

Dear Friends:

“How may we better support the leadings of the Spirit among Friends in Pacific Yearly Meeting?”

Laboring with this question, the PYM Committee on Ministry and Oversight created a Subcommittee on Ministry and Leadings, which began its work in September 2007. The Subcommittee was given the following charge:

- Developing a means, and assisting Monthly Meetings to develop means, for helping Friends to discern when they are experiencing a leading, and supporting them in fulfilling the leading;
- Recommending procedures to Monthly Meetings for ways of supporting individual leadings and ministry through the use of clearness committees, anchor committees, and/or oversight committees.
- Developing mechanisms for helping to fund Friends traveling in the ministry, including overseeing Yearly Meeting funds for these purposes;
- Sponsoring interest groups and other adult education opportunities related to ministry and leadings.

Drawing upon existing documents from other Quaker groups as well as adding much new material, the Subcommittee has created a booklet designed for use by Friends in Pacific Yearly Meeting, titled:

FAITHFULNESS IN ACTION: Supporting Leadings in Pacific Yearly Meeting.

With the encouragement of the PYM Committee on Ministry and Oversight, members of the Subcommittee now offer this booklet in draft form to Friends in Pacific Yearly Meeting. *We invite you to read it, use it, and evaluate it—and to send us your comments* as we consider possible revisions of the booklet. Please submit your comments to:

MinistryLeadings@pacificyearlymeeting.org

On behalf of the Subcommittee on Ministry and Leadings,

Steve Smith, clerk

FAITHFULNESS IN ACTION

SUPPORTING LEADINGS IN PACIFIC YEARLY MEETING

Draft 2.2 – 1 June 2009

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;
and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord;
and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who
activates all of them in every one.*

*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to
another the utterance of knowledge according to the same
Spirit,*

*to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the
one Spirit,*

*to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another
the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues,
to another the interpretation of tongues.*

*All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each
one individually just as the Spirit chooses.*

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the
members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with
Christ.*

New Testament (NRSV): 1 Corinthians 12:4-12

A Note to the Reader
Regarding This Booklet

The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
2 Corinthians 3:6 (NRSV)

The following pages offer possible guidelines for recognizing, lifting up and supporting the work of the Spirit in Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups within Pacific Yearly Meeting, with an emphasis upon supporting leadings as they arise. These guidelines draw extensively upon documents that have been developed by Friends in Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting (CPMM) of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and Beacon Hill Friends Meeting (BHFM) of New England Yearly Meeting.¹ The present document has been seasoned in worshipful reflection and discussion by the Subcommittee on Ministry and Leadings under the care of the Committee on Ministry and Oversight of Pacific Yearly Meeting.

Despite this extensive pedigree, *Faithfulness in Action: Supporting Leadings in Pacific Yearly Meeting* should not be viewed as a fixed map or strict protocol for supporting leadings—but rather as a set of fluid suggestions and an invitation to dialogue. No one can predict when and how the Spirit may break into our lives—nor should we presume to confine it within a structured and rigid form. Life in the Spirit is endlessly, amazingly creative; rule-bound expectations undermine God-given inspiration, diminishing vitality and insight. *Faithfulness in Action* should be seen as offering a variety of paths among infinitely many through which we may become more faithful to the promptings of the Spirit.

Faithfulness in Action is still in draft form. Comments and/or suggestions for improvement should be sent to: MinistryLeadings@pacificyearlymeeting.org

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**CONCERNS AND LEADINGS:
An Overview from *Faith and Practice* of PYM, pp. 59-62**

Concerns and leadings grow out of the spiritual experience and contemplative practice of the Meeting. They are the living fruit of Friends' faith that the Spirit will lead us forward into right action in the world.

The impetus for action is often a concern: a pull toward a specific issue, an experience of the stirring of the Spirit about a particular topic, individual or group. A concern may thrust itself suddenly into the life of a Friend or may grow out of a long-standing interest. A concern may be short lived or it may inform and direct Friends throughout their lives. . . .

When it initially arises, a concern may not yet be linked to a proposed course of action, but may simply be a troubled sense that something is needed or something is awry. Action, when it follows, is often the result of a sense of being drawn or called by God in a particular direction or toward a particular course of action. Friends speak of "feeling led" or "being called." . . .

At times a call may take a more profound hold, causing us to make significant life changes, to take risks, or to engage in specific social or political actions. Friends under the weight of such a concern should rely on the Meeting to help them discern the right course of action. Friends' long-standing practice confirms the rightness of testing a leading with the Monthly Meeting, which customarily appoints a clearness committee to meet with the concerned individual. Together, the clearness committee and the initiating individual seek to join the mystical with the practical and to test the validity of the concern. . . .

During the clearness process, the Meeting has a duty to consider the matter carefully and sympathetically. The concerned Friend has a duty to participate in the discernment. Does the concern spring from the movement of the Spirit in the life of the concerned Friend? Is it consistent with Friends' testimonies? If not, can the committee confirm that it nonetheless flows from that same Light that has steadfastly inspired Friends?

If the committee affirms the spiritual leading of the concerned Friend, the committee then considers how it is led further to act. If the concern is confined to the individual and does not directly involve the Meeting, then clarity may be the primary gift of the Meeting. However, an individual's need for careful discernment often comes during a period of change, and it is always appropriate to offer ongoing spiritual support to the concerned Friend. The existing clearness committee often takes responsibility for this support.

The Meeting should determine what additional forms of support it wishes to offer, ranging from childcare and financial assistance to releasing the Friend from other responsibilities. The Meeting may support the leading of the concerned Friend; it may also wish to take on the leading as its own. This may relieve the concerned Friend of the burden of leadership; more often it affirms and validates the importance of the initial concern.

