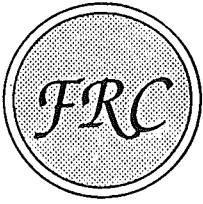


# PASTORAL CARE NEWSLETTER



PUBLISHED BY THE FAMILY RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
OF PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING

*For Overseers and others involved in pastoral care and counseling*

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## MEETING SUPPORT OF MARRIAGE AND COUPLE RELATIONSHIPS

By Patricia McBee  
Couple Enrichment Leader



Patricia McBee

On the whole, there is a great reticence among Friends to address with each other the nitty-gritty issues of what makes relationships work. Most often Overseers feel helpless and out of place in trying to reach out to couples, particularly if the couple is known or believed to be in a stressful period in their relationship.

And no wonder Overseers are hesitant. In our culture little is regarded as more shameful than having people know that we are having struggles in our relationships. What could be more embarrassing for most couples than to have others know they are struggling? Why do we keep from each other

that all of us have rough times and that they are survivable?

Here are some suggestions for overcoming the barriers and giving meaningful support.

### **I. Create an Atmosphere in which Relationships Can Be Talked About.**

The key in supporting couples is to integrate that support into the day to day life of the meeting. If you wait until a couple is in trouble and then want to help them, you may lack the connections that make it possible for your help to be accepted. If you support relationships when they are already strong, fewer problems may arise and you will be in a better position to respond if they do.

- Organize on-going couples support groups that meet monthly. These groups can include a mix of couples or be established topically such as for retired couples, couples with children, couples where only one is a Quaker, etc.

- Have periodic occasions when groups of couples get together to discuss topics related to relationships, such as: how do you integrate different family holiday customs, or how do couples make time for each other in the face of busy schedules.

- Once or more a year sponsor a discussion of a book or pamphlet on strengthening relationships.

- Set up occasions to meet with couples who have been married under the care of the meeting and elicit suggestions as to how the meeting can be of continuing support.

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*"The critical issue is to be talking frankly about the day to day workings of relationships so that couples can see others' relationships not as picture perfect, but as resilient and creative."*

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- Sponsor a Couples Retreat or support couples in attending one offered by your Yearly Meeting or Friends General Conference (For more details on Couples Retreats see insert page 1).

The critical issue is to be talking frankly about the day to day workings of relationships so that couples can see other's relationships not as picture perfect, but as resilient and creative in the face of the inevitable challenges of learning to love each other well. We learn so much more from hearing other couples, see options that hadn't occurred to us before, and find out that we are not alone in the things that are difficult.

These occasions of discussing marriage in the ordinary times create a foundation for greater willingness to have our needs known and accept support in hard times.

This Newsletter is published quarterly by the Family Relations Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102. Trish Walat, clerk. For suggestions or to obtain additional copies, contact Helene Pollock, Editor, at (215) 988-0140.

## II. Reach Out to Couples in Good Times and Bad.

The societal taboo against revealing your relationship is so strong that the meeting has to work at ways to make it easy and safe. Don't wait for couples to overcome their hesitations on their own. Call them specifically to invite them to one of the gatherings listed above and make it clear that it is an opportunity to honor marriage and committed relationships as a spiritual path and that their participation will be a support to other couples.

When the grapevine tells you times are rough for a certain couple, don't wait for them to contact you. Have someone they know and trust offer a listening ear and the meeting's support.

## III. Establish Channels for Seeking and Giving Help.

Make sure everyone in the meeting knows where to turn for confidential help.

- Some meetings establish a contact person for each member when they want to tap the meeting's support systems. In my meeting it is your "Friendly Overseer.". In other meetings, households are paired in a buddy system. When something comes up, you talk to your Friendly Overseer or buddy and explore whether other meeting help should be sought.

- In some meetings there is a standing committee for marriage clearness and support and it is made clear how to contact that committee.

- Meetings can designate an individual, sometimes the clerk of overseers, who is known for being able to keep things in confidence. This person can then help the couple identify what supports they need.

- In some meetings marriage clearness committees remain in contact with couples and are available for consultation.

