee clerks and officers are their responsibility to preserve, the archivist (sometimes called recorder) takes care of other important records of the meeting. The archivist preserves typewritten or electronically printed copies on archival paper, and, to the extent possible, electronic copies of all minutes and documents from meeting for business. Attention is paid to keeping electronic records in accessible formats. The archivist may have the care of young people’s formal statements of their conscientious objection to military service. The archivist also preserves important correspondence and legal papers, such as deeds, conveyances, and trusts, in a permanent repository protected from fire and loss.

For preservation of membership records, see the Pastoral Care Committee, below.

...That a record be kept in every meeting of the births of children of such who are members of that meeting, and of the burials of the dead who die in the Lord as they depart out of the body....

Epistle from the Elders at Balby, 1656

Committees

Monthly meetings often use committees to further their 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. A committee can also be a “school of the Spirit” where Friends nurture one another and offer mutual accountability and support. Faithful service on a committee can be a spiritual discipline; see “Participation in the Life of the Meeting” in Chapter 3, “Friends Spiritual Disciplines.”

Each meeting decides which committees are necessary to carry out its business and concerns, and how they are named. There is no obligation to create any committee, although most monthly meetings find a Committee on Ministry & Counsel and a Nominating Committee essential. Other standing committees often found in meetings are those on religious education, finance, peace and social concerns, outreach to the wider community, property, and fellowship. Ad hoc committees are sometimes useful for a particular project or concern. When a committee no longer serves its purpose, it is laid down.

Members of committees are carefully selected according to their abilities and concerns. Appointments to a committee are for a definite term of service and often arranged so that terms overlap, to ensure continuity. Meetings customarily appoint experienced and capable members of the Religious Society of Friends to the committees on pastoral care and ministry in order to assign those responsibilities to persons of spiritual depth who are familiar with Friends faith and ways of organizing and conducting meeting work. Some meetings, particularly smaller meetings, choose also to invest seasoned attenders with those responsibilities while others limit service on Worship & Ministry and Pastoral Care Committees to members of the Society.

Committees conduct business in the same manner as a monthly meeting, waiting on the Spirit to find direction in their operation and unity in their decisions. Clerks of committees or their designees attend meeting for business regularly in order to assure smooth coordination between the committees and the meeting. It is important that committees keep minutes of their meetings and report to the monthly meeting regularly. All action of committees in the name of the meeting is subject to approval by the monthly meeting for business. 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 consider carefully the recommendations of a committee, and at the same time do not re-do 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.

Another Quaker custom is that when a committee or smaller group reports back to the larger group about its work or recommendation, that committee is trusted to have done their work well. We trust their study and insight of the issue. ... The work of the larger group is to hear the details or recommendations, and make decisions regarding the ... broad implications of the decision, and to decide whether or not to go forward.

Rebecca Henderson, 2013

Worship & Ministry and Pastoral Care Committees

The important and closely related functions of these two committees are central to the life of the meeting. These committees have a special responsibility to encourage and develop the care of members for each other and for the life of the meeting (although all members share in the responsibility for such care). The primary focus of the Worship & Ministry Committee is the spiritual life of the meeting, while the Pastoral Care Committee is mainly concerned with care for members, including their relationship to the meeting.

The Pastoral Care Committee has sometimes been called an “Oversight Committee,” a name less often used today because “oversight” recalls the history of slavery. This committee may also be called the “Care & Counsel Committee.” This *Faith and Practice* uses “Pastoral Care Committee” for the sake of clarity when referring to the committee concerned with memberships, marriages, memorial meetings, and similar matters.

Some meetings, especially smaller meetings, have one committee with combined functions. This committee is sometimes called the “Ministry & Oversight Committee;” some meetings call it the “Ministry & Counsel Committee,” “Spiritual Nurture Committee,” or “Community Spiritual Life Committee.” Each Friends group names its own committees as it finds best.

Joint Responsibilities. In a meeting which has both a Worship & Ministry Committee and a Pastoral Care Committee, these committees share certain responsibilities. The monthly meeting sometimes asks these committees to share in the nurture of worship groups and preparative meetings under its care, although a separate committee is sometimes appointed for this purpose. 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.

