

WYM Guidebook for Elders - Year C "Caring for Your People"

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Year C – 1 Caring for Your People

Scripture References – John 21:15-17 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon Son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

“Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you truly love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

I Peter 5:2 Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers –not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock.

I John 3:23 & 24 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us; We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

Quaker Quote – *“The sick and those caring for them have need of our prayers. But let us not imagine...that a few sentimental good wishes from a distance are all that is needed. Whenever we intercede in prayer we must be prepared for an answer which places a practical obligation upon us. A prayer is always a commitment.”* -- Thomas F. Green (1952) *Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends*, #339, London Yearly Meeting 1973

Narrative – At the dinner table one Sunday, the mother in the family who had stayed home from worship to attend to a sick child, asked the father. “How was the sermon today?”

“Fine,” he responded.

“What was it about?” she questioned further.

“Love,” was his brief answer.

“Well, what did he say about it?” she persisted.

“Oh, he and Jesus are all for it,” was all she got back.

“Well, did he give any instructions on how to go about it?”

“Can’t say that I can come up with any,” he concluded.

This year's series of studies address how we go about loving and caring for those in our faith fellowship. Like the mother in the above conversation, we all could use some coaching on how to show our love for others. Perhaps we long for practical advice on how to follow the second greatest commandment. How do we, on a routine basis, do what Jesus would do, given this person, this need, these circumstances? What builds a strong fellowship in which people know they are loved and cared for?

We are familiar with Matthew 25 where Jesus explains that when we feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, welcome the strangers, clothe the needy, look after the sick and visit the prisoners, we are doing those deeds not just to help those in need, but to help God with His work. So, during this year, we will share some reminders and perhaps offer some helpful instructions on how we go about that LOVE thing.

A few years back, several church leaders took training in Natural Church Development. Christian Schwarz listed eight qualities of healthy churches. One of the characteristics he named is "Loving Relationships." Schwarz wrote in his introduction to that chapter, "Some years ago, when we published materials to help individuals, groups, and entire churches learn how to express Christian love, some specialists said that these were not 'church growth materials.' Yet our research indicates that there is a highly significant relationship between the ability of a church to demonstrate love and its long-term growth potential. Growing churches possess on the average a measurably higher 'love quotient' than stagnant or declining ones."

"Unfeigned, practical love has a divinely generated magnetic power far more effective than evangelistic programs which depend almost entirely on verbal communication. People do not want to hear us talk about love, they want to experience how Christian love really works."

-Natural Church Development: A guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches, by Christian A. Schwarz, 1996, Pg.36.

Consider this short writing by Ann Weems from her book, *Searching for Shalom*. Pg. 47 (1991).

He said, "Feed my sheep."

There are no conditions: Least of all, feed my sheep if they deserve it. Feed my sheep if you feel like it. Feed my sheep if you have any leftovers. Feed my sheep if the mood strikes you... if the economy's OK... if you're not too busy. No conditions. . . just "Feed my sheep."

Could it be that God's kingdom will come when each lamb is fed?

We who have agreed to keep the covenant are called to feed sheep even when it means the grazing will be done on our own front lawns.

Prayer – Dear God, move us to feed your sheep the way Jesus fed them, by speaking words of healing, by comforting the troubled, by welcoming the unpopular, by giving rest to the weary, by offering companionship to the lonely, by living simply so that others may simply live. Amen.

Year C-2 Getting to Know Your People

Scripture Reference – John 10: 1-5 & 14 “I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me---just as the Father knows me and I know the Father...”

Luke 19: 1-6 “Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.’ So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.”

Quaker Quote – *“In the pastoral care of the meeting there should be good communication between the pastor and elders, each relying on the other. Elders know of change in the community’s personnel; they should become acquainted with new people, inform the pastor of those who might benefit by a visit. The pastor in visitation learns of needs and searches out just the right member to follow up this call. A home-visiting meeting makes a sensitive Christian fellowship.*

Both pastors and elders need to be sensitive to emotional, spiritual, and physical problems. Among these are: immaturity of spiritual life, sense of inadequacy due to failure or guilt, unreasoning worry and fears, inner conflicts of other kinds, poor adjustment, especially at home or at work. When such are located, it is the concern of all to restore people to wholesome Christian living. To achieve this may require cooperation of all concerned.” A Revised Handbook for Ministry & Counsel, WYM 1989, p. 10.

Narrative – Perhaps the days of the pastor and/or elders visiting families in their homes is a thing of the past, but getting together with the people of your congregation to get acquainted with their situations, interests and concerns is never out of date. We must make it our business to get to know our people. These are suggestions that may or may not apply to your situation.

Create a Shepherding Program. You may have another name for it, but if each member of your Ministry & Counsel is willing to take under his/her care a manageable number (4-6) of attenders and/or family units for regular times of communication, your meeting will be able to see that no one slips through the cracks. Each “shepherd” could set up a plan that suits her/his schedule and theirs. It might include meeting for lunch, sitting with parents at a sports event, sharing dinner at a local restaurant, taking walks or playing golf together. The shepherd could be a liaison between the life at the church and the life at home and be the one who notices if there is a need for a specific ministry.

Reinvent Sunday Dinner. In a church larger than most of ours in Western Yearly Meeting, a certain couple hosts Sunday dinner at least twice a month for a small group of people and has been doing that for about 30 years. It works because of good planning, big roasting pans, crock pots and a helpful spouse, but they make it a priority to take time to get to know each person in their church. Each time, they combine different people into their guest groups so those people get to know someone they might not have connected with otherwise. This may seem unreal in these busy times, but it has been one of the most effective ways to build relationships in this church.

Get to Know Your People by Name. What a missed opportunity when the pastor or other leader presents a children's message each Sunday but doesn't remember the names of the children! Children of all ages like to be called by name. We who have trouble with names may have to work extra hard at it, but so be it. It's important in making people feel welcomed and valued. Not only do names matter to people who regularly walk through our doors, but it matters when we can remember the names of their family members who don't.