The clearness committee, after listening carefully and laboring faithfully with the concerned Friend, may conclude the Friend's calling is not divinely inspired. This may lead the Friend to feel relieved of the concern and lay it down. Some Friends may choose to carry on, without the support of the Meeting, taking care to represent the concern as a personal one. Any Friend may choose to labor further with the Meeting and the clearness committee, in pursuit of unity. The clearness process should substantially assist the concerned Friend; it may inspire the Meeting. Ideally, it will do both.

Depending on the nature and scope of the concern, the Monthly Meeting may wish to present it as a minute to the Quarterly Meeting. Similarly, the Quarterly Meeting may seek to engage a wider circle of Friends by bringing it before the Yearly Meeting.

GUIDELINES FOR RESPONDING TO LEADINGS:

1. What is a leading?

In the experience and understanding of Friends, a leading has these dimensions:

- a. Recognition of need, injustice, or other work to be done;
- b. An inward, caring response to the need, injustice, or work to be done;
- c. A sense that one is somehow being asked to take action to meet the need, correct the injustice, and/or do the necessary work;
- d. A belief that one's sense of "being asked to take action" arises not merely from one's small self, but from a larger Source—God, Christ, Spirit, the Numinous, the Real, the Unconscious.

Quaker and Judeo-Christian histories abound with examples of leadings. Two familiar scriptural examples are those of Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-10), and Saul (later, Paul) on the road to Damascus (Acts, 9:3-6). The *Journal* of George Fox and other early Quaker writings are full of accounts of leadings, often described in explicitly biblical terms.

A passage from John Woolman's *Journal* illustrates the essential features of a leading:

12th day, 6th month, and first of the week. It being a rainy day we continued in our tent, and here I was led to think on the nature of the exercise which hath attended me. Love was the first motion, and then a concern arose to spend some time with the Indians, that I might feel and understand their life and the spirit they live in, if haply I might receive some instruction from them, or they be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of Truth amongst them.²

Reflecting on the lives of the Indians, Woolman experiences a "motion of love" and a "concern . . . to spend some time with" them. Humble and open, his first hope is to "receive some instruction from them", and possibly to help them, by "following the leadings of Truth."

2. How do I know whether I am experiencing a true leading?

We are notoriously capable of deceiving ourselves—and perhaps nowhere so readily as when we imagine that we are "following the will of God." Ancient and modern history abounds with instances of what Friends regard as false "leadings" that have led to cruelty, injustice, war and oppression. Religious conflict, slavery, racism, sexism, suicide bombings, and many other deranged and destructive behaviors have all been rationalized as "God's will." Thus when we sense that we are experiencing a leading of the Spirit, careful discernment is required.

In Friends' perspective, genuine leadings are characterized by love, not hate; a desire to unify, not divide; an impulse to heal rather than to destroy. Although awareness of cruelty and injustice may readily inspire moral outrage, anger is not the root motivation of a true leading. *The Letter of James* (which George Fox frequently cited in defense of Friends' Peace Testimony) declares that "your anger does not produce God's righteousness" and "The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy." (1:19, 3:17) In *Galatians*, St. Paul expresses a similar sentiment: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (5:22-23, NRSV) "Love was the first motion," writes Woolman.

A genuine leading may announce itself through overheard conversation that speaks directly to one's heart³; it may arise as a persistent dream, preoccupation or concern that one cannot shake off; it may become clear through painful realization that one's beliefs and actions are not congruent. Awareness of a leading may unfold slowly over time, as one's heart opens more fully to Truth. It may be work that is begun reluctantly—perhaps assigned by a nominating committee—yet grows into a labor of love. (See Appendix C: When a Nomination Becomes a Leading, pp. 18f.)

As these examples illustrate, there is no formula, no infallible marker by which a genuine leading may be recognized. In Quaker perspective, religious passion or zeal are not proof of a true leading. Early Friends were all too aware of the dangers of undisciplined fervor and excess. Quakers were frequently confused with the Ranters, another 17th-century religious group, who (in the words of Hugh Barbour, a leading Quaker scholar) “claimed that since they were redeemed and led by the Spirit, they could do no wrong, and so followed impulses into all kinds of immorality and anarchy.”⁴ To counter such religious anarchism, from a very early date Friends insisted upon the importance of *corporate* discernment (rather than purely individual conviction) as an essential test of religious insight.

Often, recognition of a leading comes first not from one's own discernment, but through suggestions or nudges from others who recognize and name one's ministry. In Quaker tradition, those in a Meeting who demonstrated a gift for discerning, naming and lifting up the ministry of others were formally recognized as “elders.” The practice of drawing upon elders is being widely reintroduced among liberal Friends. The spiritual insight and guidance of trusted elders (whether formally recognized or not) can be immensely valuable throughout the entire process of discerning and following a leading. Thus when exploring a possible leading, Friends are strongly encouraged to consult with others whom they trust as spiritual mentors—good listeners who are spiritually experienced and seasoned, able to “hear beyond the words” to the underlying motion of the Spirit. For a fuller description of elders and eldering, see Section #15 below and Appendix D.

A rich, useful literature exists on leadings, ministry, callings, spiritual discernment and similar concepts. Hugh Barbour's classic piece, “Five Tests for Discerning a True Leading” is included here as Appendix A. A number of helpful sources on leadings are listed in Appendix B. Friends who are exploring a possible leading are encouraged to consult these sources.