Worship & Ministry. The function of the Committee on Worship & 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, it is central to the life of the meeting. The first responsibility of members of this committee is to deepen their own spiritual lives and their preparation for worship.

This 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 offer vocal ministry in meeting for worship and those less inclined to do so. It also includes Friends of good judgment who have a gift for encouraging sensitivity to divine prompting.

The committee meets regularly to consider the meeting for worship and to keep it under constant review, prayer, and care. Members of this committee strengthen meeting for worship by attending regularly, setting an example, demonstrating promptness and reverence in their approach to the meeting for worship, and adhering faithfully to the guidance of the Spirit. Through self-examination, prayer, and mutual counsel, committee members help one another and the meeting to grow in worship and ministry. An ever-renewed dedication to worship is almost always the best way to minister to difficulties in a meeting for worship.

This committee is responsible for the care of meeting for worship, including, for example, welcoming of visitors, encouraging promptness at meeting, protecting the sense of worship, and closing meeting for worship.

The committee may occasionally hold meetings for all members and attenders to share their experience and search for insight concerning the meeting for worship and the meeting for business. When appropriate, the committee may propose to the meeting specially called meetings for worship. See, for instance, “Memorial Meetings” in Chapter 11, “Death and Memorials.”

Committee members are mindful that there are differences in background, fluency of expression, and power of interpretation among those who may be led to speak. The committee gives sympathetic

encouragement to those who show promising gifts and gives loving and tender guidance to those whose vocal ministry may seem too frequent, too lengthy, not Spirit-led, or otherwise of concern to the meeting. The committee opens the way for those who are timid and inexperienced in vocal ministry and encourages all Friends in the ministry of listening. Committee members cultivate in themselves the search for right guidance.

The committee seeks to deepen the spiritual lives of individuals in the meeting and encourages varied gifts for ministry and service, whether through vocal ministry, teaching, deep listening, and counsel, or through artistic, interpersonal, and practical ways of expression. The committee encourages private worship, prayer, meditation, and devotional reading to promote growth in the spiritual life and prepare each individual for the corporate worship of the meeting. The committee may also obtain and circulate appropriate literature and arrange for retreats, study groups, and spiritual sharing groups.

Pastoral Care. The Pastoral Care Committee (sometimes called the Oversight Committee or Care & Counsel Committee) is responsible for the care of the meeting's members. In providing pastoral care, the committee is concerned with the more outward aspects of building a fellowship in which all members find acceptance, loving care, and opportunity for service. Then all may grow in grace and, liberated from preoccupation with self, help to serve humanity creatively.

Membership on this committee calls for dedication, tact, confidentiality, and discretion, and is entered into prayerfully, with an alert 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. The committee meets regularly to carry on its work in a spirit of dedication and love.

The committee knows the members and attenders of meeting and maintains contact with them in a spirit of affectionate interest and loving care. To foster the knowledge of one another in things both temporal and eternal, the committee encourages members and attenders to visit in each other's homes and promotes activities that will deepen fellowship within the meeting. The committee also encourages Friends to attend the Annual Session of the yearly meeting and similar gatherings, advising on possible financial assistance for this purpose.

It is useful for the committee to keep in contact with 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. The committee keeps in touch with inactive members, hoping to rekindle their interest in the meeting. If an individual fails to attend meeting for worship for a prolonged period, the committee may encourage that person to withdraw from meeting (see Chapter 9, "Membership"). When appropriate, the meeting encourages distant members to transfer membership to a nearby meeting.

The committee also faithfully keeps an accurate record of the membership as provided for on the form recommended by the yearly meeting. Such records cover vital statistics 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. Each spring the committee or an officer of the meeting completes a questionnaire from the yearly meeting to give statistical and other information regarding the monthly meeting. A copy of this report is part of the permanent records of the monthly meeting.