Dig a little deeper than small talk. Starting with small talk is a way to warm up to a person, but we who are charged with the oversight of our Spiritual Community should learn the art of getting to the heart of spiritual issues. Some early Quakers would greet each other with, "How is Thee and how is Thy spirit?" If we ask such a question, and we should, we need to be ready to listen and to express our genuine interest without being nosy. And, we need to guard what is told to us in confidence and share encouragement with those who need it. Committing to pray is usually a good thing, but returning to the person later to see how she/he is doing provides evidence that you are sincerely concerned.

Elders are not only called to make people feel valued, included, and welcomed. The New Testament also charges elders to instruct, correct, and discipline the flock. Is it truly loving to omit these things? While previous generations of Quaker elders might have gone too far in one direction, today's elders seem not to take on the responsibility to "oversee" the spiritual condition of our people. The above-mentioned initiatives may not seem much different than any social club in which we forge bonds through interaction while sharing sympathy and mutual affirmation. The unique element in a faith community is the spiritual growth refined from shared experiences of divine encounters in our worship. Our meetings become vital when they function with a shared vision of mutual obedience that comes from diverse individual wills and agendas brought to the altar of conviction and then are freed to serve God with a sense of purpose and unity.

Queries for Discussion – How well do you know the spiritual health of the people you see at worship? Which ideas from the above suggestions will work in your meeting to get people better acquainted and engaged in each other's spiritual lives?

Prayer – Dear God, thank you for the joy of friendships and caring that we feel in our fellowship. Teach us how to care for each other at a deeper level. Teach us how to love and accept each one as you love and accept each one, for we seek the unity of your Spirit in the bond of Peace. Amen.

Year C – 3 Caring for Troubled Spirits

Scripture Reference - Psalm 43:1-5 “Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, Oh God, my God. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.”

Psalm 25:4-10 “Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths: guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O Lord. Good and upright is the Lord; therefore, he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful for those who keep the demands of his covenant.”

Quaker Quote *“The spiritual welfare of a meeting is greatly helped if its social life is vigorous, and its members take a warm personal interest in one another’s welfare. The pastoral work of the Society is specially committed to the overseers, but our members generally should not allow themselves to feel that they are relieved from responsibility. In the greater events of life, such as marriage, the birth of a child, illness or death, it is our duty and privilege to share in one another’s joys and sorrows; and sympathy thus shown is a potent means of binding us in closer fellowship.”* #325 *Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends*, London Yearly Meeting, 1960.

Narrative – On any given Sunday morning, as you look around the worship room, there are probably people whose spirits are very troubled. Perhaps a marriage is falling apart. Maybe there just isn’t enough money to pay the bills. A family member has been arrested for selling or using drugs. A child is in trouble at school for fighting. Whatever the reason, these are not usually things brought to our meetings for advice or prayer. Mostly people just don’t want to talk about them because of guilt or embarrassment and sometimes because of lack of trust that the information can be respected as confidential. What is the role of elders when a troubled spirit is noticed?

Most elders and often pastors are not equipped to counsel our members and attenders who are in legal trouble or have mental health issues, nor should they be expected to. The intent here is more to encourage us to work at building and maintaining an environment where troubled spirits are not ignored and where empathy is part of our Christian means of loving and caring for each other. Should you, as a pastor or elder, learn of someone who could use a sympathetic ear or just a friendly visit, here are some bits of advice based on Kenneth Haugk’s book, *Christian Caregiving, A Way of Life*. (Kenneth Haugk, is the founder of Stephen Ministries.)

1. **Provide an Atmosphere of Acceptance.** This is not time to be judgmental. Take time to listen fully, be sensitive to the person’s hurts and struggles. As trust develops, people are often more

willing to discuss personal spiritual matters but don't push it. Given that society in general is spiritually impoverished, spiritual talk is often hard to do or accept, so tread gently. Avoid giving canned answers or advice, just listen.

2. **Be Alert to Spiritual Needs.** Look for glimpses into the feelings that lie beyond the words that are said. It's okay to check your understanding by asking questions like, "Did I hear you say that?" (Repeat what you heard.) Can you say more about that?
3. **Encourage People to Discuss Their Spiritual Needs.** When caring for someone, you usually ask "How are you feeling?" or "How are things going?" You could also inquire, "How is (this particular crisis) affecting your view of God?" or "How do you see God fitting into this?" or "What values are you hanging on to right now?" This person may well be looking to you for spiritual guidance, so sharing scripture or other reading references, and/or telling the person what your life and faith has taught you may be helpful.
4. **Ask First before Praying.** Initiating prayer is awkward for some people. You might say something like "Would you appreciate a prayer right now?" or "Shall we ask God for his help right now?" If he or she says 'no,' accept whatever reason they have for that response, and pray later in private. If he or she says 'yes,' pray specifically for the need that was expressed and keep it simple. If that person asks you to pray, you might invite her/him to tell you what they want the prayer to include.

Some other things to remember are:

- How you respond to this opportunity may depend on who initiates this meeting.
- Feelings are as much a part of you as your arms and legs. It's not very helpful to just cut them off or suppress them; rather identify them and manage them in healthy ways. So, if the person you are caring for says she is angry at God, don't try to talk her out of it.
- It is not helpful to use such phrases as "All you need is stronger faith," or "Don't worry, God loves you," or any other clichés. If you don't know what to say, say so. Do not act as if you are an authority on spiritual matters. Your presence should say you care, your listening ear may be what is needed most. Talking about God is a sharing process in which you both speak and listen.
- You can ask if the person you are caring for would like to talk to someone else. Elders and pastors should have up-to-date references for professional services that can be handed to a person in need.

Queries for Discussion How will you respond to someone who asks to speak privately to you about a personal matter? How do you feel about approaching someone you suspect is going through a tough time? In our fellowship, can people be trusted with confidential information?

Prayer "Dear God, we thank you for nudging us to step forward when we know someone is hurting. Take away our fears and grant us the right words to say that makes our conversation comfortable and helpful. Please bless us with an extra portion of your Light, wisdom, tenderness, and understanding so that this person feels your love and you are glorified in our actions. In the name of Jesus, the Master Counselor, Amen.

Year C – 4 Caring for the Sick

Scripture Reference – Matthew 4:23-24 Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them.

James 5:13-15 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of Praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up.

