

## Living Life in the Spirit: Friends' Meetings and Ministry

From *Quaker Faith and Practice*, London Yearly Meeting:

"Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community?"

"Let your life speak. When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God's guidance and offering counsel to one another?"

"Every stage of our lives offers fresh opportunities. Responding to divine guidance, try to discern the right time to undertake or relinquish responsibilities without undue pride or guilt. Attend to what love requires of you, which may not be great busyness."

Friends cherish the belief that Quakerism is a living faith, one that calls us to "attend to what love requires." In corporate and individual worship, we seek to lay our lives open to the Spirit of God, to wait expectantly to see what the Spirit might illuminate for us, and to act upon the guidance we receive. In different ways, *we are all supported and guided by our meeting* in our various ministries and on our spiritual journeys.

**Putting into action the Light we experience *is* ministry.**

### A Spectrum of Relationships

The following paragraphs describe four stages of relationship between Friends and their monthly meetings. These relationships lie within a spectrum that includes all of us; *and each of us might take up residence at different points on this spectrum at different points in our own life's journey.* These descriptions are offered as guideposts to assist Friends and their meetings in making clear choices in response to calls to work together in ministry.

I. *Living as Active Friends.* We undertake our spiritual journeys and our ministries in the context of support from our meetings. Sometimes that support is found in the meeting for worship, in the opportunity to be among a group that is openly and earnestly listening for God's guidance. Sometimes examples of other Friends who "let their lives speak" offer courage and comfort. Sometimes after-meeting conversations yield encouragement, advice, and thoughtful questions. These experiences support many of the ministries that come to us as opportunities along our life paths.

II. *Seeking Clearness.* Sometimes the questions are harder, the pitfalls more numerous or obscure, or

the path less clear. Friends sometimes seek a clearness process to help with discernment with life questions, such as family and workplace situations. The clearness process might involve a meeting or two with an appointed committee, or it might extend for a longer period of time. In this way, the meeting supports individual Friends as they seek to live their lives in the Light.

III. *Responding to a Calling.* Sometimes a Friend is called to undertake specific work that embodies living life in the Spirit. In considering this individual ministry, the Friend may ask the Meeting to help discern whether it is a true calling. If the Meeting is clear that the Friend is called individually to a ministry, and that the ministry carries out the Meeting's understanding of the Society of Friends, the meeting may wish to provide nurture for this ministry, if the Friend requests it. This nurture might include spiritual support, counsel, and continuing discernment. In this stage, the meeting is not called to join in the work of the ministry itself.

IV. *Releasing a Friend in Joint Ministry.* The meeting may be called to undertake a joint ministry with a Friend. At a Friend's request, the meeting may initiate a clearness process to consider the Friend's call to ministry and to discern whether the meeting itself is called to be involved in the work. In addition to providing opportunities for clearness, discernment and spiritual support, the meeting

- recognizes the ministry as an extension of its own work and provides a committee of support and oversight,
- provides active practical or incidental financial support to enable the Friend to embark on a ministry, and
- releases the Friend as necessary from certain financial and practical responsibilities for a period of time while a ministry gets underway.

Joining with a Friend in partnership, and releasing that Friend to focus on the work of the ministry is a relationship of intense support and involvement. It is a temporary supportive relationship between a Friend and his or her meeting.

## **Relationships Involve Mutual Expectations**

Along the spectrum of relationships between a Friend and his or her meeting, mutual expectations change. The following paragraphs describe what might reasonably be expected of a Friend, and what reasonably might be expected of a meeting for the four stages outlined above.

I. *Aspects of the relationship between a monthly meeting and an active Friend.* The Friend attends meeting, reads Quaker and other religious literature, attends spiritual discussions, and tries to apply Friends' principles at home, in the workplace, and in the world. The Friend contributes appropriate share to the

meeting's budget, and serves the meeting on a committee or in other roles. Meeting welcomes the Friend, provides a place and occasion for corporate worship and other interaction with Friends, provides information about Quaker teachings and values, and invites participation.

II. *Aspects of the relationship between a monthly meeting and a Friend seeking clearness.*

A Friend requests the meeting's help in discernment. If so led, the meeting (through an appropriate committee) appoints a clearness committee to meet with the Friend. One or more meetings with the Friend are arranged, and when the Friend and the clearness committee agree that some degree of clearness has been reached, the clearness committee is laid down.