The Pastoral Care Committee considers and recommends action upon requests for membership and transfer and withdrawal of membership (see Chapter 9). 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 young people near adulthood, the Pastoral Care Committee makes sure they understand that membership in the Religious Society of Friends is an individual conscious choice, not an automatic, age-dependent transition. The committee may discuss this with young people informally

or may offer the clearness process to them to discern whether they are led to request membership. The committee also helps to make newcomers and attenders welcome and gives them information concerning Quakers and Quakerism. When it seems right, the committee encourages those who may be holding back to consider applying for membership.

The committee assists those contemplating and entering into marriage under the care of the meeting (see Chapter 10, “Marriage and Committed Relationships”). It gives care and aid in needed arrangements at the time of death (see Chapter 11, “Death and Memorials”). The committee seeks to be of help in clearing up misunderstandings and reconciling differences that 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 is tender to the challenges of aging and long-term illness, helps to discern the appropriate limits of medical intervention, and offers a Care Committee as need arises. The Pastoral Care Committee sees that those in need are visited, counseled with, and assisted. The meeting provides this committee with a fund to be used at its discretion.

Particular responsibility for spiritual counseling and care lies with the Pastoral Care Committee, which should choose counselors fitted for particular needs from among themselves or from among other qualified persons in the meeting. Qualifications of a good counselor include approachability, warmth, sympathy, spiritual insight without prejudice, capacity to listen without judging, and ability to keep confidences.

In dealing with particular needs, the committee remembers the value of simply listening. To listen helpfully and creatively involves faith in the person and in God, a desire to understand, patience, and avoidance of giving advice. The committee is sensitive to those who may not be receptive to counseling, or who hesitate to seek help. The committee usually assigns one or two Friends to address a given situation. These Friends honor confidentiality, although they may rely on the Pastoral Care Committee as a whole for additional help. The assigned Friends suggest new ways of looking at the problem and possible solutions, but decisions must be left to the person involved. The assigned Friends encourage growth, independence, and self-reliance while providing emotional support for those making hard decisions.

Conflict in Meetings

A difficult issue may cause prolonged conflict within a meeting. Silent worship, our most central practice, is the most vulnerable to disruption. Examples of other issues that can spark conflict are:

- The content of religious education programs for children;
- Use of funds, e.g., spending, saving, investing;
- The meeting space itself, e.g., renting, owning, renovating;
- Changes in organizational structure, e.g., a worship group becoming a preparative meeting, or a monthly meeting reverting to a worship group.

Conflict can take on different faces in meetings of different sizes. In large meetings a disturbance may be overlooked because few are aware of it or it is unclear which committee will respond to it. In medium-sized meetings, members overburdened with other meeting demands may find it hard to give due time and energy to resolving conflicts. In small meetings or worship groups, conflict can be particularly disruptive because there is no “neutral party” and everyone is involved in some way.

In any meeting, unresolved conflict may cause people to leave and may threaten the survival of the group itself.

Every meeting, but especially a small meeting, is advised to discern when to ask for outside help. Meetings wisely assess resources available to address a conflict. This process may reveal that it is best to invite a Friend experienced in Quaker dispute resolution from the quarterly or yearly meeting, or outside NPYM, to help the group find its way forward.

Even after the issue is resolved, disturbed relationships may remain within the group. The Pastoral Care Committee can facilitate healing dialogue with individuals who are especially estranged. Following up with a called “meeting for worship for healing” when the conflict ends may yield both forgiveness and unity.

A problem may be too serious for the Pastoral Care Committee to handle alone, in which case a professional referral is made. Members of the committee make themselves familiar with assistance available in the wider community, including clinics, family and social services, therapists, physicians, and psychiatrists. The committee may call upon others in 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 can also be of great help in a critical time.

Challenges in Pastoral Care

The Pastoral Care Committee is a confidential place for considering the needs and characteristics of individuals in a more complete way than would be comfortable with the meeting as a whole. Many Friends struggle at times with their own personal problems. Friends ordinarily want to extend themselves to help others. A meeting can get lost in the issues someone might bring. At the same time the meeting needs to attend to the safety of adults and children and the meeting community as a whole.