Quaker Quote *“We are all ordained by God for everyday ministry. The urging of the Divine within each of us creates the potential for a spark to burst into flames of passion for Christ and the work of God. As we hunger for the love of our Creator and thirst for the spiritual nourishment of his Spirit, we become propelled into service with a great outpouring of joy.*

During this sacred time, our heart cries out, “Oh that you would bless me and enlarge my territory.” (Chronicles 4:10) In answer, it is revealed that our territory includes encounters with the homeless on a street corner, the destitute woman in the grocery line who cannot pay, an elderly neighbor who becomes ill, a child needing help with homework, or someone in Africa starving. God places us in circumstances each day to encourage ministry.

*Loving God wholeheartedly creates opportunity to live a purposeful life as the everyday ministry is fully embraced. Christ taught us what to say and what to do by the way he spoke and lived. We are blessed with the greatest teacher, the most skillful coach and the most successful CEO.” -Diane Andrews in “The Joy of Everyday Ministry,” *Quaker Life*, March/April 2014*

Narrative – It may seem impossible to care for others in the same way Jesus did. His miracles of healing show up rarely in even the most gifted Christians, but we can reach out to care for those in our fellowship who are ill or may even be dying. And we can bring cheer, encouragement and hope to those suffering. It isn't just the pastor who can do that, but there might be others among us with a gift for communicating God's love to sick people. Sometimes, others know their own gift well, while a few of us may feel a nudge to visit someone in the hospital and respond like Moses who said, “Who am I that I should go...?” But God says, “I will be with you.” If your motivation is to share God's love with the person who needs your visit, you will probably say the right things. Your presence says you care.

Some churches organize their care. There might be a coordinator who checks with the family to see what practical things can be done to help a person who is ill or dying. The coordinator will then send a message/announcement out to church members to call for meals to be prepared and delivered according to a schedule. Willing and available people respond by signing up for a certain day or meal and list the food items they will bring so others don't duplicate them. If it's a large church, there may be several “team captains” who contact their team or group to serve in specified ways. For example, if

a member needs to move from her house to assisted living, one team may be able to load up the furniture and move it to the new place while another team furnishes a meal, while another team may clean the house that is left behind. There might be a person designated to send flowers on behalf of the meeting.

Sometimes all that is needed is to send around a paper where people sign up to go for a visit on certain days, to prevent the chance of the patient having several visits on the same day and none the next. You could list the patient's address in the bulletin or by email so that cards can be sent. When people (of all ages) are part of the caring process and the prayer chain, it will most certainly lift the spirits of the person on the receiving end. Now that we are in the world of technology, many hospitals offer a CARE website where you can check for updates and send messages to the patient.

Angela Morrow, RN, has a series of articles you can read at www.verywell.com. Some of this advice on visiting a person who is dying is from Angela.

1. Be physically present. Don't talk or do housekeeping tasks that distract from your time together. Don't be afraid to touch the person or hold his/her hand while you sit there.
2. Express concern, but not excessive worry or pessimism. "Mary, I'm here because I care about you and want you to know that you mean a lot to me and others in our meeting."
3. Reach calm acceptance. Don't say "You're going to beat this," or "Don't give up." Allow the person to feel however he/she feels. You are there to love and support her/him just as she/he is. It's probably good to talk about special times you have shared with this person and how you appreciate his/her gifts to your life and others.
4. Offer practical assistance that might include laundry, errands, rides to medical appointments --- anything that might be cause for concern for the person or the family. It's okay to ask if the person would like for you to call anyone or bring anyone special to see him/her.
5. Perhaps reading aloud from a favorite book or playing some quiet music may bring the person comfort. There may be scripture verses that are meaningful to share. Offer to pray, or pray anyway, even if you think the patient is unable to hear you. Pray for God's healing touch i(n whatever form that might be). Pray for His comfort and peace. Thank God for this person,
6. Remember that we don't know how much a person who doesn't seem conscious can hear, so take the topics you wouldn't want them to hear outside the room.

Queries for Discussion – What words would bring you encouragement or comfort when you are seriously ill? How could (or does) your meeting organize to care for members who are unable to be out and about?

Prayer – Our Father who art in heaven, thank you for these ministers who are gathered here to seek your guidance, your wisdom, and your words of encouragement as we reach out to those in need of your love. Grant us courage and confidence when you call us to do what we think we cannot do. Help us to think more about what the sick person needs than what we ourselves need. For it is to your glory and in Jesus' name we serve, Amen.

Year C-5 Caring for Those We Seldom See

Scripture Reference – Romans 1:9-13 “God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times, and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gifts to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith. I do not want you to be unaware brothers, that I planned many times to come to you (but have been prevented from doing so until now) in order that I might have a harvest among you, just as I have had among the other Gentiles.”

Philippians 1:3-8 “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel all of you share in Gods’ grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”

Quaker Quote – *Quakers didn’t even believe in “membership” at first, because the goal of their coming together was not to get bigger and do more. The goal was to provide an environment that would facilitate the individual seeker in perceiving his/her “inner teacher.” The meeting’s primary responsibility was to remove the barriers to one’s being sensible to the Light of Christ’s internal testimony, and their answering of this Light through a life of holy obedience... By striving for greater holiness, they further distinguished themselves from the surrounding culture and religions –as in the famous quote: “Let thy Life Speak.” --John Connell, Mooresville Friends, WYM*

Narrative – So, even though early Friends were not so interested in numbers of members, today it is common practice for Ministry & Counsels to review and update the membership rolls on a regular basis. On those occasions, we are reminded of the people on our rolls who we hardly ever see and may even seldom think about. Too often when we contact them, it’s about money and how much our meeting is assessed by the yearly meeting for people who remain outside the life of the meeting. We may send a letter to those people asking if they want to remain listed as a member. Hopefully, that’s not the only time they hear from you. Generally, we really miss those people and wish they would engage in the fellowship of the meeting, but we just don’t know how to go about keeping in touch with them.

Scott Wagoner, at the Western Yearly Meeting Retreat in 2016, spoke of three types of church members:

1. **Engaged** – Those who have strong emotional connections and find meaningful opportunities to serve.
2. **Not Engaged** – Those who may attend regularly but have no psychological or emotional connection.
3. **Actively Disengaged** – Two types include those on the membership roll who show up once or twice a year and the CAVE dwellers (Consistently Against Virtually Everything).