III. *Aspects of the relationship between a monthly meeting and a called Friend.* When a Friend is responding to an *individual* call to ministry, as discerned in the clearness process, and seeks on-going counsel from the meeting while he or she responds to that call, the Friend might request:

a. *Spiritual support.* At the Friend's request, the meeting may find clearness to appoint a small group to meet with the Friend over some specified period of time for prayer, listening, and spiritual encouragement.

b. *Accountability.* At the Friend's request, the meeting may find clearness to appoint an oversight committee for some period of time. This committee would meet as needed to support the Friend's obedience to his or her calling, faithfulness to proceeding in good order, and constancy in carrying out the discerned goals of the undertaking.

A calling might continue for a long time. While we hope and expect that meeting's spiritual resources are unlimited, the human beings who are the vessels and instruments of these resources are often stretched in many directions. Therefore, the offer of ongoing spiritual support or oversight committees should be seen as a time-limited offer, with the expected duration of the process to be determined at the outset.

IV. *Aspects of the Relationship with a Released Friend in Joint Ministry.* When the meeting and a Friend discern that they are mutually called to partnership in a joint ministry, the relationship between the meeting and the Friend changes. The meeting and the Friend become accountable to one another in carrying out the joint ministry. When the meeting undertakes a joint ministry with a Friend, it may release the Friend for the work in several ways:

a. *Recognition of ministry.* Responding to a Friend's request, the meeting may find clearness to *recognize* the Friend's ministry as an extension of its corporate ministry. The meeting and the released Friend would continue to hold the recognized ministry in the Light, testing from time to time whether a call to partnership in joint ministry still abides with them.

b. *Practical assistance.* In a ministry that the meeting recognizes as part of its own corporate ministry, the released Friend may wish to seek occasional practical assistance. At the Friend's request, the meeting may find clearness to assist the person in carrying out the ministry, offering

such practical help as occasional childcare, transportation, or companionship for a journey.

c. Financial release. A Friend may seek to be released from certain financial and practical responsibilities in order to undertake a ministry that the meeting recognizes as part of its own corporate ministry. This relationship requires careful discernment, not only of the mutual calling to partnership in a joint ministry, but also of the meeting's practical ability to release the Friend from financial and practical responsibilities.

Following a careful discernment process, the meeting may find clearness to support the Friend financially and to offer practical assistance for a period of time while the Friend embarks on the ministry.

The meeting and the Friend would be accountable to one another in this joint ministry. While the Friend's own expertise and judgment would direct the day-to-day work of the ministry, the meeting would continue to meet with the Friend to discern the overall direction of the joint ministry, and to ensure that the work stays true to the calling.

If the meeting decides to release a Friend financially in order to carry out a joint ministry, the meeting's commitment to financial and practical support is a regular activity of the meeting. It is the meeting's responsibility to budget and/or to raise funds as necessary to meet the commitments made to a released Friend.

Friends have noted a possible conflict between our concerns to avoid a "hireling ministry" and our deep desire to enable Friends to respond to a spiritual calling. The practice of releasing Friends can address the latter desire without approaching the concept of a "hireling ministry" by ensuring that "release" is an expression of a partnership in joint ministry, and that it is a temporary arrangement.

When the meeting releases a Friend to focus on a joint ministry, there should be an understanding from the beginning that the period of release is temporary and has a known endpoint. If the meeting is providing financial support and the Friend believes that he or she is called to continue with the work of the ministry beyond the period of release, the Friend needs to ensure that the work will be self-sustaining in the long term.

Finally, Friends know that meetings can't do everything. Thomas Kelly's sage advice to individuals can serve to guide meetings as well:

*"A life becomes simplified when dominated by faithfulness to a few concerns."*

*Testament of Devotion*, 1941 edition, page 110.

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## APPENDICES

Recognition and support for the expression of a life lived in the Spirit should be available to all people in the meeting. However, some will not seek this corporate recognition and support.

Below is the process for seeking clearness and for acknowledging a called or released Friend. The person considering being a called or a released Friend should read this document before writing the initial letter.

### **Seeking Clearness**

**For those seeking clearness about their personal ministry of living their lives in the Spirit of God:**

Friends might seek clearness about life questions or challenges as they try to live their life in the Spirit of God. The clearness and discernment process is an opportunity for the clearness committee to help the Friend reach clarity and to offer guidance and suggestions.

### **Called Friend**

#### **Clearness process for recognition as a *called* Friend**

(To begin the process on becoming a released Friend, see appendix page 3.)

