

# PASTORAL CARE NEWSLETTER



PUBLISHED BY THE FAMILY RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
OF PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING

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

Vol. I, No. 3

February, 1994

## REFLECTIONS OF AN OVERSEER

By Regina Hallowell Peasley



Regina Peasley

Arlene Kelly's article in the first *Pastoral Care Newsletter* (Sept. '93) sparked my thinking about what it means to take seriously the calling of the Spirit and become an Overseer. In my experience, being an Overseer means many things. It means caring, sharing, loving, receiving, listening, praying, centering, compromising and, most importantly, following the Light as you see it. When I was first asked to serve as an Overseer, it was important for me to take time to pray about whether I truly felt called to this service. Although, as a meeting member I was basically familiar with Overseers' work, it was also helpful to consult *Faith and Practice*, which sees Overseers' responsibility as "pastoral care and counseling of the meeting membership. [Overseers] should take a personal interest in the spiritual and physical

welfare of each member of the monthly meeting. Membership on this committee calls for dedication, tact and discretion and should be entered into prayerfully, with an alert willingness to be of service."

As a new Overseer I immediately recognized that the work of Overseers was extensive and varied. In my meeting, as in most, the Overseer's agenda is full as we talk about ways to help people get better acquainted, plan for the newsletter, receive applications for membership, choose clearness committees, consider what to do with delinquent members, share knowledge of illnesses and other major events in the lives of members, and deal with sticky pastoral care issues centering around behavior Friends find difficult, or conflict within a family or between meeting members.

The positive aspect of the busy agenda is that a new person is quickly drawn into the work, and learns by doing. The negative aspect is that our very busyness sometimes keeps us from having time to step back and reflect on how we are doing and to consider which areas of either individual or corporate growth we may wish to nurture. When the reading of the *Pastoral Care Newsletter* led me to such reflection, the questions on which I found my thoughts focussing were: *How does each of us grow into the role of Overseer so that we*

*are able to carry it with some confidence? How do we, as a committee, deepen and mature in a way which makes use of the wisdom of the group and the guidance of the Holy Spirit? How do we, as a committee, deepen and mature in a way which supports each individual Overseer in carrying out his or her ministry?* These questions are present, at least implicitly, in any of the pastoral care which we carry out. In my experience they are most likely to emerge when we are faced with a difficult, usually conflictual, situation.

It is important, I think, that we learn to blend the committee's strengths, and yes, our weaknesses. If we are both grounded in what we know, and comfortable in acknowledging what we do not know, then we are able to not only act from our strength but also to seek the skill or the information we lack. Unfortunately, when we are not confident in ourselves either individually or as a committee, a lack of experience or knowledge can become too easy a place to hide. It is a given, for example, that most of us are not professionally trained as counselors. Does that mean that we cannot reach out in a caring way when we see an individual or family in disress? I don't think so. We need to find ways to know deeply that each of us is a minister and to acknowledge our gifts. We need to know when and how to seek help if it is needed. Our Overseers have discovered what an incredible resource the Yearly Meeting offers through the Family Relations Committee and its Friends Counseling Service. We have experienced the way in which these Friends are able to offer an objective view of a situation as well as being well trained in methods that utilize our best

skills. Very often they spark the Overseers to actions that are needed. They help to bring out our strengths.

Part of our growth comes through recognizing and nurturing the gifts which each Overseer brings. While newer Overseers learn from more seasoned folks, Overseers with many years' experience also gain a great deal from the newer and often younger members. This sharing happens when Overseers meetings are safe, so that people can speak from the heart. Business should be conducted in a spirit of worshipful seeking. In the absence of that safety and spirit of seeking we are much more likely to slip into the trap of judgement, slip into the trap of saying, "this is the way we've always done it." Also, we are much more likely to be blind to the changing needs of our members in regard to pastoral care. How do we open ourselves to be responsive to our membership as it is today with all the complexities of single parent families, families with both parents filling demanding jobs, same gender couples and individuals seeking to find a spiritual home with us, as well as being open to all of the aspects of pastoral care with which we are more familiar?

#### **Challenging Situations.**

As an Overseer, I find myself growing most through situations in which there are differences -- where there is often more heat than Light. I wonder how this is for others. There is little which really prepares us for dealing with these problems. We truly need to turn ourselves over to the leading of the Spirit.

One example comes to mind. For the sake of confidentiality I have taken some poetic license, yet the issues as outlined are those with which we struggled. From my conversations with Friends outside my meeting, I know that these issues are not unknown to Overseers in other meetings as well.