Safety of Children and Youth. Friends need to be aware that we are just as susceptible as any other group to those who would take advantage of our children and teenagers. Situations of trust can provide openings for abuse. We are responsible for ensuring the safety of children in our communities. Meetings educate themselves regarding indicators, prevention, and handling of incidents of abuse. All Friends groups exercise common-sense precautions in monitoring activities that include adult teachers or caregivers and children.²

Conflict within the Meeting. Friends may find themselves in sharp disagreement about particular attitudes and actions. Such disagreement is not to be deplored; it may help to clarify issues and contribute to a deeper unity in time. When difficulties arise, shared, prayerful, and determined efforts to seek Guidance by those involved can help to gain a better understanding. The Pastoral Care Committee may assist with this process or may labor individually with a Friend of unbearable behavior. Support by experienced Friends from quarterly or yearly meeting or other sources may help a meeting to grapple with serious conflict. Mediation can also be sought to strengthen a monthly meeting in its capacity to lovingly and effectively resolve uncomfortable differences. Working faithfully through controversy is central to the health of a Friends community.

Behavioral Disorders. A meeting's members and attenders (or their families) may have varying degrees of behavioral disorders, including mental illness and dementia. Meetings try to be supportive, although it is not always clear how to be so meaningfully. Friends continue to be tolerant and accepting to the extent possible. But it should be emphasized that disruptive behavior during meeting for worship cannot be accepted. The Worship & Ministry and Pastoral Care Committees respond appropriately to stop behavior that disrupts meeting for worship or threatens the fabric of the meeting community.

In some cases, it may be helpful to designate a Friend to sit in meeting for worship with the person showing behavioral disorder; in other cases a designated Friend may invite the person to leave meeting together to talk elsewhere. In the experience of one meeting, a mentally ill person severely and consistently disrupted meeting for worship. A Clearness Committee process led to a separate, regularly scheduled meeting for worship which included that person and did not disrupt the worship of others. It is important to remember that meetings cannot provide therapy, nor can they ignore such things as civil protection orders.

Violent Offenders. Individuals with a history of sexual offense or other violent crimes may seek to attend meeting. They may be given a chance to come to terms with their past with the help of the

² NPYM's Youth Safety Policy may serve as a reference or model: <http://npym.org/?q=content/npym-youth-safety-policy>. Multnomah Monthly Meeting also has an extensive child and youth safety policy; see "resources" on their website: <https://www.quakercloud.org/cloud/multnomah-friends-meeting>.

meeting. But the extent to which a meeting can be of help is very limited. A meeting cannot function as a personal therapist. One meeting appointed a Clearness Committee for a convicted sex offender and held several threshing sessions on all the concerns that arose within the group. This process led to a special, regularly scheduled meeting for worship off-site in a home with no children.

There are other important and practical considerations; it is essential for the meeting to identify sexual offenders promptly, so that it can maintain appropriate monitoring for the safety of all children and adults. The meeting must be sensitive to the needs of adults in the meeting who might have been abused. Meetings and worship groups have to consider what accommodations they can make with the resources they have available.

How we deal with trauma within our meetings is an indicator of how skillfully and consistently we are living our Quaker testimonies.

Bill Ames, 2011

Nominating Committee

The meeting depends upon the Nominating Committee to find the most appropriate persons to fulfill meeting responsibilities and to use to best advantage the capabilities of meeting members and attenders. The committee, a small group of sensitive, tactful, and dedicated Friends, works to discern the meeting's needs, in both the immediate and long term, and to nurture the growth of new leaders.

The Nominating Committee is representative of the meeting and its members serve overlapping terms. In some meetings a small ad hoc committee is created, often at a meeting for business, to nominate members of the Nominating Committee. These nominations are acted on directly by the monthly meeting. This selection process is used to ensure that the Nominating Committee does not perpetuate itself.