1. The Friend writes a letter asking for a clearness committee to test the calling and sends it to the clerk of the appropriate committee.
2. The appropriate committee, if so led, forms a clearness committee of people who have an empathy for and understanding of the calling but who are also able to ask penetrating questions and to speak truth. This group will form queries for the Friend to consider and will critically and actively listen to the person's responses.
3. This committee gives guidance by asking questions and making alternative suggestions (such as suggesting the person seek a short term experience in a similar field before making any large career changes). The committee asks penetrating questions:
  - a. to discern whether this is a true calling

b. whether the call is within the meeting's understanding of the principles and testimonies of the Society of Friends. To aid in this discernment the following questions are suggested:

(1) Is God calling this Friend to do this?

(2) Is there a sense that the Spirit of God is providing this Friend the means, time, and skills to respond to this calling?

(3) Is this the right time in the Friend's life to respond to this calling?

(4) Does the content of the calling exemplify the meeting's understanding of what Quakers stand for? Is the calling in keeping with Quaker principles and testimonies? (The clearness committee does not need to analyze and approve the practical and fiscal structure of any task or project that the individual is undertaking.)

(5) Is the Friend asking for the meeting to provide spiritual support, counsel, future discernment? If so, what will be the frequency and duration of this support?

The clearness committee and the Friend together seek unity in responding to these and other relevant questions.

As part of this process the Friend and the committee consider what the Friend is asking from the meeting. The Friend could be asking only for affirmation and recognition from the Meeting. The Friend could also be asking for a spiritual support committee to help him/her stay accountable to the calling. A support group should agree to meet for a specific period of time. At the end of this period the group's continuation should be considered afresh.

4. After the clearness committee meets and considers the above points with the Friend, the committee meets independently of the Friend and prepares its report and recommendations. This report is presented to the appropriate committee.
5. The appropriate committee reviews the report and recommendations. If the committee unites with the clearness committee's recommendations that this Friend be recognized as a called Friend, the appropriate committee brings its recommendations to the monthly meeting for the conduct of business.
6. This report and its recommendations are considered in the monthly meeting for the conduct of business.
  - a. The meeting may wish to query the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of the process the committee followed. The meeting does not query the individual Friend.

- b. The meeting considers whether the calling is in keeping with Quaker principles and testimonies, but the meeting is not responsible for approving the details of the project (for example, finances, viability, etc.).
  - c. The meeting may then affirm the committee's recommendations, including any request for a spiritual support committee.
  - d. Recognition of this calling is given and so minuted.
7. Accountability for a called Friend is understood to mean:
- a. Being accountable to the call of the Spirit of God
  - b. Keeping in right order and form in following the call

## **Released Friend**

### **Clearness procedure for the *release* of a Friend**

1. The Friend writes a letter to the clerk of the appropriate committee asking for a clearness committee for the purpose of discerning a calling to ministry as a released Friend.
2. The appropriate committee, if so led, sets up a clearness committee of people who have an empathy for and an understanding of the calling but who are also able to ask penetrating questions and to speak the truth. This group will form queries for the Friend to consider and will critically and actively listen to the person's responses.
  - a. This group will be listening with the intention of discerning the truth regarding two different questions:
    - Is God calling this Friend to do this?*
    - Is God calling the meeting to do it as well?*
  - b. This process may well be expected to take more than one meeting and should be deliberate and prayer-filled.
3. In addition to the queries given for the called Friend (see page 2), the committee should also consider the following questions:
  - a. What are the person's general goals?
  - b. What is the general plan to carry out this project?
  - c. Is this goal and plan consistent with our faith and practices?
  - d. Is this the work of who we are as a meeting?
  - e. What support is the Friend asking from the meeting?

4. After the clearness committee meets and considers the above points with the Friend, the committee meets independently of the Friend and prepares its report and recommendations. The report should include a review of the specific request for support and the length of time suggested for the release, as well as a plan for eventual self-sufficiency. This report is presented to the appropriate committee and is shared with the Friend.
5. The appropriate committee reviews the report and recommendations. If there is unity that the Friend is indeed called to this ministry and the meeting may well be called to participate in it, the committee brings its recommendations to the monthly meeting for the conduct of business.
6. The monthly meeting will consider:
  - a. whether to acknowledge and affirm this calling to be one of the individual's as well as of the meeting's
  - b. the availability within the meeting of the support that is requested
  - c. the time period for release as well as the plans for the ending of the release and/or the plan for self sufficiency. In specifying the period of release it should be remembered that the **maximum** term is one year. However, a few months may be all that is asked for or truly manageable by the meeting.
7. To give approval to a released Friend the meeting must be willing and able to say "we go with you and share this work with you". Thus, the released Friend's ministry is seen as a ministry of the meeting and as such has the meeting's full spiritual and practical support.
8. Because of the weight of this commitment, it is recommended that the meeting consider the request at least a month before making a decision. Since the meeting as a whole has not had a clearness process to consider its role in this joint ministry, the meeting may wish to have some additional discussion at this time.
9. If the meeting approves of the Friend's release this action is minuted.
10. The meeting sets up a Support and Oversight Committee for the released Friend. The released Friend may suggest some members of this committee, the whole committee is named by the appropriate committee. It is recommended that the committee include people who have some knowledge of various aspects related to the work to be accomplished by the released Friend. Also, they should be people who are comfortable giving guidance and speaking a gentle truth when needed. This committee becomes a monthly meeting committee and will have a term that coincides with that of the release.