There are many reasons some people fall into the third type. Perhaps some travel frequently. Maybe they have a job that requires Sunday morning work hours. For some, Sunday morning is the only time they can find for quality family and/or rest time. There may be those whose parents or grandparents were members and they feel some distant ties or loyalty that prompt them to show up occasionally. A few just may not enjoy being there enough to want to come more often. And there may be those of us who are not tactful about how overjoyed we feel when they do show up so we pounce on them and make them feel squeezed rather than hugged. We want to welcome everyone, but we want to be able to discern the right way to do it. We also may find ourselves harboring thoughts of resentment toward these folks who seem to have no idea about the commitment and expense it takes to keep a church going. So, as we consider these possibilities, we may have to check our motivation for keeping in touch with them. Since the reasons for their lack of regular attendance are as different as the people themselves, we need to focus on one person at a time to ask these questions.

- In what ways do we keep in touch with _____ (fill in the name) _____?
- Are we sensitive or even sympathetic toward his/her situation? Do we even know the situation?
- Are we pushing or pulling too hard, or at all?
- Is there something going on in our church that makes this person avoid coming?
- Have we explored whether we are meeting this person's spiritual needs?
- If we can discern what it takes to keep this person in our fellowship, are we willing to do what it takes to make that happen?
- Do we expect our pastor to take responsibility for getting/keeping in touch with our people we seldom see?

Here are a few suggestions how elders and other meeting members can help engage the people we seldom see. For larger meetings, people on a Membership Committee could make regular personal contacts with our occasional attendees. For our smaller meetings who implement a shepherding plan, implementation of the plan may mean that M&C members are the ones who make the effort to see that regular contacts are made. These could include birthday cards from the meeting, invitations to special events such as Mother's Day Teas and Thanksgiving dinners, solicitations for bake sale or craft items for the Chicken Barbecues and Fall Markets. Make sure the meeting newsletters are sent to these occasional folks. Inviting them for lunch and home visits also help people feel connected. These efforts are generally more effective if shared by several in the meeting and not just the pastor.

Queries for Discussion How often do our seldom seen people hear from us and by what means? When you review the three types of members, what would you say is the percentage in each category for your meeting?

Prayer – Dear God, we thank you for those who are faithful and dedicated workers. We also thank you for the challenge of welcoming and engaging those who feel they do not belong. Please teach us how to connect with them, invite them, love them, welcome them and accept their circumstances. Constantly remind us that Jesus opened his arms and his love to all people and didn't give up on any. Amen.

Year C-6 Marriage with the Care of the Meeting

Scripture Reference - Ephesians 5:25-33 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Quaker Quote *“The simple Quaker wedding, when the two concerned join together with their friends in worship, is the most natural expression of the way of life in which we believe. In the presence of God they take each other freely and equally as life-long partners, asking His blessing on their union and dedicating their new life to His service. From the start, they feel that they are partners with God in the new undertaking. They believe that, while Christian faith remains, there can be no disagreement or difficulty which cannot be resolved by the grace which is theirs in their new and deepening relationship illumined by the love of God.”* #487 **Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends**, London Yearly Meeting, 1960

Narrative One never knows what to expect when going to a wedding in these modern times. We may find them to be in a gazebo at the local park, on a beach at a tropical resort, at a mountain lake among the wild flowers, at a hotel ball room with sparkling lights, or in someone’s nicely landscaped back yard. We also may experience a wide variety of music and very untraditional vows. There may be a minister officiating or a public official who doesn’t even mention God. While some of those can be very spiritual and moving celebrations, marriage has always been regarded by Friends as a deeply religious and Spirit-led event.

The following narrative is slightly revised from *“A Revised Handbook for Ministry & Counsel,”* provided by the WYM Board on Christian Ministries and Evangelism in 1989. It is meant to give guidance to elders who wish to encourage couples to not only seek God’s will and blessing in their marriage, but to have their faith fellowship participate in the preparation for and celebration of their wedding.

The wise couple, beginning to consider each other seriously, should be anxious for guidance. Many have sought out a counselor of mature judgment who knew both and secured his/her reactions to the suitability of the match. While it is unwise to ever flatly disapprove, the respected elder (*or pastor*) may have a determining influence. He/she must remember –The final decision to marry or not is that of the couple.

The Meeting will do a great service to a couple contemplating marriage by offering that they be married "under the care of the meeting." If the couple agrees to do so, a Clearness Committee of four or five people is appointed by the Monthly Meeting. (*See a description of the traditional procedure in Faith and Practice of WYM, 2005 edition, page 38 & 39.*) Then the Clearness Committee meets with the couple to consider the proposed marriage. (*See Topic C-7 Seeking Clearness.*) If a couple planning to marry has been properly nurtured with the Meeting and has developed trusting relationships with members, such a committee will reinforce their decision and provide a source of future support if and when problems may arise. Our meetings need to provide continuing contact with persons following the wedding to ensure caring and encouragement.

If, in the course of such a Meeting for Clearness, it appears that the proposed marriage would be unwise, the Meeting should carefully point out potential problems and offer to labor with the couple in working through the problems until they are resolved or the marriage is no longer contemplated.

If the couple's decision is made affirmatively, the meeting should play its part in providing the setting and atmosphere for the wedding. No ordinary civil official is likely to provide the needed spiritual surroundings that can be provided by a pastor and/or Clearness Committee.

Many meetings have a committee to assist with weddings, which is of great service. (*This could be the same people as the Clearness Committee, but could be others as requested by the couple.*) It has become the custom for the couple under the care of the meeting to be married in the meetinghouse in a worshipful setting.

Queries for Discussion How does your meeting encourage marriage as a Divine Covenant relationship? If weddings of your members or attenders are held somewhere outside the meetinghouse, how do your people offer your blessing to the marriage? How is your meeting preparing your young people for a vision of a healthy marriage relationship?