Members of the Nominating Committee are familiar with the function and structure of the meeting and with the good order of Friends. They are aware of the interests, talents, proven experience, latent gifts, and leadership potential of meeting participants. The committee must begin its work well in advance of the date when its nominations for new officers, committees, and committee clerks are presented to the monthly meeting. After the committee presents its slate, the meeting postpones action upon it for a month, during which time Friends consider the nominations prayerfully and may seek clarification or suggest changes to the Nominating Committee.

The Nominating Committee is available throughout the year to nominate persons to fill vacancies which may occur or new positions which the meeting may establish. This committee is usually responsible for maintaining written job descriptions of the offices and committees to be filled. In some meetings, the Nominating Committee's sole task is discerning how to match Friends' gifts with available positions; in other meetings, the committee has the broader charge of care for the spiritual health and functioning of the various committees, and responsibility to intervene when a committee seems to be struggling.

The Nominating Committee best serves the meeting by keeping the following suggestions in mind:

1. In approaching candidates, the committee members make clear that the meeting, not the committee, is responsible for the ultimate appointment.
2. The approach is not made casually. The Nominating Committee and the person approached for nomination need to fully understand the duties involved in the position. The committee gives a written job description to the prospective nominee.
3. Not all Friends are equally qualified for a particular responsibility, so the committee avoids "taking turns" or rewarding long service in making nominations.

4. The committee consults the clerk of a committee about members proposed for that committee. When two persons are to work together closely they should both be consulted about the proposed arrangement.
5. The Nominating Committee recommends a clerk for each standing committee.
6. When the work might pose challenges for a nominee, the Nominating Committee offers to help arrange support and guidance from an individual or a Support Committee.
7. The Nominating Committee considers the gifts and talents of new and young members and attenders.
8. The Nominating Committee provides information about workshops and other training available for clerks, treasurers, and committee members.
9. The committee stays aware of individual Friends who are carrying heavy responsibilities for the meeting; it understands that it is unwise for one or two people to hold too much responsibility.
10. When there are persistent difficulties in filling offices or committees, the Nominating Committee makes the meeting aware.

Religious Education Committee

The committee adopts curricula, activities, and projects that reflect Quaker faith and practice for both adults and children. It helps children feel welcome and integrated into the meeting community. Care for young people is an opportunity for the whole meeting, not just a task of one committee. The meeting can provide recognition of transitions such as high-school graduation; it can nurture the spiritual gifts and spiritual contributions of young people, and encourage participation in meeting for worship. A large meeting may have separate committees for children’s religious education and adult programming. See “Religious Education and Study” in Chapter 3, “Friends Spiritual Disciplines.”

Clearness and Other Care Committees

Meetings form various kinds of ad hoc committees to assist members and attenders. Different meetings use different names—a “Clearness Committee” in one case may be a “Support Committee” or “Anchor Committee” in another. No matter what the committee is called, meetings wisely take care to establish any such committee mindfully, state its charge clearly, and name a clerk to convene its meetings and guide its process. Typically the Pastoral Care Committee appoints the committee in consultation with the person or group needing clearness, support, or care.

Such a committee may also meet without the focus person or group present, to seek Light for its work. The committee may ask:

- What are our appropriate behavioral boundaries? Are we keeping to them?
- Are we helping or are we hindering, for example by fostering dependency?
- Are we allowing the focus person or group to do their own work, or are we being too directive?
- Are we staying within our responsibility and charge?
- Have we gone beyond our ability? (That is, is it time to recommend professional help?)

Clearness Committees. Clearness Committees are ad hoc committees appointed by the Pastoral Care Committee. Their original and continuing use has been for those requesting membership in the Religious Society of Friends and for those contemplating marriage. Over the years, the scope of Clearness Committees has widened to address personal problems and decision-making.

When an individual, family, or other group is facing a particularly difficult situation, they may request a Clearness Committee. The Pastoral Care Committee appoints the committee and names its

clerk in consultation with the person or group concerned. Situations in which clearness is sought may include changes in a marriage relationship such as separation or divorce; interpersonal conflicts within the meeting; stands on public issues; a new job; a required move to a distant area; a concern for personal witness; travel in the ministry; and other personal decisions. The Clearness Committee and the person or group meet together in worship to seek divine Guidance.