## Services Offered by the Family Relations Committee

**Couples Enrichment Retreats** led by Brad Sheeks and Pat McBee  
June 3-5; June 10-12, 1994 at Cape May, NJ.

**"Parenting Creatively" -- Eight-Week Workshop Series** led by Harriet Heath.  
At Moorestown Monthly Meeting, Jan. 16-March 6; and at Goshen Friends School, Jan. 19-March 9.

**Consultation services** assist meetings in developing a creative, caring response to particular problems of pastoral care. Consultation, which is provided by Friends experienced in the issue being addressed, can provide a sounding board for your ideas, an outside perspective, and an assessment of the skills needed to address the problem. Dealing with difficult members, conflict within the meeting, and situations of mental health and substance abuse are among the issues recently addressed.

**Workshops** are available for individual meeting committees as a resource for deepening skills in pastoral care. Overseers workshops may focus on such issues as clearness for marriage, death and dying, the meaning of membership, etc. Workshops are also available for the meeting as a whole, and may address such topics as strengthening the meeting as a caring community, enhancing communication/creative listening, or dealing with anger and conflict.

**Counseling.** Counseling needs of members and attenders may at times exceed what overseers can provide. In such instances, counseling services are available for individuals, couples and families through the Friends Counseling Service. All counselors are active Friends whose spiritual lives are integral to their approach to counseling. Service fees are adjusted according to the client's ability to pay. Service is never denied because of a person's lack of means. Counselors are listed below:

**Henry Beck, Ph.D.**

Bala Cynwyd, PA  
(215) 664-5443

**Annie Burrows, M.A.**

Kennett Square/Phila., PA  
(215) 444-1824

**Terence Carroll, ACSW**

Philadelphia, PA  
(215) 473-2600

**Kathryn L. Ellis, Ed.D.**

Carlisle, PA  
(717) 258-6519

**Teresa A. Glatthorn, M.A.**

Hatboro, PA  
(215) 672-6627

**Harriet Heath, Ph.D.\***

Haverford, PA  
(215) 649-7037

**Winifred S. Hope, M.Ed, M.S.S.**

King of Prussia, PA  
(215) 293-9720

**Gary M. Johnson, Ph.D.**

Wilmington, DE  
(302) 656-1295

**Arlene Kelly, ACSW**

Philadelphia, PA  
(215) 988-0140

**Deborah Osborne-Daily, M.Ed.**

Philadelphia, PA  
(215) 248-0489

**Judith Owens, M.A.**

Voorhees, NJ  
(609) 768-4114

**John Ries, M.A.**

Doylestown/Reading, PA  
(215) 538-9111

**Karin Sannwald, ACSW**

Berlin, NJ  
(609) 767-6471

**James J. Saxon, Ph.D.**

Swarthmore, PA  
(215) 544-9634

**John Scardina, Ed.M.**

Doylestown/Westtown, PA  
(215) 399-9793

**Alexander Scott, ACSW**

Valley Forge, PA  
(215) 983-3617

**Barbara T. Snipes, M.A.**

Morrisville, PA/  
Riverton, NJ

(215) 428-0315

**Ann Swain, M.S.W.**

Glen Mills, PA  
(215) 399-1977

**Fran Van Allen, M.A.**

Philadelphia/Media, PA  
(215) 358-3212

**Lindley M. Winston, M.D.**

Malvern, PA  
(215) 647-1237

\*Available for work with parenting issues only

For further information on any of the services provided by the Family Relations Committee, contact Arlene Kelly at (215)988-0140.

## "Varieties of Couples Groups"

**George and Lillian Willoughby**, members of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, are both in their 70s. The couples group they participate in is made up of older Friends from various meetings who have known each other over the years. The early sessions of the group were led by trained couple enrichment leaders; now the group meets on its own. After the group had been meeting for some time, a group member died. The group was able to offer a great deal of support to the surviving spouse. Since then the group has evolved from a "couple enrichment" to a "life enrichment" group.