A situation which had been known or suspected by several of us came to the attention of our Committee. A married member of meeting was apparently becoming involved

This Newsletter is published quarterly by the Family Relations Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102. Trish Walat, clerk. Comments and suggestions are welcome. **Please do not photocopy.** To obtain additional copies, contact Helene Pollock, Editor, at (215) 988-0140.

## Services Offered by the Family Relations Committee

### Small Group Discussion for Overseers at Yearly Meeting

Friday, March 25, 1:30 - 3:30 and/or 3:15-4:45

"Parenting Creatively" -- Eight-Week Workshop Series led by Harriet Heath.

At Wrightstown Monthly Meeting, March 1 through April 19.

Group for Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse led by Teresa Glatthorn.

10-12 sessions beginning in late March or early April.

Couples Enrichment Retreats led by Brad Sheeks and Pat McBee

June 3-5; June 10-12, 1994, at Cape May, NJ.

### The Family Relations Committee Also Provides . . .

--**Consultation** on particular issues facing the meeting.

--**Workshops** for the meeting as a whole, or for meeting committees, on such concerns as clearness for marriage, the meaning of membership, strengthening the meeting as a caring community, creative listening and dealing with anger and conflict.

--**Publications** on a variety of subjects of concern to Overseers.

--**Counseling.** 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. Sliding fee scale; 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

**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

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

Morrisville/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.

## Job Opening

As of June 30, 1994, Arlene Kelly is resigning the position she has held for the past eighteen years with the Family Relations Committee. The Committee will be seeking a Program Coordinator to coordinate and develop FRC programs, including supporting monthly meetings in their role of providing pastoral care and offering administrative support to the Friends Counseling Service. The successful candidate will be a member of the Religious Society of Friends, active in the life of his or her meeting, and deeply experienced in pastoral care. This part-time position is divided between a fixed office presence and work at home. Starting salary is between \$14 and \$18/hour, depending upon experience. Job description available from Family Relations Committee, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102. (215)988-0140. Closing date: Monday, April 4, 1994.

## One Meeting's Approach to Pastoral Care

Newtown Meeting has developed a system of pastoral care which has been successfully operating since September of 1992. A central advantage of the new system is that it utilizes the natural social networks of the meeting. Individuals in the meeting identify persons with gifts in communication and pastoral care who need not be members of particular committees, such as Overseers or Worship and Ministry. One result of implementing the new system has been to increase communication in the meeting in appropriate ways, while respecting confidentiality.

### Setting up the System

The new system was developed over a period of months by the Overseers Committee in consultation with Worship and Ministry. It was decided to initiate the new plan for a trial period. A letter was sent to resident members and regular attenders asking them to list three persons whom they would feel comfortable going to in times of difficulty or in times of joy. The three choices allowed for a degree of flexibility in making final assignments. After the response forms had been returned, the clerks of both committees (Jo Ann Woodman and James Fraser) set up the list of pastoral contacts. Each person participating was assigned a pastoral care contact person. Each of the pastoral care contact persons had several people on their list, and they were consulted regarding their willingness to work with each person assigned to them. Overseers also gave consideration to the needs of those who did not respond to the letter and those who indicated that they did not wish to have a pastoral care contact.

### Overcoming Initial Hesitations

At first there was some discomfort with the term "pastoral care," as it seemed to denote a "professional" service for which meeting members did not feel prepared. Overseers offered encouragement to the new pastoral care contact persons. Guidelines were sent out, noting that although "most of the nurture and usefulness [needed by pastoral contact persons] should not require more than a normal amount of knowledge and wisdom," there might be times of uncertainty. At such times, the pastoral care contact persons were encouraged to "get in touch with a member of Overseers with whom [they] felt comfortable, taking great care that confidentiality be maintained." Overseers also offered to assist in making referrals to professionally-trained counselors at the Friends Counseling Service and other agencies.

### A Year and a Half Later

There is a sense that the quality of pastoral care in Newtown Meeting has been enhanced, largely because of the increased communication in the meeting. Overseers seek continual feedback as to how the system is working. Any meeting wishing more information about Newtown's approach should feel free to give Jo Ann Woodman a call at (215) 968-2134.

Many thanks to Pat Darenau of Reading Meeting for suggesting this article. We welcome suggestions!

with another member of meeting in ways that threatened the marriage. The first question with which we wrestled mightily was: "Should we even be discussing this?" It seemed simpler to follow the path that said we would be interfering. "Is it our concern?" "Is it affecting the life of the meeting?" "If we DO something, what would that be?" Yes, we went through that and more! We even tried to "escape" by questioning whether the facts were really facts. We didn't have to look far for that one, because the spouse of the married person approached Overseers and asked for help.