11. Recommendations for the functioning of the Support and Oversight Committee include:
- a. The committee should have a clerk who calls the meetings and sets the agenda with input from the released Friend.
  - b. The committee operates with the released Friend in a relationship of mutual accountability. The group is accountable to the released Friend in maintaining a clear vision of the calling and staying true to Quaker practices. The individual is accountable to the group in that the individual listens to and considers advice and guidance. The released Friend also makes reports on the work of the ministry. The released Friend and the committee are responsible for the good use of the money contributed to this work and for maintaining good order and practice in carrying out the calling.
  - c. This committee stays in touch with other relevant meeting committees on specific issues that may arise.
  - d. If there is an intention for this project to be continued beyond the period of release, the committee helps and encourages the released Friend design a plan for the work to become self-sustaining and self-supporting .
  - e. This committee reports quarterly, or as needed, to the monthly meeting regarding the status of the work and the plans for the development and ending of the project.

## **Fund Raising**

**When a meeting releases a Friend the meeting has taken this ministry as its own. The release of a Friend is to be seen as a meeting activity and not an individual's activity supported by interested Friends. Therefore, the meeting, and not the released Friend, must raise the needed money.**

It is recommended that each meeting look carefully at these issues:

- who should know what about the monies collected,
- whether members can earmark their contributions, and
- who receives written thanks.

Our group has considered these points and offers the following guidelines.

### **Suggested procedure for raising funds**

1. The clearness committee produces a budget for the ministry. ascertains how much money is needed. This is reported to the appropriate committee and included in the initial report to the monthly meeting for the conduct of business.

2. The meeting, in keeping with the communal level of work required in having a released Friend, raises the needed funds.

- a. The meeting approves any necessary increase to the meeting's budget.
- b. The meeting clerk writes a letter identifying the special financial need that this ministry entails. This letter is sent to the members and attenders of the meeting.

The funds thus collected *within the released Friend's meeting* are not to be earmarked but go into the general fund. Special acknowledgments or thank you notes are not sent.

c. If the meeting decides to ask other meetings to participate in this ministry another letter can be sent out from the clerk. Funds thus contributed can be earmarked for the ministry and acknowledgments are sent out.

3. The Finance Committee collects the money and gives it to the released Friend. The names of contributors and amounts donated by each are kept by the Treasurer. If the contribution comes from outside the meeting, this information is given to the Support and Oversight Committee to acknowledge. The released Friend is not made aware of who has contributed to the ministry. In this way the relationship between the released Friend and others is not impacted or impaired.

4. The Support and Oversight Committee oversees how the money is spent.

## **Endings**

*“Every stage of our lives offers fresh opportunities. Responding to divine guidance, try to discern the right time to undertake or relinquish responsibilities without undue pride or guilt. Attend to what love requires of you, which may not be great busyness.”*

From *Quaker Faith and Practice*, London Yearly Meeting

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## **How to proceed at the end of the term of release:**

1. As the end of the term of release approaches, the released Friend and the Support and Oversight Committee will look ahead and consider how to bring this relationship to a close .
2. At the appropriate time, the released Friend and the Support and Oversight Committee will recommend to the monthly meeting that their roles be laid down. The monthly meeting will minute this action and express its regard for their work. At this time, the former released Friend may consider becoming a called Friend. If this is the guidance of the Spirit of God, they will

then initiate that procedure.

3. In an unusual circumstance, the committee could suggest that the term of release be extended.

a. The Support and Oversight Committee suggests the term of release be extended for a specific period of time.

b. The request for an extension is brought to the monthly meeting for the conduct of business for consideration. If approved, it may be necessary to add new committee members to the Support and Oversight Committee if current members need to be relieved. The meeting may also need to make further changes to its budget.

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