

Some Guidelines for Clearness

For a Leading or Ministry under the Care of a Meeting

** Borrowed & adapted from Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting's "Handbook for Formal Care of Friends Called to Ministry or Witness" Approved April 10, 2005, Draft Revision 2010*

Clearness

In a clearness process, an individual (or couple, in the case of clearness for marriage) meets with three or four other Friends in a spirit of worship, listening and loving concern. The clearness committee's job is to help the focus person discover whether there is clarity to move forward with a matter, wait, or take other action. Clearness committees can be used informally as a way of testing for clarity around personal decisions or transitions, and more formally for membership, marriage and public ministry, witness or the carrying of a concern which ought to be brought formally into our meetings' care and accountability. In the formal clearness process, this clarity is for the spiritual community as well. If a recommendation is to be brought before the community, clearness must be sought on behalf of both the meeting and the individual.

The clearness process includes:

- Worship together
- Deep listening to the questions & concerns brought to the committee
- Careful, gentle open-ended questions from clearness committee members
- Reflecting back what has been heard

A. Clearness of the Individual

Testing for clearness is a spiritual exercise which requires that the person seeking clearness and the members of the committee all enter in a spirit of trust, teachability, and openness to the guidance of the Spirit. Occasionally members of a clearness committee may meet separately from the focus person in order to clarify process or address obstacles to unity; however, the report to the meeting's ministry and counsel committee should be produced jointly with the focus person. While there are suggestions below on issues to reflect on in seeking clearness, clearness is not found in the correct answers to a set of questions. It is found in the collective sense of having discerned the leadings of the Spirit. A clearness process that has been favored by the movement of the Spirit may produce an unexpected and surprising outcome.

(NOTE – A clearness committee for a leading for ministry or stand of conscience under the care of the meeting involves clearness on behalf of *both* the individual *and* the meeting.)

1. *Appointing a Clearness Committee*

When there is a need for testing of the leading or exploration of how the meeting might most appropriately support the Friend in her/his faithfulness, the meeting's ministry and counsel committee appoints a clearness committee to join the Friend in a process of discernment.

In some instances, ministry and counsel may feel clear to bring a recommendation supporting a Friend's request directly to the meeting for business without a further clearness process. This is most likely to be appropriate when the work has been known to the meeting or where it has been tested through other meeting channels (such as a small group in the meeting.)

2. *Responsibilities of the clearness committee*

The clearness committee should be attentive to two responsibilities:

- Assisting the individual in testing his/her next steps in faithfulness, grounding in the Spirit and readiness to take these next steps
- Assisting the meeting in discerning its appropriate role as outlined below

The clearness committee usually meets one to three times, or as needed, to come to clarity and unity. Should concerns arise at any stage in the clearness process the clearness committee or the person seeking clearness may consult with ministry and counsel for support and guidance.

3. *Testing Clearness*

The first step in the clearness process is to assist the individual to come to a deeper clarity about whether there is a leading of the Spirit, what faithfulness requires, and whether way is open for responding. Through a clearness process a person who feels a leading of the Spirit can come to a deeper clarity about the nature of a call and a fuller understanding of how submitting to the meeting's care and discernment may empower it.

Below are suggestions of issues to reflect on in seeking clearness.

- Grounding in the Spirit:* Is the sense of call from God or from some other impulse? How does this person ground her/his seeking?
- The nature of the call:* What is being asked of this Friend? How has the person come to feel that s/he is being called to this service? How does this call fit into his/her personal and spiritual life?
- Ways in which the person already feels clear:* In what ways does the person feel already clear? What questions and concerns is s/he seeking to clarify?

- D. *Potential benefits of the proposed ministry:* What are the potential benefits to the person's spiritual development? What are the potential benefits to the wider community? What are the potential benefits to the life of the meeting as it seeks to learn the ways of faithfulness?
- E. *Readiness to undertake the ministry:* Is the person prepared to undertake this ministry at this time? How does it fit into other obligations such as family, work, or community? Does the person have the skills and resources to carry out this call? What steps might be taken to become better prepared for undertaking the ministry? What are the risks and how will they be borne?
- F. *Financial readiness:* How will the person support him/herself while carrying out this ministry? Is s/he prepared to go forward even if the level of funds available may require living on significantly reduced means?
- G. *Rightness of seeking support:* Is it appropriate to ask others to join in this ministry by providing spiritual, practical, or financial support? Sometimes there may be clearness that this is something the individual is called to bear alone. What expectations does the person have of the meeting community and are they realistic? In exploring whether there is a role for the meeting, is the person prepared to engage prayerfully with others without resentment and disruption of his/ her relationship to the meeting community?
- H. *Adequacy of support:* Does the work require more financial or practical resources than the individual can reasonably carry alone? Is the needed financial or practical support available? If not, can the ministry be carried forward faithfully in a less demanding form and/or is it rightly ordered to wait until way more fully opens?
- I. *Next steps:* Are there next steps required in preparation and walking with the Guide before moving forward in outward action?