3. When should I submit my leading to the discernment and care of the Meeting?

Friends may consult informally with others in the Meeting at any time. It is usually appropriate to explore a relationship of greater accountability to the Meeting when one or more of the following conditions are present:

- When a concern has begun to settle into a clear leading to action that may involve spiritual, physical, and/or financial burdens or risks;
- When others in the Meeting offer encouragement to test the concern in a more formal way;
- When the concern seems to have ripened to the point that it calls for fuller support and accountability;
- When Friends who are already engaged in public ministry seek discernment in order to stay more faithful to their ministry;
- When Friends face special challenges or personal attacks as they follow their leadings;
- When Friends find, as they pursue their concerns, that others in the Meeting have come to regard their work as a “public ministry” on behalf of the Religious Society of Friends;

- When the Meeting’s endorsement or financial support is a useful next step in the full expression of the Friends’ ministry.⁵

4. *What steps should I take to submit my leading to the Meeting?*

The first step in submitting a leading to the discernment of the Monthly Meeting is usually to write a letter to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel. (In some Meetings, the committee may be differently named—e.g. “Ministry and Oversight” or “Worship and Ministry.”) The letter may be brief (one or two pages), giving a short history of the Friend’s concern or leading and describing the kind of help that is requested.

5. *How should the Meeting respond to such a request?*

The usual first step in responding to such a request is for Ministry and Counsel to appoint a Clearness Committee to work with the requesting Friend.⁶

The person bringing forward the request may suggest names of possible members for the Clearness Committee. The Committee on Ministry and Counsel may give weight to these suggestions, but should exercise its own discernment regarding the best composition of the committee for the purpose. A Clearness Committee usually consists of at least three, and usually no more than five persons from the Meeting. Friends from another Monthly Meeting who know the Friend with a leading and/or who have experience with the concern that animates the leading may also be considered for membership in the Clearness Committee.

In some cases, the Committee on Ministry and Counsel may feel clear to bring a recommendation supporting a Friend’s request directly to the Meeting for Business without a further clearness process. This is most likely to be appropriate when the work is well known to the Meeting or where it has been tested through other trusted Meeting channels, such as a small group within the meeting.⁷

6. *What are the responsibilities of the Clearness Committee?*

The Clearness Committee serves two main purposes: to assist the individual in gaining clearness regarding the leading, and to guide the Meeting in discerning its appropriate role in support of the leading. The first step is to assist the individual to come to a deeper clarity about the leading and whether way is open for responding to the leading. As the Clearness Committee reaches greater clarity about the leading itself, it may then explore the appropriate role (if any) for the Meeting in supporting the leading.⁸

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

1. *What is the nature of the call?* How has the person come to feel that she or he is being led to this service? How does this leading fit into his or her personal and spiritual life?
2. *In what respects does the person already feel clear?* What remains unclear?
3. *What are the potential benefits of the proposed ministry*—to the person’s spiritual development, to the wider community, to the life of the Meeting?
4. *How ready is the person to undertake the ministry?* Does it fit into other obligations such as family, work, or community? Does the person have the skills and resources to carry out this call? What steps might be taken to become better prepared? What are the risks—and how will they be borne?

5. *Is the person in a financial position to support him- or herself while carrying out this ministry? Is he or she prepared to go forward even if the level of funds available may require living on significantly reduced means?*
6. *Is it appropriate to ask others to join in this ministry by providing spiritual, practical, or financial support? Sometimes there may be clearness that the ministry is something the individual is called to bear alone. In exploring whether there is a role for the Meeting, is the person prepared to engage prayerfully with others without resentment and disruption of his or her relationship to the Meeting community?*⁹

The Friend seeking clearness and the committee may conclude that there is no call to service, or that this is not the right time to act on the call. In such a case, the Friend may continue to season the sense of leading, and may at some future time again request clearness. If there is clearness for the individual to go forward, the Clearness Committee seeks to discern unity regarding what support from the Meeting might be appropriate.

On some occasions, the Clearness Committee may not reach unity regarding the rightness of proceeding with the leading at this time. This outcome should not be regarded as a failure, but as an occasion for further searching and growth in the Spirit by the individual, the Meeting, or both. A further time of prayerfulness and humility may bring forward ministry that is deepened and honed in ways that would not have been possible, had the Friend pressed forward with his or her earlier understanding.¹⁰

At the conclusion of the clearness process, the Clearness Committee prepares a succinct written report, which is then delivered to Committee on Ministry and Counsel.

7. What forms of support should the Clearness Committee consider?

If a sense of unity and clarity is reached as to the rightness of the leading, the Clearness Committee moves on to discern whether support from the Meeting may be called for—and if so, what form that support might take. There are many possibilities, including (but not limited to) the following:

1. It may be found that the Friend is clear to move forward and that no further involvement of the Meeting is needed or desired beyond the Meeting being informed of the progress of the ministry and holding the Friend in love and prayer.
2. The Meeting may minute its readiness to hold in its care the Friend's faithfulness to the leading.
3. The Meeting may appoint a Spiritual Accountability Group (traditionally named an "Oversight Committee") to care for the Friend's faithfulness. (See below, ##10-14.)
4. The Meeting may provide a letter or "Minute of Service" affirming the clarity of the Friend's call.
5. The Meeting may provide financial or practical support.
6. In the case of traveling ministry, the Meeting may provide companions for travel.
7. The Meeting may provide affirmation or endorsement of the Friend's call to another Friends' organization.
8. The Meeting may affirm that it is in unity with the ministry and is itself under the weight of the concern.
9. The Clearness Committee may discern that another form of support by the Meeting is appropriate.¹¹

The Clearness Committee should consider which (if any) of these options seems in good order. When the clearness process is completed, a written report of this process should be given to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel, and should contain any recommendations that the Clearness Committee wishes to forward to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel.

8. *What is the responsibility of the Committee on Ministry and Counsel?*

Ministry and Counsel receives the written report of the Clearness Committee and seasons it with care, consulting as necessary with the Friend and members of the Clearness Committee. If it unites with recommendations contained within the report, the Committee on Ministry and Counsel minutes this unity. When the written report recommends support by the Meeting for the Friends' ministry and the Committee on Ministry and Counsel unites with this recommendation, it brings the recommendation to Meeting for Business for approval. The recommendation will normally include provision for a relationship between the Friend and a Spiritual Accountability Group (see below, #10).

