

June 2018

# 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](mailto: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.*

-----

## 1 Leadings

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

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

7 *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?*

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

### 14 Part 2. Draft of Revised Leadings

15 *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*

20 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

June 2018

26 out of a long-standing interest. A concern may be short lived or it may inform and direct Friends  
27 throughout their lives.

28 Often, recognition of a leading comes first not from one's own discernment, but through  
29 suggestions or nudges from others who recognize and name one's ministry. In Quaker tradition,  
30 those in a Meeting who demonstrate a gift for discerning, naming, and lifting up the ministry of  
31 others were formally recognized as "elders." The practice of drawing upon elders is being widely  
32 reintroduced among Friends. The spiritual insight and guidance of trusted elders (whether  
33 formally recognized or not) can be immensely valuable throughout the entire process of  
34 discerning and following a leading. Thus, when exploring a possible leading, Friends are  
35 strongly encouraged to consult with others whom they trust as spiritual mentors—good listeners  
36 who are spiritually experienced and seasoned, able to "hear beyond the words" to the underlying  
37 motion of the Spirit. As the leading begins to develop, it is strongly advised that one ask the  
38 Meeting for a "clearness committee," to test and clarify the leading.

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

40 Recognizing that there are multiple possibilities of a leading coming to be, what follows is a  
41 guideline. It should not be prescriptive but rather a suggestion of how to proceed. Friends may  
42 consult informally with others in the Meeting at any time. It is usually appropriate to explore a  
43 relationship of greater accountability to the Meeting when one or more of the following  
44 conditions are present:

- 45 • When a concern has begun to settle into a clear leading to action that may involve spiritual,  
46 physical, and/or financial burdens or risks;
- 47 • When others in the Meeting offer encouragement to test the concern in a more formal way;
- 48 • When the concern seems to have ripened to the point that it calls for fuller support and  
49 accountability;
- 50 • When Friends who are already engaged in public ministry seek discernment in order to stay  
51 more faithful to their ministry;
- 52 • When Friends face special challenges or personal attacks as they follow their leadings;
- 53 • When Friends find, as they pursue their concerns, that others in the Meeting have come to  
54 regard their work as a "public ministry" on behalf of the Religious Society of Friends;
- 55 • When the Meeting's endorsement or financial support is a useful next step in the full  
56 expression of the Friends' ministry.

### 57 **What steps should I take to submit my leading to the Meeting?**

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

### 63 **How should the Meeting respond to such a request?**

June 2018

64 The usual first step in responding to such a request is for Ministry and Counsel to appoint a  
65 Clearness Committee to work with the requesting Friend. The person bringing forward the  
66 request may suggest names of possible members for the Clearness Committee. The Committee  
67 on Ministry and Counsel may give weight to these suggestions, but should exercise its own  
68 discernment regarding the best composition of the committee for the purpose. A Clearness  
69 Committee usually consists of at least three, and usually no more than five persons from the  
70 Meeting. Friends from another Monthly Meeting who know the Friend with a leading and/or  
71 who have experience with the concern that animates the leading may also be considered for  
72 membership in the Clearness Committee.

### 73 **What are the responsibilities of the Clearness Committee?**

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

80 On some occasions, the Clearness Committee may not reach unity regarding the rightness of  
81 proceeding with the leading at this time. This outcome should not be regarded as a failure, but as  
82 an occasion for further searching and growth in the Spirit by the individual, the Meeting, or both.  
83 A further time of prayerfulness and humility may bring forward ministry that is deepened and  
84 honed in ways that would not have been possible, had the Friend pressed forward with his or her  
85 earlier understanding. At the conclusion of the clearness process, the Clearness Committee  
86 prepares a succinct written report, which is then delivered to the Committee on Ministry and  
87 Counsel.

88 We humans are notoriously capable of deceiving ourselves—and perhaps nowhere so readily as  
89 when we imagine that we are “following the will of God.” Ancient and modern history abounds  
90 with instances of what Friends regard as false “leadings” that have led to cruelty, injustice, war  
91 and oppression, and the Society of Friends is not exempt. Thus, when we sense that we are  
92 experiencing a leading of the Spirit, careful discernment is required. Discernment is carried out  
93 in community rather than in isolation. In Friends’ perspective, genuine leadings are characterized  
94 by love, not hate; a desire to unify, not divide; an impulse to heal rather than to destroy.  
95 Although awareness of cruelty and injustice may readily inspire moral outrage, anger is not the  
96 root motivation of a true leading. The Letter of James (which George Fox frequently cited in  
97 defense of Friends’ Peace Testimony) declares that “your anger does not produce God’s  
98 righteousness” and “The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and willing to  
99 yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.” (1:19, 3:17)

### 100 **What is the responsibility of the Committee on Ministry and Counsel?**

101 Ministry and Counsel receives the written report of the Clearness Committee and seasons it with  
102 care, consulting as necessary with the Friend and members of the Clearness Committee. If it  
103 unites with recommendations contained within the report, the Committee on Ministry and  
104 Counsel minutes this unity and brings the recommendation to Meeting for Business for approval.  
105 The recommendation will normally include provision for a relationship between the Friend and a  
106 Spiritual Accountability Group, sometimes called an “Anchor Committee.”

June 2018

107 If the Ministry and Counsel does not unite with the recommendations contained in the report of  
 108 the Clearness Committee, it may refer the matter back to the Clearness Committee for further  
 109 discernment and seasoning. Alternatively, it may advise the Friend who has brought the concern  
 110 that further time and reflection may be helpful.

111 **Does an individual’s leading usually become the Meeting’s leading?**

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

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

121 A Spiritual Accountability Group (SAG) is charged with acting “on behalf of the Meeting in  
 122 holding the Friend’s faithfulness in prayer, offering care, asking hard questions, and holding the  
 123 person accountable to the Spirit and responsible to the Meeting.” (Central Philadelphia Monthly  
 124 Meeting) Responsibility for creation of a SAG rests with the Committee on Ministry and  
 125 Counsel. The SAG provides guidance and oversight for any Friend whose leadings have received  
 126 the support of the Meeting for Business..

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

133 When the Meeting has found unity in support of the leading, the SAG serves the Meeting as well  
 134 as the Friend with the leading, assuring that there is integrity between the Friend’s ongoing  
 135 ministry and what the Meeting has approved. Meetings should periodically have reports from the  
 136 person with the leading. The SAG also considers when a leading may have run its course and  
 137 help the person with the leading to transition to other work.

138 **Elders and Eldering**

139 Elders provide a valuable service to the Meeting as a whole by holding the group in the Light  
 140 during worship, deliberations, or presentations, and creating a container for Spirit to break  
 141 through. Elders are those within the Meeting who support and encourage members or attenders  
 142 in the flowering of spirit-led ministry (and discourage behavior and speech which inhibits such  
 143 ministry). This care can include logistical support, honest feedback, prayer, and helping with  
 144 spiritual discernment. Those found to have a gift for this service are not necessarily older Friends  
 145 but those who have a gift for empathic concern for another person, a sensitivity to that person’s  
 146 condition, the ability to recognize personal gifts of which the person may be unaware, and the  
 147 gentle audacity to invite him/her/they to acknowledge and embrace those gifts - these are the  
 148 marks of a good elder.