**Robert Hernblad and Gladys Kinard Hernblad**, who are members of Philadelphia Monthly Meeting (Arch Street), founded an interracial couples support group in October of 1992 for the purpose of supporting strong interracial relationships. In publicizing their group, they appeared on Claude Lewis' radio talk show. Information about the group also appeared in a column by Lucia Herndon in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and in a notice which was sent to clerks of PYM meetings. Besides Robert and Gladys, there is one other Quaker couple in the group.

Gladys and Robert were also instrumental in starting a couples group at Arch Street Meeting. Last November at the "Circles of Support" Conference, which was sponsored by the Family Relations Committee, Robert and Gladys met **Jim Newell and Catharine Krieps**, who were also from the Arch Street Meeting. As Gladys recalls, the conference provided the two couples an opportunity to get to know each other on a personal level. "We discovered that we had many things in common," notes Gladys, "although Jim and Catharine were newlyweds and Robert and I were 'old hands' at marriage

after 26 years. After the conference Robert and I felt led to share with Jim our desire to start a couples support group in the meeting." In time the idea was approved at business meeting, and the group began meeting at the homes of different group members.

The format for the meetings of the three groups is similar. The evening starts with a potluck. But, as Jim Newell explains, "we have to be strict about the ending time for the potluck so that we'll have time for the discussion." While the hosts are responsible for getting the discussion started, every member has an opportunity to speak at each meeting. Typical topics are "the best part of our marriage" and "dealing with in-laws at holidays." Sharing positive experiences and hearing about other people's good times -- as well as talking about problems -- is at the heart of the group experience. The group can also provide opportunities for spiritual renewal. Last month the Arch Street Meeting group held a retreat at a mountain cabin rented by Gladys and Robert. In Gladys' words, the retreat was "a gift to the group from Robert and me. It was a way of showing God's presence in our everyday lives. The group discussion was on maintaining one's individuality while functioning as a couple. The retreat included a mini-service in the cabin. We felt the presence of God with us."

All three couples would be happy to share their experience with anyone who is thinking of starting a couples group. Call George and Lillian at (609) 227-5723 and Jim and Catharine at (215) 724-5462. For more information about the interracial couples group call Gladys at (215) 922-2958 or write Interracial Families United Network, P.O. Box 363, Philadelphia, PA 19105-3120.

Regularly scheduled Couple Enrichment retreats, sponsored by Family Relations Committee, are held each spring and fall. Details appear in this newsletter's calendar. A monthly meeting or a group of couples can set up their own retreat by calling the FRC office at (215) 988-0140. Leadership for Couple Enrichment Retreats is provided by Patricia McBee and Brad Sheeks and also by Sidney Cobb and Jesse Jones-Cobb, an older couple who have been leading couples retreats for Friends General Conference and in New England Yearly Meeting before recently locating to PYM. Both couples are certified by the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment.

#### **IV. Use Informal As Well As Formal Channels.**

Often there are individuals in the meeting who can be supportive to a couple in need without "the meeting" having to get officially involved. Several years ago when my husband, Brad, and I were going through a very painful time, three or four couples of our friends in the meeting buoyed us up with their willingness to listen and love. I don't know if our needs were ever on the agenda of overseers, but we got the support we needed.

Sometimes, of course, it is important to use the formal channels. I have seen cases in which members didn't recognize informal support as outreach from the meeting and felt as though "the meeting" had not responded to them even though many meeting members had. This leads to the next idea.

#### **V. Tailor Your Response to the Needs of the Couple.**

Put your focus on loving these two people in the best way they can receive.

Do you approach them together or individually? With a formal delegation from overseers or an informal call from a friend? Do you urge them to seek professional help or provide background support while they sort it out on their own? All of these approaches are useful in some cases. Hard and fast practices and procedures won't convey the caring you want to give.

Here are some things the meeting can do for couples who are in a time of trouble.

