

Faith and Practice Revision Under Review by Monthly Meetings

Meetings are asked to reach unity on their reflections on the proposed revisions below, and to send this seasoned material to the Faith and Practice Revision Committee by **October 15, 2018**. If no unity is met, a description of the feeling of the meetings is welcome.

Please email tracked changes, a scan of written edits, or meeting response to: PYM.FPRevision@gmail.com

The Leadings draft is based on the longer document from the 2009 Pacific Yearly Meeting: Faithfulness in Action. Since 2009 Friends' practices around calls they are experiencing, discernment, formation of clearness and anchor committees, and eldering have been evolving. F&P Revision Committee felt it was time to gather some of these learnings and put them in one place accessible to all. We urge you to read this draft with your Meeting, or a committee of your Meeting that has been appointed to work with it.

Leadings

Part 1. Faith and Practice Committee queries for meetings to consider:

How does your Meeting support leadings that come to its attention?

Do you have experience with clearness committees to discern leadings? If so does this draft help clarify what that process can look like? If not please tell us what more you need, or what you do not find helpful?

What ways has your Meeting found to stay in relationship to members experiencing leadings and to provide accountability?

Part 2. Draft of Revised Leadings

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. John Woolman's Journal

Leadings grow out of spiritual experience and contemplative practice of the Meeting and the individuals within it. They are the living fruit of Friends' faith that the Spirit will lead us into right action in the world. In keeping with our recognition that there is that of God in everyone, any Friend can experience this. A concern is the first stage of what becomes a leading. It is 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.

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 demonstrate 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 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. As the leading begins to develop, it is strongly advised that one ask the Meeting for a "clearness committee," to test and clarify the leading.

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

Recognizing that there are multiple possibilities of a leading coming to be, what follows is a guideline. It should not be prescriptive but rather a suggestion of how to proceed. 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.

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 named differently—e.g. "Ministry and Oversight" or "Worship and Ministry.") The letter should 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.

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. 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.

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.

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

We humans 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, and the Society of Friends is not exempt. Thus, when we sense that we are experiencing a leading of the Spirit, careful discernment is required. Discernment is carried out in community rather than in isolation. 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)

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 and 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, sometimes called an “Anchor Committee.”

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.

Does an individual’s leading usually 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 called to act on 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 an individual 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.

What is a Spiritual Accountability Group (sometimes called an Anchor Committee)?

A Spiritual Accountability Group (SAG) 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.” (Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting) Responsibility for creation of a SAG rests with the Committee on Ministry and Counsel. The SAG provides guidance and oversight for any Friend whose leadings have received the support of the Meeting for Business..

As the use of clearness committees and Spiritual Accountability Committees becomes more common, Meetings are finding ways to provide group support for several Friends’ ministries, when their leadings fall along similar lines, as could be the case for Friends called to chaplaincy. Recently Meetings have been asked to endorse members who are being called to chaplaincy and such requests should follow the careful discernment, support and accountability described in this section.

When the Meeting has found unity in support of the leading, the SAG 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. Meetings should periodically have reports from the person with the leading. The SAG also considers when a leading may have run its course and help the person with the leading to transition to other work.

Elders and Eldering

Elders provide a valuable service to the Meeting as a whole by holding the group in the Light during worship, deliberations, or presentations, and creating a container for Spirit to break through. Elders are those within the Meeting who support and encourage members or attenders in the flowering of spirit-led ministry (and discourage behavior and speech which inhibits such ministry). This care can include logistical support, honest feedback, prayer, and helping with spiritual discernment. Those found to have a gift for this service are not necessarily older Friends but those who have 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/her/they to acknowledge and embrace those gifts - these are the marks of a good elder.