If the Ministry and Counsel does not unite with the recommendations contained in the report of the Clearness Committee, it may refer the matter back to the Clearness Committee for further discernment and seasoning. Alternatively, it may advise the Friend who has brought the concern that further time and reflection may be helpful. As was noted above (#6), this outcome should not necessarily be construed as a failure.

9. *Does an individual's leading always become the Meeting's leading?*

A number of models for support by the Meeting are outlined above. Supporting a Friend in response to a leading means that the Meeting recognizes the Spirit at work in the life of the Friend—but does *not* necessarily imply that the Meeting as a whole is under the weight of the concern. In the process of discernment within the Meeting for Business, however, it may be that the Meeting as a whole comes to feel the weight of the concern that has been brought by the Friend, and finds unity not simply in supporting the Friend, but also in undertaking a *corporate* witness regarding the leading. If so, the Meeting may minute its unity regarding the leading, and take further steps that it deems appropriate.¹²

10. *What is a Spiritual Accountability Group—and how is it formed?*

A Spiritual Accountability Group is charged with acting “on behalf of the Meeting in holding the Friend’s faithfulness in prayer, offering care, asking hard questions, and holding the person accountable to the Spirit and responsible to the Meeting.”¹³ Responsibility for creation of a Spiritual Accountability Group rests with the Committee on Ministry and Counsel. Some Meetings may create a standing Spiritual Accountability Group whose function is to provide guidance and oversight for any Friends whose leadings have, in Meeting for Business, received the support of the Meeting. More commonly, however, a Spiritual Accountability Group is formed anew for each specific Friend when that Friend’s leading has received the support of the Meeting.

While the Friend with the leading may suggest persons for his or her Spiritual Accountability Group, final responsibility for selecting the group rests with the Committee on Ministry and Counsel. Normally, a Spiritual Accountability Group consists of three to five persons from the Meeting who are known for their spiritual sensitivity, careful discernment, insight and fairness.

While the above is one pattern that has been found to be useful, Friends are reminded that it should not be regarded as “set in stone,” and are urged to heed the creative voice of the Spirit

rather than adhering rigidly to fixed rules. (Please see “A Note to the Reader Regarding This Booklet,” p. 2, and Section #19 below.)

11. What is the role of the Spiritual Accountability Group?

The purpose of a Spiritual Accountability Group is to help the Friend with the leading to remain faithful to that leading. The Spiritual Accountability Group “provides a structure of accountability for the person with the leading [and] continues to discern what the lifetime of the leading is among those who are carrying out its work.”¹⁴

When the Meeting has found unity in support of the leading, the Spiritual Accountability Group serves the Meeting as well as the Friend with the leading, assuring that there is integrity between the Friend’s ongoing ministry and what the Meeting has approved.

12. What general questions should a Spiritual Accountability Group address?

In supporting the faithfulness of the Friend with a leading, the Spiritual Accountability Group should be attentive to the following issues:

- *Ongoing spiritual care:* Is the Friend with the leading faithfully exercising his or her gifts and responding to the call? Is the Friend’s ministry filled with a rich sense of the presence of God? Is the Friend nurturing his or her spiritual life while carrying out this work? Is the Friend able to care for her/his health and well-being and fulfill other responsibilities while carrying out the work?
- *Responsible conduct:* Are the means of fulfilling the leading appropriate to the call? If a minute of religious service has been approved by the Meeting, is the Friend’s work focused and responsive to that minute? Is the Friend in right relationship with others doing similar work and open to learning from and collaborating with them?
- *Financial accountability:* If funding is being provided by the Meeting or other Friends’ groups, is there a clearly expressed and adequate budget? Are funds being raised in appropriate ways, representing the work and its goals accurately, and representing the role of the Meeting accurately? Is the committee satisfied that funds are being properly accounted for, being spent for the purpose for which they were granted, and that appropriate and timely reports are made to the funders?
- *Adequacy of support:* Though the Spiritual Accountability Group is not responsible for obtaining financial or other support for the Friend’s ministry, it should take care to review with the Friend the adequacy of support for the work.
- *Companions for travel:* If the Friend’s ministry requires him or her to travel outside the Meeting, would it be useful for the Friend to travel with a spiritual companion or elder who may offer ongoing support and honest spiritual discernment?
- *Changes in the leading:* As the leading evolves over time it is the responsibility of the Spiritual Accountability Group to discern whether the form of the Meeting’s care should also change. Is it rightly ordered for the new shape of the leading to be under the Meeting’s care? If there is a minute of religious service, should it be modified to conform to the changes? Is the call continuing or has the time come to lay down the ministry? What are next steps for laying down the leading or transforming it to a new stage?¹⁵

13. What are the specific tasks of a Spiritual Accountability Group?

1. It is useful for the Spiritual Accountability Group to meet with the Friend with a leading on a regular basis to review the concerns listed above. In addition, the group should remain in touch with the work. Members might travel with the Friend as companions from time to time in order to keep informed. Holding the Friend in prayer is another appropriate form of support.
2. If the Friend has been receiving financial support of the Meeting, it is a responsibility of the Spiritual Accountability Group to assure that the Friend is working to discover how the ministry might become independent of the Meeting's financial support.
3. The group also maintains communication between the Friend and the Meeting, for example by encouraging the Friend to share experiences of the ministry through the Meeting newsletter, or by arranging opportunities for the Friend to teach or witness within the Meeting.
4. Normally the Spiritual Accountability Group reports to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel at least once yearly. Appropriate topics for a report include a description of the activities carried out and any results of those activities; how the ministry has contributed to the spiritual growth of the Friend and of those whom she or he has served; if applicable, a financial report listing sources and amount of income, nature and amount of expenses, and the distribution of any surplus; and recommendations for continuing, laying down, changing the form of the ministry or changing the form of the Meeting's support.¹⁶

14. When is a Spiritual Accountability Group not appropriate?

There are a number of circumstances in which a Spiritual Accountability Group may be not (or not yet) appropriate. For example, some leadings may be best pursued through existing structures of the Meeting, rendering unnecessary the apparatus of a Spiritual Accountability Group; or the work may be of such short duration that there is insufficient time and/or little need for a formal structure. Some Friends may be intimidated by the rigor of a formal Spiritual Accountability Group, and may be more faithful within gentler, informal pathways.¹⁷

In most cases, however, a Spiritual Accountability Group is appropriate when a Friend seeks formal Meeting support for his or her ministry, and especially when financial support is required.