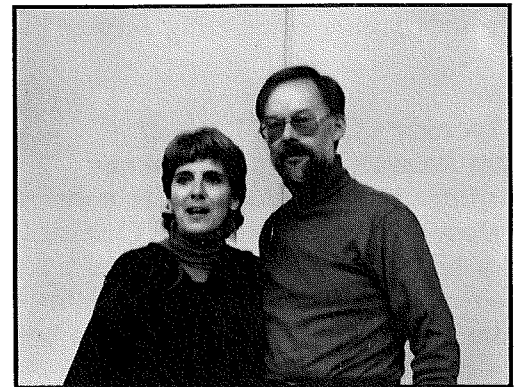
- Express the meeting's affection for them and confidence in their ability to find the best solution.
- Just listen in love.
- Staunchly regard each member of the couple as worthy of love and understanding, no matter who seems "to blame," and help their partner to do the same.

- Provide child care or other concrete support to give the couple opportunities to work on their relationship without distraction.

- Have a list of professional resources. The Friends Counseling service provides a brochure listing their counselors in all parts of PYM. It is often hard to choose a professional counselor, an annotated listing can be a great help.

- Facilitate the use of a counselor by helping pay the fees or by providing child care or transportation.

The meeting's delegates to a couple may not be professional counselors, but they are qualified to bring love, which is God, to people who are troubled. Let them know that they are loved and valued before, during, and after a hard time, whatever the outcome. It's amazing how healing and empowering that is.



Patricia McBee and Brad Sheeks

#### **VI. Build a Reputation for Being Affirming and Not Judgmental.**

If a relationship breaks up, find ways of reaching out in love to both individuals. They are both suffering. They wonder if the meeting disapproves or blames or rejects them.

When couples hear of practical ways in which another couple was given the meeting's loving care, it will be far less intimidating

to accept an offer of help. Knowing the meeting holds its members in love even when they fail can make it easier for couples to let it be known that they are at risk of failing or just aren't quite perfect.

### VII. Have Literature for Couples Where It Can Be Picked Up Anonymously.

You can make it easier for people to take the first step in seeking help by making it possible to begin without identifying themselves. Things you might have available on your literature table include:

- Information on how to tap into the meeting's support system
- Pamphlets on relationship issues
- Book lists
- Announcements of retreats and workshops
- Brochures from the Friends Counseling Service or a family counseling service in your area

### VIII. Sponsor a Couples Retreat.

Couples Retreats are a powerful and underutilized tool available to Friends. For more than twenty years trained Quaker leader couples have been conducting retreats for couples with the result of strengthening relationships and deepening spiritual bonds within meetings.

A group of five to nine couples meet for a weekend or a series of 6-8 weekly sessions to share with each other. The power of the Retreat for couples is that they can give time to focusing on their relationship without distraction. All of us get busy and take our relationships and our partners for granted. A retreat gives us an opportunity to remind ourselves how rich a resource our relationship can be if it is nurtured.

Depending on the size of the meeting, a couples retreat can be held every one to five years. It can be looked at as something that is done on a regular basis to keep support of

couples alive in the meeting. And couples can be brought to regard this kind of intentional nurturing of their relationship as important to themselves, the meeting and the world around them.

### IX. Most Importantly - Create a Loving, Caring Meeting Family.

If you want to strengthen relationships and be in position to be of support in times of need, play together, work together, meet informally; talk about yourselves, your hopes, your fears. Love each other and say so.

When the meeting is alive and open, all kinds of support can flow in natural, comfortable ways to couples, singles, old folks and children.

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*Patricia McBee, who presently serves as clerk of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, has also been an overseer and has participated in an ongoing couples support group in her meeting. She and her husband Brad Sheeks have been leading couples retreats since 1975.*

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Do we have an atmosphere in our meeting in which couples are able to share resources and struggles?
2. What kind of activities can we hold in our meeting to bring couples together to focus on relationship issues?
3. Can we support and sustain one or more couples support groups in the meeting? Or could we sponsor a couples retreat? [Family Relations Committee can provide a variety of resources. Call 988-1040.]
4. What can we do to reach out to couples and help them overcome hesitation to participate in these activities?
5. Do we have channels for our members to seek confidential help from the meeting? If not, can we establish these channels? How can we keep members aware of the availability of these resources?
6. Could we as Overseers be more pro-active in reaching out with offers of support when we know couples to be struggling?