4. Discerning the clearness of the individual may produce a variety of outcomes:

- If the individual concludes that there is not a call to religious service or that this is not the right time to act on the call, ministry and counsel would report this outcome to the meeting for business. The Friend seeking clearness may continue to season the leading.
- If there is clearness for the individual to take some action, the clearness committee proceeds to discern what support from the meeting would be most rightly ordered.
- Often, the individual and the committee come to clearness that the individual has a Spirit led leading and that the support of the meeting would be a gift to the individual and to the meeting.
- On some occasions the committee and the individual do not find unity on the rightness of proceeding with the leading at this time. This is not a “failure” or a “bad outcome.” Rather, it signifies the need for further searching and growth in the Spirit by the individual, the meeting,

or both. Our Quaker forebears such as John Woolman and Lucretia Mott found themselves in this position with their meetings at times. It is an occasion for prayerfulness and humility for all concerned. The time of waiting may bring forward a ministry that is deepened and honed in ways that might not have been possible if the ministry moved forward when originally proposed.

If a lack of unity should occur, the individual and the committee may agree on a process for further seasoning the leading and/or further educating the meeting on the concern. They may explore with ministry and counsel what next steps might be appropriate. If the person feels called to act on the concern despite the reservations of the clearness committee, care should be taken to avoid bitterness and division.

B. Discerning the nature of the meeting's support

When a sense of unity and clarity is reached as to the rightness of the leading and any next steps, the clearness committee moves on to discern how the meeting might best support the Friend in faithfulness.

An individual's clarity to act on a leading does not necessarily imply that it is rightly ordered for the meeting to undertake any specific form of involvement. It may be found that the Friend is clear to move forward but that no further involvement of the meeting is needed or desired beyond informing the meeting of the progress of the ministry and holding the Friend in love and prayer.

More formal support of the meeting may take one or more of the following forms:

- Minuting the meeting's readiness to hold in its care the Friend's faithfulness to the leading
- Providing an anchoring committee (spiritual accountability group) to care for the minister's faithfulness
- Providing a letter or minute affirming the clarity of the Friend's call to religious service
- Providing financial or practical support
- Providing companions for travel
- Providing affirmation to another Friends organization
- Affirming that the meeting is in unity with the ministry and under the weight of the concern
- Other recommendations as the clearness committee or ministry and counsel is led

As the clearness committee proceeds with its work it should reflect on whether there are other forms of support already available in the meeting that might be appropriate for this individual.

C. Report of the Clearness Committee

The clearness committee reports to the meeting's ministry and counsel committee. On reviewing the report ministry and counsel may refer to the clearness committee any additional questions that

should be clarified before reporting to the meeting for business. As needed, ministry and counsel works with the clearness committee in identifying members for an anchoring committee (spiritual accountability group). Ministry and counsel may also assist the clearness committee in drafting a minute of religious service if there is to be one.

The report of the clearness committee to ministry and counsel should include:

1. Description of the leading and of the request to the meeting;
2. Clarity as to the nature and clarity of the leading and that the individual is spiritually grounded and ready to undertake the work
3. Clarity as to the timeliness of the leading;
4. Recommendations to the meeting for business regarding the meeting's relationship to the ministry;
5. Details regarding recommended actions of the meeting (any that apply):
 - a. Recommendations for members of an anchoring committee (spiritual accountability group);
 - b. The meeting's relationship with Quaker work outside the meeting with which the work will be affiliated (*e.g.*, yearly meeting or FGC);
 - c. Draft of a minute or letter
 - d. Recommendation regarding financial support from the meeting. If no financial support is needed at this time but a request in the future is anticipated it is good to let the meeting know that a further recommendation may be coming forward;
 - e. If funds are to be solicited outside the meeting, recommendations should include request for approval of solicitation of funds and include information about and the meeting's relationship to that support.

At the conclusion of the clearness process, the meeting's ministry and counsel committee reports to the meeting for business. In discerning its right response to the report, the meeting should discern its readiness to enter into a commitment to engage tenderly with the Friend as s/he seeks to be responsive to the Spirit's guidance.

Approval for taking a Friend's faithfulness to a leading under the meeting's care is usually for a specified period of time (often up to one year.) If the leading continues beyond a year, the meeting may once again discern the form(s) of support that are most appropriate in each new season of the ministry.

***Note** – this piece on Clearness Committees was borrowed (and adapted) with permission from the section on "Clearness" in Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting's *"Handbook for Formal Care of Friends"*

Called to Ministry or Witness,” approved April 10, 2005, Draft Revision 2010. Committee names were changed where appropriate to fit the wider body of FGC Friends meetings and sections pertaining only to Central Philadelphia or Philadelphia Yearly Meeting were changed or removed.

For more information contact travelingministries@fgcquaker.org .

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