15. What other forms of accountability and support are possible?

Elders: Early Friends developed a practice of formally naming those in the Meeting who, by virtue of a deep understanding of Quaker tradition and spirituality, displayed special gifts of discernment and guidance. These persons were called "elders."

While the formal recognition of elders has been largely discontinued among liberal, unprogrammed Friends, the function that elders performed remains essential to the spiritual life of Quakerism. In recent years, the use of elders has been reintroduced in many Quaker Meetings and organizations. Sometimes one member of a Meeting will invite or admonish another Friend to acknowledge a leading that the Friend has resisted or doubted. Or a Friend who senses that he or she may be called to a particular ministry may seek out the advice of a trusted spiritual mentor in the Meeting. Some Quaker organizations routinely appoint elders to accompany a Friend who is traveling in the ministry. Other forms of eldering are possible.

If a Spiritual Accountability Group seems overly formal for a particular case, provision for an elder to advise and perhaps accompany the Friend with a leading may be a good choice. See Appendix D (p. 20) for a fuller description of “Elders and Eldering.”

Spiritual friendship: In traditional Quaker practice, a Friend who sought guidance and growth in the Spirit might pair with another like-minded Friend to provide regular mutual discernment and spiritual nurture. This practice continues today. Spiritual friendships should be based upon a deep and open trust in matters of the spiritual life. A spiritual friendship may (but does not necessarily) include more conventional friendship involving social companionship and recreation.

In a thriving spiritual friendship, the partners may be said to serve as elders to each other. Because such friendships are not necessarily built around recognition of a specific leading, calling or ministry, however, we do not say more about them here.

Support Committee: Friends with leadings require not only oversight in carrying out their ministry, but also loving support as they face the challenges and trials of that ministry. While a good spiritual friendship may be sufficient for this purpose, in many cases it will be helpful for the Friend to meet regularly with a circle of supportive and devoted persons whose sole responsibility is to provide sensitive, listening ears, compassionate understanding and loving support for the Friend with the leading. Such a group is called a Support Committee.

16. How is a Support Committee formed, and what is its function?

The purpose of a Support Committee is to provide spiritual care for the Friend with the leading. Unlike a Spiritual Accountability Group or elder, a Support Committee is not tasked to hold the Friend accountable to the leading and (when applicable) to the minute approved in Meeting for Business regarding the leading. Rather, it exists to provide a safe, supportive environment in which the Friend may unburden her- or himself, and share feelings without the need to explain or defend. The Support Committee does not report to the Committee on Ministry and Counsel or to Meeting for Business. It is not appointed by the Committee on Ministry and Counsel, Nominating Committee or Meeting for Business, but is formed by the Friend with a leading and is accountable only to that Friend. (If the Friend asks for help in finding persons for the Support Committee, then Ministry and Counsel may suggest some names—but those persons should be approached by the Friend with the leading.) As people rotate off the Support Committee, the Friend with the leading is free to ask new people to join. Continuity is helpful; the best Support Committee consists of people who see no impediments to staying for the entire duration of the leading.

The Support Committee meets at the discretion of the Friend with the leading—normally, six to twelve times a year. The Friend may choose to write a report of his or her activities since the last meeting of the Support Committee, and distribute that report prior to the next meeting of the committee. Support Committees often meet over a potluck dinner followed by worship and personal sharing—not only by the Friend with the leading, but by others as well.¹⁸

Another model is a Mutual Support Committee, consisting of several Friends who are all engaged in one or another form of ministry, and who gather regularly to worship together, listen in turn to each other, compare notes, offer insights and suggestions, and enter deeply into one another’s experience of following a leading.

17. *When may a leading be forwarded to Quarterly or Yearly Meeting?*

A Monthly Meeting may exercise discretion regarding when and how to refer the leading of one of its members to a larger Quaker body. Examples might include the following:

- When a Friend’s leading calls the Friend to carry a concern to other Quaker organizations or gatherings, the home Monthly Meeting may approve a Minute of Introduction or a Travel Minute.¹⁹
- A Monthly Meeting may recommend to Quarterly or Yearly Meeting that a Friend’s leading receive the support of that larger body—especially when the Friend’s leading serves the work of that larger body in some manner.
- A variety of other options exist, some suggested in #7 above.

18. *What if carrying out a leading (e.g. traveling in the ministry) requires financial support?*

Friends who need financial support to carry out a leading are urged to seek such support from their own Monthly Meeting. If the Meeting unites in support of the Friend’s ministry (see #7 above for various forms that this support may take), but its financial resources are insufficient to support that ministry, the Meeting may encourage the Friend with the leading to seek funding from Pacific Yearly Meeting’s “Fund for Concerns”:

FUND FOR CONCERNS: The Ministry and Oversight Committee administers the Fund for Concerns. Its purpose is to assist members and attenders of Monthly Meetings to follow individual leadings arising from peace, social order, or spiritual concerns. It is not intended to underwrite organization or committee projects. Individuals may apply for funds through their Monthly Meeting, which in turn applies to the Ministry and Oversight Committee on their behalf. Earmarked contributions from Meetings form the primary source of this fund. (*Faith and Practice of Pacific Yearly Meeting*, 2001, pp. 187f)

19. *What if some part of Faithfulness in Action does not fit a specific, individual case?*

Friends are again reminded that guidelines spelled out in *Faithfulness in Action* are not a set of strict, required procedures, but rather a collection of suggestions that may or may not be adopted according to the good judgment of Friends. Use of *Faithfulness in Action* should not replace prayerful discernment of right order in specific cases.