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In looking back I realize that we were scared, uncomfortable and perhaps even a little angry. The anger came from our sense that the involvement of the two people was wrong, and it also came from being placed in the position of needing to address it. We would rather it wasn't happening. Being able to admit our feelings to each other at the Overseers' meeting helped us turn our attention to the three members of our meeting who all needed our love and understanding. We wondered how we could be present to each one, and how not to stand in judgment while still saying that the behavior of the two people was wrong within the values of our Friends community. We struggled to find an answer. We paused and worshipped. We centered our thoughts and focused on the "Query on Care for One Another": "Does your meeting, in appropriate ways, counsel any member whose conduct or manner of living gives cause for concern?"

That phrase, "in appropriate ways", got our attention. In reflecting on some of the thoughts put forward by Arlene Kelly in her article, I can see that we would have been

further helped in our consideration of what was "appropriate" if we had had fuller discussions in the meeting about the meaning of community, and had given more conscious thought to the relationship between members and their faith community. What is it that members should expect of the meeting and the meeting of them? The best time for such

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discussions, of course, is not when a problem arises. General discussions of such matters provide a context which can give rise to appropriate responses when problems arise.

In dealing with the situation before us, it was agreed that two Overseers would visit the person who seemed to be carrying more initiative in the relationship. It was decided beforehand that the purpose of the visit would be to clearly state the concern of Overseers, and to describe the way that the meeting was being affected. The plan was to just go and talk without judging or advising. The visit was done in love, with an emphasis on listening. Unfortunately the visit did not have the outcome we had hoped for. The two Overseers were received with defensiveness; the member was expecting to be reproached. In due course the individual chose to resign from membership.

This was a painful situation for us. The two Overseers who had made the visit had a sense of failure, particularly when the Friend who was visited was very critical of them to others in the meeting. At moments like that it is important for the Overseers' Committee and the meeting to be sensitive to the feelings of those who have carried out the ministry on behalf of the meeting.

Did this outcome mean that we should never have gotten involved? I don't think so. Overseers knew in their hearts that there was

no other way to proceed. Those making the visit tried to prepare their hearts. Caring for one another was the focus of their vision. What this situation taught us was that there are times when the interests or needs of individual members are in conflict with the interests or needs of the community. In such instances we need to prayerfully seek the right course of action. But there may not be a way, in the short run, for the situation to be resolved so that all parties are pleased with the outcome.

In this situation, as it turned out there was, in time, a sort of healing between the member who resigned and the meeting. The behavior that had raised questions was brought to an end, and the individual re-applied and was accepted back into membership. I feel clear, though, that the action of Overseers would have been rightly ordered whether or not the healing took place. Have you faced situations with similar challenges in your meetings? What has been the learning from them?

#### Sources of Support

I have found that prayerful seeking of the Light, either as a group or individually, is the most powerful way to gain insight, to speak to "that of God" in others and to be God-led in deliberations. Under guidance of the Light, I have come to see how the group and the individual can grow in awareness and in the ability to resolve problems according to the Divine will. Under the guidance of the Light, I have seen our meeting becoming increasingly able to pool and weigh the diverse aspirations and judgments of our members. We have been enabled to gain courage, to make decisions and to move forward while being freed from the bonds of narrowness, self-interest and prejudice.

I find it helpful to remember the ways in which earlier Friends banded together when one of them was imprisoned for reasons of conscience. The meeting cared for the family of the person in need and then took them food and clothing. The meeting supported them in their stand. The term "necessitous cases" is not often used in the nineties but the

needs go on. In the times of the underground railroad, Quakers were recognized as friends who would risk life and limb as well as reputation or imprisonment to aid those in need. These examples can guide us in considering not only the nature of our responsibility, but also the spirit in which our work should be done.

So "dear reader," when the nominating committee asks you to serve, and when you say "yes," remember that you aren't in it alone. You're working with, praying with, and helping a group of conscientious Friends who CARE. Help is available if needed. Give it your best and reap the rewards of knowing that you are growing in God's love.

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*Regina Peasley has been part of Gwynedd Meeting all of her life, has been an Overseer during most of her adult life, and has been clerk of Overseers. She currently serves as meeting recorder and has been secretary of the meeting. She is a resident of Foulkeways.*

#### **Questions for Reflection and Discussion:**

1. Do we conduct our meetings in a way which allows time for reflection and creates an atmosphere in which differing points of view can be lifted up?
2. When we encounter a situation in which there are differences between members, or between the meeting and a member, do we acknowledge those in an open and constructive way? Are there obstacles within ourselves or the meeting which makes the addressing of those differences more difficult? What would help to remove those obstacles?
3. Do we as Overseers find appropriate ways to counsel any member whose conduct or manner of living gives cause for concern?
4. What could the Overseers' Committee do to be more supportive of my work as an Overseer?