Prayer Dear God, for all the ways you have held together long and loving marriage relationships in this meeting, we thank you. For those who have served as models of faithfulness and enduring commitments, we thank you. For helping couples through rough times, we thank you. And for those in this fellowship who have been beacons of Light, love and healing to others, we thank you.

Please help us know your will as we support our couples in marriage. We ask for your guidance and courage as our ideas about marriage are challenged. May you find us faithful in following your will in all we say and do. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

C-7 Discerning God's Will Together

Scripture Reference – Judges 6:36-40 Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised---look, I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said. And that is what happened. Gideon rose early the next day; he squeezed the fleece and wrung out the dew –a bowlful of water.

Then Gideon said to God, "Do not be angry with me. Let me make just one more request. Allow me one more test with the fleece. This time make the fleece dry and the ground covered with dew. That night God did so. Only the fleece was dry; all the ground was covered with dew.

Philippians 1: 9-11 And this is my prayer; that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ –to the glory and praise of God.

1 Corinthians 2:10-16 The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught to us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words. The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man's judgment; For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Quaker Quotes Lon Fendall in *Practicing Discernment Together: Finding God's Way Forward in Decision Making* by Lon Fendall, Jan Wood and Bruce Bishop, p. 1, Barclay Press, 2007

"To discern is to hear and understand God's voice as articulated by the Holy Spirit, resident within us. Discernment is a necessary precondition for faithfulness to God's leadings. This is as true for groups as it is for individuals, which means it is true for congregations and businesses that want to obey Christ.....Group discernment is an essential ingredient of anything that Christ's followers seek to do together. Even the smallest Bible study group or informational gathering makes decisions"

#353 *Christian Faith & Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends, London Yearly Meeting, 1973, #353*

"As it is our hope that in our meetings for discipline (business) the will of God shall prevail rather than the desires of men, we do not set great store by rhetoric or clever argument. The mere gaining of debating points is found to be unhelpful and alien to the spirit of worship which should govern the rightly ordered meeting. Instead of rising hastily to reply to another, it is better to give time for what has been said to make its own appeal, and to take its right place in the mind of the meeting.

Neither a majority nor a minority should allow itself in any way to overbear or to obstruct a meeting for church affairs in its course toward a decision. We are unlikely to reach either truth or wisdom if one section imposes its will on another...It is in the unity of common fellowship, we believe, that we shall most surely learn the will of God. We cherish, therefore, the traditions which excludes voting from our meetings, and trust that clerks and Friends generally will observe the spirit of it..."

Narrative Maybe some of us have tried the fleece method to clarify what God would have us do when it's time to make an important decision. While some may reach clarity in doing so, it's not quite the same as seeking God's will for the group using the Quaker discernment process. Historically, Friends have found that when we seek the will of God, and trust the Spirit-led voice(s) that arise out of our midst, we can come to unity (not always agreement but unity) in responding with action." When that happens, there are no winners and losers, but a belief that as a group we are following the will of the Holy Spirit.

This statement is from "**Beyond Majority Rule**" by Michael J. Sheeran, p. 54. "*The goals of Quaker decision making are basically different from those of majority rule, a process to which most Americans are conditioned. The proposals made at the beginning of a discussion are thus usually seen by participants as starting points, not as finished products unsusceptible to modification.*"

Howard Brinton, in **Reaching Decisions: The Quaker Method**, p. 17 writes: "*Those who come to the meeting not so much to discover Truth as to win acceptance of their opinions may find that their views carry little weight. Opinions should always be expressed humbly and tentatively in the realization that no one person sees the whole truth and that the whole meeting can see more of Truth than can any part of it.*"

Since there isn't time or space to review all the elements of the Quaker Business Procedure here, it may be helpful to invite an outside resource person to train your meeting in the process. The Friends' way of doing business can be applied to many situations in the life of our meetings. It is expected that it is used in all monthly meetings for business. It is also good practice to use it in committee meetings so that everyone gets accustomed to how it works and how to participate helpfully in reaching unity.

Queries for Discussion To what extent do our people understand and trust the Quaker discernment process to reach unity before taking action? How well do we seek out and value each person's voice as we deliberate what might be a divisive issue? Does our meeting need help in learning and practicing the discernment process?

Prayer Dear God, Thank you for being present in this and every meeting. Teach us to stop and listen to your voice. Teach us to trust that your will can be revealed in the faithfulness of others. Help us not to judge others or take sides. Teach us to humble ourselves and seek the good of all from **your** point of view. For we desire to follow your Truth and your Way as Jesus did. Amen.

Year C-8 Offering Spiritual Support with Clearness Committees

Scripture Reference – Romans 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is –his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Acts 2:1-4 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

I Samuel 16:6 & 7 When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord. But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Quaker Quote – *"Over our three and a half centuries Quakers have learned to integrate the spaciousness of silence into our worship, our business, our learning. In worship, we are quiet together to better hear the message God might have for us that day. In our business meetings, we practice group discernment through which we allow participants to pay attention to bring forward their piece: that furthers the decision-making process. Then in the quiet, we let the Spirit start to take these disparate pieces and start to move them into a more complete decision than anyone of us might have had in mind. I think of it like assembling a jig saw puzzle. We have different pieces that we put on the table—and then we all partner with the Spirit to see how these work together to make a complete picture."* –from "Rhythms of Silence in Group Discernment," Jan Wood, posted in *Seeds* on August 12, 2017
<https://goodnewsassoc.org/seeds/>

Narrative – In the "Ask Tom" feature of *Quaker Life* dated March/April 2013, Tom Hamm states that the concept of "clear" recurs in the writings of Friends from the 1650's down to the present. He says there are three meanings: guiltlessness, certainty in following God's will in a particular situation, and freedom such as was applied to a committee on clearness for marriage when the committee searches for marriage obligations to others before determining a couple is "clear" to proceed to marry each other.

Tom writes *"The concept of a 'clearness committee' appears to be a twentieth-century application of this ancient Quaker conception. Except in relation to marriage, one does not find it in the books of faith and practice before the 1970's. Today, unprogrammed Friends appear to be more likely to make use of clearness committees. My sense is that many pastoral Friends are not familiar with the idea.... Today, Friends use clearness committees as a way to test leadings and help discern the Lord's will in a particular situation.... The process is, at its best, simply applying Friends methods of discernment in a meeting for business on a smaller scale."*

Friends' tradition values a corporate process in seeking God's "good, pleasing, and perfect will." (Romans 12:2) We believe that we ourselves and others can be filled with the Holy Spirit, and that we

are to seek that of God in the hearts of each other. With that in mind, the process of gathering others around us as we ponder a monumental decision makes sense.