Appendix A: FIVE TESTS FOR DISCERNING A TRUE LEADING by Hugh Barbour

Early Friends faced the daily job of recognizing the true from the subjective when they were led to speech and action. From Jeremiah's time to the present, men have known no absolute or easy way to tell a genuinely divine message from wishful impulses and false prophecy.

The problem was made urgent for the Quakers because they were regularly labeled by men of their time as "Ranters." The actual Ranters were a religious movement of the Seventeenth Century that superficially resembled the Friends and used much the same religious language. Ranters claimed that since they were redeemed and led by the Spirit, they could do no wrong, and so followed impulses into all kinds of immorality and anarchy. Some went further, saying that no man could be freed from a sin until he had committed that sin as if it were not a sin. Most of them felt they had found true faith or had been given a special prophetic call by God after a period of frustration in orthodox churches. Some were clearly psychotic.

It was therefore important for Quakers to know themselves, to find a basis for guiding and disciplining one another when necessary, and to explain to others how they differed from Ranters.

1. *Moral purity.* The first test for the genuineness of a leading was moral purity. Friends said that the Ranters "fled the cross," and that the true Spirit was always contrary to self-will and led to righteousness. They applied this test within their own Meetings, and their austerity was certainly in contrast to the libertine habits of the Ranters.

Even condemnation of the impure was part of this test, "for the word of the Lord is pure," wrote George Fox in a reference to Jeremiah 23:28, "and answers the pure in everyone . . . It is as a hammer to beat down the transgressor."

2. *Patience.* As a second test, elders warned Friends to sit with their leadings for a while in patience. Self-will is impatient of tests. Fox wrote, "Be patient and still in the power and still in the light that doth convince you, keep your minds unto God . . . If you sit still in the patience which overcomes in the power of God, there will be no flying."

3. *Consistency with others.* The third and most important test was likely to be the self-consistency of the Spirit. The Light should not contradict itself, either in history or among the members of the Spirit-led group.

Even the senior preachers submitted their directives to each others' testing. In 1659 Thomas Aldam and William Dewsbury wrote to George Fox and Edward Burrough: "Take into your consideration the things written down in that power which came to me and W. Dew. at York and let me have an answer, how the large wisdom of God in you doth approve of the particular things to be done, and what it disapproves of, that in one Mind we may meet."

From these casual ways of verifying each others' leadings, there grew up in turn the uniform and practical organs of Quaker group life in Meetings for Business.

4. *Consistency with the Bible.* One strong means for using the consistency of the Spirit as a test for the validity of leadings was to compare them with biblical conduct.

Friends were never willing to use the Bible directly as a guidebook or rule book lest it substitute for each person's own direct experience of the Light of Christ. In every area of life the Spirit must be absolute. But the Quakers, of course, believed that the biblical writers were also

divinely inspired and that biblical teachings and prophecies were therefore proper to use for comparison. They were also willing for their opponents to test them by the Bible.

This agreement of the Spirit with the Bible was achieved more easily than it would be now, since early Friends were steeped in the Bible, quoted it unconsciously, and felt that it was the Spirit's characteristic vocabulary.

5. *Inward unity*. The power of the Spirit to bring people into unity was one of the happy discoveries of the early Friends, and served as a final test of the guiding of the Light.

Friends have always needed to distinguish between "Openings" teaching them timeless truths, and "Call" experiences of individual guidance for specific tasks and decisions. Even the latter, however, were tested by early Friends against the discerning of other Friends, to guard against self-deception. For example, Thomas Stubbs, though his own work kept him in Northampton, spoke of feeling the call that had taken Edward Burrough and Francis Howgill to Ireland. At the same time he wrote to William Dewsbury, in prison for his faith, that he felt united to him in the will of the Lord.

Sharing the Spirit of God within them underlay the deepest of all Quaker experiences, the unspoken awareness of the unification of the group by the Spirit in the silent Meeting, where the whole body, and not primarily its individuals, received power, wisdom, and joy.

[This leaflet is based on pages 119-123 of Hugh Barbour's history, *THE QUAKERS IN PURITAN ENGLAND*, Yale University Press, 1964 (now available in paperback from Friends United Press.) The original includes footnotes and more examples.

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Appendix B: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

J. Brent Bill, *Sacred Compass: The Way of Spiritual Discernment*. Paraclete, 2008. 191 pp. cloth. A clear, systematic and thorough description of the process of individual spiritual discernment, well informed by a variety of accounts of leadings, written by a pastoral Friends minister. A good place to begin.

Samuel Bownas, *Description of the Qualifications Necessary to a Gospel Minister; Advice to Ministers and Elders Among the People Called Quakers*. Pendle Hill/Tract Association, 1989. 105 pp. cloth. A classic, historically influential account.

Sandra Cronk, *Discovering and Nurturing Ministers* at www.nextreformation.com/wp-admin/articles/ministers.htm. An excellent, nuanced account of the place of ministry and how it may be supported within the Religious Society of Friends.

Brian Drayton, *On Living With A Concern for Gospel Ministry*. Quaker Press of FGC, 2005. 196 pp. paper. “Brian Drayton has studied *Description of the Qualifications Necessary to a Gospel Minister* by Samuel Bownas. . . . A book full of wisdom and advice on how to cherish, live with, and grow into the gift of ministry.” -Marty Grundy.