The process begins with the person or group asking for the committee to help hear what God may be asking of them in a particular area of life. The committee usually consists of two to four trusted individuals (but not necessarily close friends) willing to listen. The Clearness Committee's clerk convenes the committee and keeps it focused. Another member may take notes.

The committee gathers in silent worship. The person or group speaks out of the silence concerning the question weighing on them. Listeners offer gentle open-ended questions to clarify the matter; the person or group responds from the heart. The committee's inquiries invite the focus person or group to deeply engage and discern their own truth, rather than offering advice or judgment in the guise of questions. All present are committed to attend to the movement of the Spirit, recognizing that this is a time for the person or group to find their own way in accord with the Light, not an opportunity for others to share stories about how they solved similar problems. The listeners reflect back what they have been hearing. Further meetings are arranged if desired. In all things the committee remains aware that the process is confidential.

Support Committees, Anchor Committees. A Support or Anchor Committee is an ad hoc committee acting as elders for a Friend who is filling a responsible position within the meeting or the Society. The clerk of a meeting, a hospital chaplain, a prison visitor, or a Friend with a leading in peace, social justice, or environmental action—all can benefit from a gentle, strong listening presence to help them stay faithful, grounded, and accountable in their ministry. The Friend may choose the committee name that best describes the type of assistance they need. The Pastoral Care Committee or Worship & Ministry Committee appoints the Support or Anchor Committee (usually two to five people) and names its clerk in consultation with the Friend concerned. The Support or Anchor Committee exists for the duration of the Friend's work.

Care Committees. A Care Committee is an ad hoc committee that usually consists of two or three people who walk alongside a Friend during major life transitions, long-term illness, or incapacity. The Pastoral Care Committee appoints the committee and names its clerk in consultation with the Friend concerned. The Care Committee responds to the person in need of assistance by arranging for food, prayers, visits, transportation, or other support that can be provided by volunteers. It may make available counsel, information, and support in planning for life transitions. The Care Committee reports regularly to the Pastoral Care Committee and is laid down when the Friend's situation is resolved.

Friends in Ministry

...That care be taken for the families and goods of such as are called forth into the ministry, or who are imprisoned for the truth's sake....

Epistle from the Elders at Balby, 1656

“Friends in Ministry” includes Friends with leadings to travel among, write for, and speak to other Friends, as well as Friends whose lives speak in a specific outward witness—for example, visiting prisoners, working among the mentally ill, addressing racism, or serving at food banks or homeless shelters. In our time, “Friends in Ministry” is expanding among unprogrammed Friends to include, for example, Friends in professions with an explicit pastoral or ministry component, such as chaplains and spiritual directors.

Vocal ministry during meeting for worship is described in “Expectant Worship, Vocal Ministry” in Chapter 3, “Friends Spiritual Disciplines.”

Released Friends with a Concern. Friends endeavor to serve God through their daily lives. However, in some Friends there arises a leading to some specific task. The leading is felt as an imperative claim—it cannot be denied even when the individual experiences deep personal reluctance. This is what Friends call a “concern.” It is also possible for a concern to arise spontaneously in a meeting in response to a particular need or opportunity. From early days the Religious Society of Friends has greatly valued those leadings of the Spirit which result in individual and corporate concerns. However, concerns vary in merit, depending on the validity of the inspiration and the care with which they are considered and carried out. The concerns of even well-known Friends have not always been of equal significance. Some concerns are meant for an individual, others for a wider group. Friends pursue a concern publicly only after they have clearness for themselves and the concern has received the corporate support of their meeting. A person with a concern should have patience and humility in seeking support for it.