Note that the word is “clearness” and not “clearance” which implies that permission is sought. Clearness Committees can be a way of gathering people who are respected because of their wisdom, strong spirituality, and experience to help us discern God’s will as closely as possible. The clearness process involves questioning and testing our perceptions as a small group considers a specific issue along with the person seeking direction in his/her lives, work or relationships. Often, in this type of meeting, the clearness group does not need to come up with answers or make the decision, nor does the person requesting clearness have to decide on a plan during the meeting. She/he may find the help needed in seeking pros and cons, special insight, suggestions or support as she/he continues to work out answers for her/himself. A few examples of concerns that might be brought to a Clearness Committee are job or career changes, calls into ministry or missions, marriage or other relationship problems, moving to another location and, of course, when a couple requests to be married under the care of the meeting. Often the Monthly Meeting appoints the Clearness Committee for that purpose, but for other concerns, the committee may be made of people invited by the person of focus.

These are steps for the person seeking clearness in preparing for a Clearness Committee.

1. Think, pray, talk, consult –Take time in your busy schedule to be alone and contemplate the issue you are facing. Talk with a good friend or relative to gain valuable insight and reflections.
2. Ask your M&C or Monthly Meeting to appoint a Clearness Committee of 3 to 7 people respected for their wisdom, experience, and spiritual strength. Make sure there’s at least one who is not closely associated or emotionally involved with you so there is an objective viewpoint represented. One person should be named as facilitator.
3. Set a time & date when all people can fully attend the meeting. Allow at least two hours.
4. Meet with the facilitator to (1) clarify the question or decision to be made, (2) Clarify the task of the clearness group, (3) Draw up a tentative agenda that meets your needs, (4) Decide what questions need to be asked and (5) Talk about what support you might need during the meeting. (What might be difficult for you to talk about? What are you afraid might happen, etc.)
5. Take home the list of questions you created and prepare to answer them as truthfully and helpfully as you can.

(A sample agenda and two lists of questions will be in the Resources available to you in the Supplement Section of this notebook: One adaptable for marriage, and one adaptable for general use.)

Query for Discussion - Can you think of people and issues in your meeting for which a Clearness Committee might be offered? If your meeting is unfamiliar with this process, who can you invite to assist you?

Prayer – Dear God, fill us with your Holy Spirit, that we can know your good, pleasing and perfect will. Open our eyes, our minds, and our hearts that you might dwell in us and speak through us as we faithfully serve you. Amen.

Year C-9 Responding to Conflicts in the Meeting

Scripture Reference – Matthew 5:23&24 Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Ephesians 4:22-27, 29-32 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Quaker Quote *“To operate from a place of centeredness, to open ourselves deeply to the leading of the Spirit, to truly witness to our belief that God can be present in this moment as we seek a solution – this is what we are reaching toward. Experience has taught me, however that before this can happen we must be clear about the feelings that have been elicited by the troublesome behavior. If we do not sort through and take responsibility for the emotions which have been stirred up, then it is likely that the issue is being clouded by another motivation –the desire to reduce our own level of discomfort. Let’s be honest. People who exhibit behavior which we describe as “difficult” make us uncomfortable, and it is a very normal human response to want a lessening of discomfort. But as a faith community that should not be the main motive impelling us to action. Our discomfort is useful in letting us know that something is wrong, that something needs attention –but what?”* -Arlene Kelly, “Dealing With Difficult Situations” Pastoral Newsletter, Vol.2, No. 1, Oct. 1994 in a collection of newsletters titled **Grounded in God: Care and Nurture in Friends Meeting**, published by Quaker Press, FGC, 2002

Narrative – Tensions in our local meetings are as normal as disagreements in our families. After all, we, in a church community (especially small ones), are very much like families and sometimes even share more in common than members of our families do. With what Scripture teaches us about healthy relationships, we should be some of the best at addressing disagreements in loving and helpful ways. But sometimes, we fall short of being truthful when we sing “We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand...We will work with each other, we will work side by side, and we’ll guard each one’s dignity and save each one’s pride and **They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love.**”

Arlene Keely (as referenced in the Quaker Quote) suggests that If we are to be faithful as elders or pastoral caregivers in our meetings to address problems or face openly the differences that exist, we need to be clear about what our expectations are for the outcome. “Ideally, of course, we hope that the person whose behavior is causing difficulty will receive us openly when we go to talk, that the

person will share with us his or her perspective, and that behavior will change in a positive direction, thereby reducing the tension between us. Sometimes, however, even though we approach a difficult situation in a centered and skilled way, the person becomes angry with us for daring to open the subject and we are unable to move the exchange beyond that level of defensiveness and anger.”

She continues with “There are two things which are within our control as we enter a situation: 1) The spirit that guides our actions. Are we centered? Have we considered what might be **our** part in the problem? 2) Our sense of clarity in communicating a clear definition of limits regarding acceptable and unacceptable behavior in our meeting. Then the other person has control over the way in which he or she will receive our concerns, and whether or not to join us in seeking a mutual solution.”

The role of elders includes working toward unity in the meeting by addressing conflicts. Whether it is difficulty between two people or a divisive issue that seems to be driving a wedge through your fellowship, these are suggestions (summarized from Arlene Kelly’s article) on how to resolve the matters:

1. Depending on the scale of the issue, designate a person or team to **arrange a visit** directly with whom we disagree. In humility and patience, try to define the points of disagreement.
2. We need to **trust** that it is not the person’s or group’s intention to be causing distress but that they are trying to be faithful to their conscience as we are.
3. We need to **honor their perspective** by learning how they see the situation. So, we need to open a conversation (not an argument) that starts with letting them know we care about working things out WITH them. Try to remain open and non-defensive in listening to them.
4. **Be gentle in sharing YOUR perspective.** There is nothing to be gained from debating who is right. That is not to say you need to agree with the person or pretend there isn’t a difference. It means trying to discover why it feels the way it does to them and trying to get them to hear how things are feeling for you.
5. **Take practical steps.** Develop, in collaboration with the person, specific ways of dealing with the problem, trying to avert its recurrence.
6. **Keep at it.** Behavior patterns are hard to change. Keep connecting with the others in ways that let them know you care for them and don’t avoid them because of this disagreement. Check in with each other in a few weeks or months to get a sense of how things are feeling to all the parties involved.

Queries for Discussion How does your meeting deal with conflict? What ideas have you gleaned from this reading that will help your meeting resolve conflict?

Prayer Dear God, we thank you for the courage and wisdom you grant us when we face conflict. Thank you for nudging us back to loving behaviors when we become angry and defensive. Lord, dwell in our hearts that we may radiate your peace and patience in all we do and say. Amen.

Year C-10 Caring for New Members

Scripture References – Ephesians 3:16-19 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge –that you may filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Colossians 3:15-17 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Quaker Quotes *“There are certain broad principles of belief and conduct that afford a basis for an association in and through which living membership can find expression. In the case of our Society unity is essential upon the spiritual and practical nature of Christianity –the deep and penetrating reality of worship and the claim of Christ to rule our whole life, both inward and outward.” #367*
Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends, London Yearly Meeting, 1973

“The test for membership should not be doctrinal agreement, nor adherence to certain testimonies, but evidence of sincere seeking and striving for the Truth, together with an understanding of the lines along which Friends are seeking that Truth. --Friends World Conference, 1952, #376
Christian Faith and Practice in the Experience of the Society of Friends, London Yearly Meeting, 1973

Narrative – In the above scriptures, Paul was writing to members of the churches at Ephesus and Colosse, both of which were relatively new organizations among Gentiles. Wouldn't either of these letters be delightful greetings to the new members of our meetings? They insinuate that once you are in the faith fellowship, you will have the opportunity for Christ to dwell within your heart, that you might grasp the love and wisdom of Christ, and that you may be filled with the whole measure of God. Oh, and there'll be lots of singing, too! Are those the reasons you think people join the church?

Our **Western Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice** states *“Friends receive into membership those whose faith in Jesus Christ as a personal Savior is manifest in their lives, who seek an inward experience of Christ—the Light which lights every person that comes into the world--and who are in unity with the teachings of Christian truth as held by Friends.”*

F & P follows that statement with guidelines for the application process and describes categories of members as they have been recorded for decades. Though those seem to be less followed than when they were written, they are meant to keep some consistency in the way our organization does membership. Membership is meant to bind us together as a community. We acknowledge that our declining membership has become problematic for meetings who require only members to serve on certain committees or offices. Those meetings whose membership rolls include far more people than who participate in the life of the meeting also find financing their budgets difficult. We may even be

taking in members who don't claim every word of the *WYM Faith & Practice* statement because we are eager for new members. But those concerns are for a wider conversation in our yearly meeting or for another time in your meeting. Today's entry is meant to inspire us to take adequate care to welcome our new people and insure they are becoming happily and meaningfully included in the life of the meeting. So, where do we start? These are suggestions:

1. Design an educational process to acquaint new people with the meaning of "Becoming a Friend." This doesn't have to be entirely about Quaker history, organizational structure and theology. What is likely to be more interesting and even more authentic is for some of your elders and/or more recently engaged folks to share their personal accounts in response to such questions as:
 - a. What attracted me to this meeting and why do I keep coming?
 - b. What do I believe about Jesus and God?
 - c. What testimonies of Friends do I value and take on as my own?
 - d. How is my relationship with God affecting my daily life?
 - e. What have I learned from others in this meeting about faith?
 - f. How do I use the Bible to guide me in my Spiritual growth?
2. Make available 8 to 10 books or other resources that new people can study to help them learn what you think they should understand?
3. When you receive an application for membership, set up a Clearness Committee (which could be your M&C) to get to know the person's background or spiritual journey and to share with her/him the meeting's expectations of members. (You may have to do some work to define those expectations if you don't already have them defined.)
4. It is traditional for a meeting to appoint a welcoming committee to visit the new member upon acceptance, but perhaps it would also be helpful to appoint one or two "mentors" for the first year or two. The new members would have someone to call upon to explain certain traditions, expectations, and cultural challenges. The mentors could initiate a few visits to open the paths of communication and help encourage the new member. He/she could also offer the chance for the new member to ask questions about the reading resources.
5. If the new member offers ideas about things that could be done differently in the meeting, be encouraging and open to those ideas. This is one of the most challenging parts of engaging new people. We are often resistance to change and loyal to our traditions, so much so that our newer people no longer feel welcome.

Queries for Discussion What does membership mean in our meeting? What is problematic for us with the guidelines on membership in WYM's Faith and Practice? How does our meeting assimilate new members? What do we need to do to improve our welcome to new members?

Prayer Dear God, we thank you for those who have provided a strong foundation on which our fellowship is built. Teach us when and how to question our traditions. Grant us wisdom and openness to new ways. Help us welcome new people into our meeting as you would welcome them into yours. In the name of the head of our church, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Sample Queries for Clearness Committees

--To be adjusted to suit the situation and directed to the Focus Person

(Adapted from *Clearness: Processes for Supporting Individuals and Groups in Decision Making*, by Peter Woodrow, published by New Society Publishers, 1984)

1. Tell us a brief personal history highlighting those events and facts that have particular relevance to the decision you'd like to make.
2. What are your present commitments and how much time do you spend at each one.?
3. What are your present sources of learning, support and affirmation? What gives you excitement in your life?
4. What do you need in order to function well, and creatively?
5. How will the proposed change make the best use of your strengths and talents.?
6. What are your goals, both long and short-range in terms of personal growth, social change work, or profession/career?
7. What are your dreams and what do you perceive are those things which are holding you back from reaching them?
8. What are the various options for the future that you are considering?
9. What are the implications of your proposed change in direction for your family, community, church, career....?
10. What are the positive and negative factors in each of the options you have already considered?

Quotes and Queries for those Contemplating Marriage

“Marriage is to be taken seriously, but not always in grim earnest; its problems take perspective from joy, adventure and fulfillment; and joy and sorrow are mingled together. We rejoice in success, but we may also be glad that we can console each other in failure. While some find perfect physical relationship easily, others reach it the hard way, and it is not less precious for that. It is wonderful never to quarrel, but it means missing the dear delight of making it up. Children bring joy and grief; some will have none and will miss both the grief and the joy. For some, there is monogamy so entire that no other love ever touches it; but others “fall in love” time and time again, and must learn to make riches of their affection without destroying their marriage or their friends. Let us thank God for what we share, which enables us to understand; and for the infinite variety in which each marriage stands alone.” --London Yearly Meeting of Friends 1959 #493

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

Queries for the Couple

1. How do we see marriage in regard to **commitment**? Is it a lifelong relationship? Is it based on mutual understanding and respect for the other? Do we face the reality that it will take care and nurture both of us to insure good growth? Can we describe to what extent we value its sacred and spiritual basis?
2. What are our **common values**? What are the differences in our backgrounds, religion, temperaments and interests? How will we handle those differences? What will be our “covenant” to guide us as we resolve or accept those differences? Have we the courage and willingness to go together for outside guidance with problems we are unable to resolve?
3. What are our **expectations** in this marriage? Do we see ourselves as trusted and equal partners, sharing responsibilities and decisions? Do we recognize and support each other’s personal goals for growth and fulfillment? In practical matters, such as taking out the garbage, will we expect roles to be the way it was when we were growing up or will we be able to define new roles according to this new relationship? Are there habits, beliefs, opinions, that aggravate each of us about the other? Can we talk about them, reach a common understanding and accept them, or are they important enough to change them?
4. Have we considered together our desire for **children**, the changes in our life style they will require, the challenges as well as the joys they will bring to us, and our shared responsibilities in raising them? How will we collaborate as parents to provide our children with boundaries, expectations, nurturing experiences, education, and spiritual nourishment?

5. As we grow together and experience **different phases of life together**, what are our expectations about getting older? How will we plan for our future in regard to our health, where we will live, how we will manage our finances, handle relationships with in-laws, -- in five years, in ten years, in twenty years?
6. To what extent do we share **spiritual values**? Do we know each other's spiritual journey? Do we know what each of us thinks about God? Are there differences that might cause conflicts? How will we blend our faith in practical ways for the sake of our relationship and for our family if/when we should have children? Will we rely on our faith in times of joy and difficulty, and in important decisions? What will the spiritual element look like in our marriage?
7. Are we aware of the need for both of us, **as individuals**, to have time, space, resources and interests not shared? Will we respect and trust the need for developing or maintaining other friendships that contribute to our individual growth and fulfillment?

Queries to be considered by each individual

1. Why do I want to be married? Do I want or need the companionship? Am I physically attracted to her/him? Am I just fulfilling the expectation of my family, friends, culture? How will I be a better individual with this partner?
2. Do I try to be in touch with my partner's feelings and needs? Do we help each other with good communication? Am I able to express my feelings, needs, desires? If not, why not? If communication is the key to a solid marriage, how can I improve my communication skills?
3. Am I open to changing some habits, ways of thinking, ways of doing things to improve our relationship?
4. Do I regard close relationships with people outside marriage as complementary or competitive with my marriage relationship? Do I expect to be "all things" to my partner? Do I expect my partner to be "all things to me? If my needs are not fulfilled, how will I handle that?
5. Do I know, or am I willing to learn, how to praise my partner appropriately. Do I find frequent and varied ways to express my love, pride, support, and joy that I receive from him/her? How is my timing?
6. Am I willing to recognize, accept, love and live with the individuality of another person? Do I look for and reverence the gift from God this person is to me? Can I be an expression of God's love in him/her?

Sample Agenda for Clearness Committee Meetings

(Adapted from *Clearness: Process for Supporting Individuals & Groups in Decision Making* by Peter Woodrow, published by New Society Publishers, 1984)

The maximum times are suggested for each agenda item to keep the meeting moving. They total about 2 ½ hours, so you may wish to move a little faster.

1. **Gathering:** introductions (if people are not acquainted), greetings, excitement sharing (10 min.)
2. **Agenda Review**, appoint recorder for agenda item #12 for use of the Focus Person. (5 min.)
3. **Committee members share** how they are connected to Focus Person (10 min.)
4. **Silence and prayer** for centering into God's presence (10 min.)
5. **Review role of the Clearness Committee** (5 minutes)
 - a. Try to stay in the presence of the Holy Spirit during the whole meeting.
 - b. Be affirmative and supportive while raising questions.
 - c. Be as objective as possible.
 - d. Listen without judgment or taking sides.
 - e. Clarify information by asking "Did you say that you.....?"
 - f. Point out irrational or erroneous assumptions.
 - g. Function as a mirror, reflecting back to the Focus Person.
 - h. Remain sensitive to feelings, work to select helpful but truthful words.
 - i. Agree to confidentiality. What you learn is not subject for sharing.
 - j. Do not press for your own agenda or tell your own stories.
 - k. Offer help to the Focus Person on some particularly difficult task. "Is there anything any one of us can do to help you with.....?"
 - l. Be willing to meet again if more reflection or time is needed to reach clarity.
6. Have the **Focus Person state the question** he/she is wrestling with and tell how the group can help. (2 min)
7. Have the **group share any personal biases** they may have toward this issue. (5 min.)
8. **Sharing from the Focus Person** – distribute answers to the questions previously prepared by the focus person with help of the facilitator, during which the group can ask questions or seek clarification. (30 min.)
9. **BREAK** (10 minutes)
10. **Group brainstorm strengths** of the Focus Person for affirmation (5 min.)
11. **Silence** (Think time to consider questions or concerns to be raised) (5 min.)
12. **Open time for discussion** and responding to questions, offering reflections, etc. (40 min)
13. Check on **next steps** for Focus Person and follow-up roles for Clearness Group. (10 min.)
14. **Evaluation** – How well did this process work for you? What would you do differently next time? (5 min.)
15. **Closing** – (however long it takes for silence, prayer, or hugs, or....)