Charlotte Fardelmann, *Nudged By The Spirit: Stories Of People Responding To The Still, Small Voice Of God*. Pendle Hill, 2001. 288 pp. paper. This anthology shares the stories of persons who have experienced a sense of call to ministry and how they moved forward into that work with support from their monthly meetings.

Deborah Fisch, *Being Faithful as Friends, Individually and Corporately*. Beacon Hill Friends House, 2006. 32 pp. paper. Deborah Fisch is current clerk of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative). This is her personal account of listening to God and finding the way to be faithful, in a spirit of radical love.

Sue Glover, *Go and the Lord Go With Thee*. Sessions of York, 1997. 76 pp. paper. A book about traveling in the ministry. How to think about the future and communicate our truth to a wider world. A helpful and practical guide.

Paul Lacey, *Leading and Being Led*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 264, 1985. A treasured and widely-consulted reflection on the nature of religious leadings as understood by Friends.

Margery Mears Larrabee, *Spirit-Led Eldering: Integral to Our Faith and Practice*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 392, 2007. Urges us to rediscover eldering as a valuable practice that can nurture the spiritual lives of individual Friends and of Friends’ meetings. Includes helpful discussions of a number of instances of eldering—some spirit-led, and some not.

Gregg Levoy, *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life*. Three Rivers Press, 1997. 340 pp. paper. “How do we know if we’re following our true callings? How do we sharpen our senses to cut through the distractions of everyday reality and hear the calls that are beckoning us?” Levoy offers answers to these questions, drawing upon stories of people who have followed their own calls, including Friends Gene Knudsen Hoffmann (Pacific YM) and Jan Hoffman (New England YM). Eloquent and poetic.

Patricia Loring, *Spiritual Discernment: The Context and Goal of Clearness Committees*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 305, 1992. A widely-read, spiritually-sensitive guide.

Ruth Hyde Paine, *How Do I Know It's a Leading?* Annual Michener Lecture 1992 of Southeastern Yearly Meeting. 20 pp. paper. A deeply personal account of successes and failures in heeding the Light and acting upon it.

Parker Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. Jossey-Bass, 2000. 117 pp. cloth. From the dust jacket blurb: "Is the life I am living the same as the life that wants to live in me?" With this searching question, Parker Palmer begins an insightful and moving meditation on finding one's true calling. . . . an openhearted gift to anyone who seeks to live authentically." Palmer is a writer, teacher, workshop leader and activist who draws from his spiritual experience as a Friend to speak to everyone.

Martha Paxson-Grundy, *Tall Poppies: Supporting Gifts of Ministry and Eldering in the Monthly Meeting*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 347, 2000. 32 pp. paper. Highlights the importance of recognizing and lifting up leadings rather than brushing them off, individually or corporately.

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Patience A. Schenck, *Answering the Call to Heal the World*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 383, 2006. 34 pp. paper. "This pamphlet invites us to explore our unique gifts and the hungers of our hearts, to discover our own calling . . . both practical and encouraging." (cover blurb)

Appendix C: WHEN A NOMINATION BECOMES A LEADING

Our sense that we are under the weight of a leading may grow gradually out of work that we have agreed to do (or that is thrust unexpectedly upon us) rather than arising through our own careful rumination and forethought. We may protest that we are not the right person for the task—that others are obviously more qualified—and that we have in any case not agreed to the responsibility that we are being asked to shoulder. (The Judeo-Christian prototype for a leading was Moses' encounter with the burning bush: Moses pleaded to be excused from God's charge to him, and only reluctantly agreed to accept it.) As we do the work we are asked to do, however, recognition dawns that we are exactly where we need to be, doing just what we need to be doing. Though a significant calling typically brings challenges and headaches, over time it becomes a true labor of love.

In Quaker settings, such a happy discovery may occur through accepting a request from a nominating committee to undertake a responsibility at monthly, quarterly or yearly meeting. Whereas most who agree to such a request readily lay down their assigned tasks when their term ends, a few discover that the work they have been asked to do calls forth more and more of their purpose, commitment and devotion, taking on a life of its own. For such persons, a nomination has become a leading.

Such cases naturally raise questions about the proper term of service in the nominated role. Most Quaker job descriptions specify a time limit for a job (typically, no more than one additional term), to distribute tasks more equitably and to invite fresh energies and perspectives. These reasonable expectations require careful review, however, in cases where those who have accepted a nomination feel that they have found a true leading in doing the work requested. Several questions may arise: (1) Is the "leading" indeed genuine—or has the person simply become attached to the position for one reason or another? (2) Might it be feasible to keep the person in the position for an additional term, beyond the specified term limit? (3) Might the person's work be "reclassified" and thus supported in a new way? (4) If the original nomination slot provided financial support, how might financial support be provided for the reclassified position?

These questions may arise when a nominating committee is performing its usual tasks. Unless answers seem readily available within the parameters of its usual practice, however, the nominating committee should not be expected to bear the burden of answering them. In such a case, the question(s) should be referred to another body for further seasoning and discernment. Within Pacific Yearly Meeting, this body is the PYM Committee on Ministry and Oversight. When the PYM Nominating Committee and/or the Friend in the nominated position sense that the Friend may have found a true leading, both the clerk of Nominating Committee and the Friend should write letters—preferably brief, and to the point—to the clerk of Ministry and Oversight, responding to the four questions in the previous paragraph.

Upon receiving these letters, the clerk of PYM Ministry and Oversight may bring the matter to the entire Committee on Ministry and Oversight for seasoning and discernment, or alternatively, may refer it to the Subcommittee on Ministry and Leadings, with a request for its recommendation. Each such case will be unique, and should be resolved on its own merits. Options may include:

- Creation of a Clearness Committee to meet with the Friend, to discern the appropriate form of the Friend's ministry. (See ##5-7 above for general guidelines.)

- Creation of a Spiritual Accountability Group to oversee the Friend's ministry. (See ## 10-14 above.)
- Creation of a Support Committee for the Friend (See ##15-16 above.)
- A recommendation regarding the position to which the Friend was originally nominated: has way opened for another person to be nominated for the position?
- A recommendation regarding funding of the Friend's work, if applicable (see #18 above).

The PYM Committee on Ministry and Oversight bears the primary responsibility for receiving and seasoning any recommendations. M&O may resolve the matter on its own authority, or (when the recommendation entails the creation of a new position and/or allocation of funds) consult with PYM Finance Committee and then bring a recommendation to Representative Committee, or to Meeting for Business at the annual gathering of PYM.

Appendix D: ELDERS AND ELDERING

In a Friends' Meeting that is vital and close-knit, we are responsive to the stirrings of the Spirit wherever it arises—not only within our own hearts, but also when the Spirit shows itself in the lives of others within our community. We are eager to encourage and support each other in awakening to this blessed Presence. Those Friends who display a special gift for recognizing, naming and supporting the growth of the Spirit in others have traditionally been called “elders.” As described in our own *Faith and Practice*, elders “support and encourage members or attenders in the flowering of spirit-led ministry (and discourage behavior and speech which inhibits such ministry). This leadership can include logistical support, honest feedback, prayer, and helping with spiritual discernment.”²⁰

Formal naming of elders was discontinued by most 20th Century unprogrammed Friends, though some programmed and conservative Friends continue the practice. Yet the informal function of eldering continues wherever one Friend fosters in another the transformative power of a life of service to God. In recent years many liberal Friends have reawakened to the value of eldering and are reintroducing the practice in their own Meetings, providing support for traveling ministry, and in other ways.

George Fox spoke of “answering that of God in every one.” As Sandra Cronk observes, “To ‘answer’ that of God means to respond to it, to nurture it, to call it forth, to dig up any entangling weeds which might be strangling the New Life beginning to grow.”²¹ Good eldering provides exactly this service. Put differently, an elder awakens us to our own Inner Teacher and encourages us to heed it.

Elders are often inconspicuous, working quietly behind the scenes—reaching out to others, listening, offering love and support. Yet such an important form of spiritual service should not go unacknowledged. When Meetings bring eldering into the Light—treasuring, encouraging and supporting it wherever it occurs—they strengthen not only the bonds between individuals in the Meeting, but also the Meeting as whole.

What makes a good elder? Age alone does not suffice. Many older Friends lack the disposition or inclination to be good elders, and a young Friend whose faith is mature may make an excellent elder. A gift for empathic concern for another person, a sensitivity to that person's condition, the ability to recognize personal gifts of which the person may be unaware, and the gentle audacity to invite him or her to acknowledge and embrace those gifts—these are marks of a good elder.

Eldering should not be confused with making opinionated judgments about how others should live their lives. Good elders speak not from their own partisan perspective, but from what they recognize as guidance of the Spirit within another. That guidance may counsel a path that is quite different from a path that the elder is called to walk. Thus *deep listening is essential to good eldering*, listening with an open heart—listening “beyond the words” to a Truth that is meant for another child of God.

Linda Chidsey writes that “If the elders are . . . the mothers and fathers of the [Quaker] tradition, and we choose to dismiss or ignore them, then we become spiritual orphans.”²² As we seek to support the leadings of the Spirit among us, Friends will do well to reclaim this precious, nurturing practice of the Religious Society of Friends.

ENDNOTES

¹ “Nurturing Faithfulness to the Leadings of the Spirit in Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting” (CPMM *Nurturing Faithfulness*) and “Handbook for Formal Care of Friends Called to Ministry or Witness” (CPMM *Handbook*), approved and adopted by Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, 10 April 2005, as well as “Beacon Hill Friends Meeting Responds to Leadings, Draft 1.5, printed October 2003.” (BHFMM)

² Phillips P. Moulton, ed., *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1989), p. 127.

³ See Gregg Levoy, *Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life* (cited in Appendix B: Annotated Bibliography), p. 6.

⁴ See “Five Tests for Discerning a True Leading,” below p. 14.

⁵ Adapted from CPMM *Handbook*, p. 2.

⁶ For a description of Clearness Committees, see PYM *Faith and Practice*, pp. 139-141. See also Patricia Loring, *Spiritual Discernment: The Context and Goal of Clearness Committees* (cited in Appendix B: Annotated Bibliography).

⁷ Adapted from CPMM *Handbook*, p. 3.

⁸ Adapted from CPMM *Handbook*, p. 3.

⁹ Closely adapted from CPMM *Handbook*, pp. 3f.

¹⁰ Adapted from CPMM *Handbook*, p. 4.

¹¹ Adapted from CPMM *Handbook*, p. 5.

¹² Adapted from CPMM *Nurturing Faithfulness*, p. 6.

¹³ CPMM *Nurturing Faithfulness*, p. 6.

¹⁴ BHFMM, p. 6.

¹⁵ Closely adapted from CPMM *Handbook*, p. 6f.

¹⁶ Adapted from CPMM *Handbook*, p. 7.

¹⁷ Adapted from CPMM *Handbook*, p. 8.

¹⁸ Adapted from BHFMM, pp. 8f.

¹⁹ For guidelines, see PYM *Faith and Practice*, Appendix 5A and 5D, pp. 240 and 243.

²⁰ PYM *Faith and Practice*, p. 201.

²¹ “Discovering and Nurturing Ministers,” at *NextReformation.com*. See www.nextreformation.com/wp-admin/articles/ministers.htm.

²² “Remarks on the Subject of Eldering.” See “Travel Among Friends” on the FGC Website, at www.fgcquaker.org/library/ministry/remarksoneldering.html.