The appropriate place for a concern to be first considered and tested as a true leading of the Spirit is within the monthly meeting, the basic unit of the Society. Before bringing a concern to the meeting for business, an individual Friend considers it prayerfully, to be sure that it is rightly motivated and of more than personal or passing importance. The Friend seasons the concern through consultation with qualified Friends, a standing committee of the meeting, such as the Peace & Social Concerns Committee or the Worship & Ministry Committee, or a specially requested Clearness Committee. When the seasoning process is complete, the concern comes to the meeting for business in a clear, concise, written statement of its purpose, including the actions proposed and the support needed from the meeting. Until the meeting determines that it will support the concern, Friends avoid statements implying that the meeting has given its support.

Unhurried consideration of the concern by the meeting is important. Consideration may extend over more than one monthly meeting for business. The meeting may unite with and support a Friend to carry out a concern personally—for example, to travel in the ministry, to witness to Friends principles in a given situation, or to do other religiously motivated service.

The process of releasing a Friend from meeting to act on a concern involves careful consideration both of merits and methods as well as the qualifications and situation of the Friend to be released. Motivation, character, and family and financial situation need to be considered. A meeting’s support for a released Friend could include any of the following:

- Release from obligations such as holding meeting offices and serving on committees;
- Appointment of a Support or Anchor Committee to offer advice, encouragement, accountability, and a place to test ideas and leadings;
- Material help as needed;
- Provision of a “traveling minute” outlining the nature of the Friend’s concern and stating the meeting’s endorsement (see below).

The released Friend’s Support Committee reports regularly to the meeting on the progress of the ministry. The Support Committee or the Pastoral Care Committee reviews the concern periodically to see if the help of the meeting should be altered or discontinued.

Sometimes a meeting may find itself so fully in sympathy with the concern that it is laid upon the group as a whole and is carried out by the meeting. If a concern has meaning for more than this monthly meeting, it may be shared directly with other monthly meetings. It may also be forwarded to the quarterly meeting or to a standing committee of North Pacific Yearly Meeting. (See “Bringing Concerns before the Yearly Meeting,” in Chapter 8, “The Yearly Meeting.”)

If a meeting fails to unite with a member's concern, the member generally reconsiders it very carefully. Occasionally, an individual who is strongly convinced that the corporate life of the meeting and of the Society will be enriched if it can grow and unite with a particular concern may bring that concern to the meeting repeatedly over an extended period. Many of the Quaker testimonies have evolved because of the patient persistence of a valiant Friend who has perceived the Light with extraordinary clarity. Such persistence has helped some meetings and the Society come to unite with an insight which they could not at first accept. If the meeting still remains unable to unite with the concern, it may be because the Friend is "running ahead of their Guide" or because the concern does not arise from a genuine spiritual leading.

Recorded Ministers. Monthly meetings within NPYM do not record ministers. Meetings do support and encourage the many Friends in NPYM who exercise clear spiritual gifts and whose lives speak in a variety of ministries.

Traveling Minutes. When a member proposes to travel under the weight of a concern to be shared with other Friends, the matter is first considered by the Pastoral Care Committee. Upon recommendation by that committee, the monthly meeting may grant the Friend a traveling minute for that particular concern. When a meeting grants a traveling minute, it takes care that, as far as possible, the service of the released Friend is not hindered for lack of funds or other resources.

If the visit will go beyond the yearly meeting, the minute should be forwarded to the presiding clerk for yearly meeting endorsement. Before the yearly meeting endorses the minute, it clarifies that the traveling Friend is aware of and sensitive to differences in theology and practice among the Friends to be visited.

Traveling minutes are submitted to and are customarily endorsed by the clerk or other officer of meetings visited by traveling Friends. The traveler returns the minute to the issuing meeting within a reasonable time after the visitation has been completed. Friends also report to other meetings which have supported the concern.

Letters of Introduction. Fellowship and the spiritual life of the Religious Society of Friends have long been nourished by visitation outside a member's own meeting. When a member has occasion to travel and wishes to be in touch with other members of the Society, the monthly meeting clerk may write a letter of introduction. The letter will certify the person's membership (or affiliation, for a faithful attender who is not a member), state something about the person's participation in the life of the meeting, and convey greetings to Friends who will be visited. 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.

Friends who are traveling and wish to visit Friends in other meetings may receive valuable guidance through Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas.