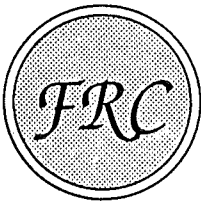


# PASTORAL CARE NEWSLETTER



PUBLISHED BY THE FAMILY RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
OF PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING

*For Overseers, Members of Ministry and Counsel, and others involved  
in pastoral care and counseling*

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## MEMBERSHIP AND THE CLEARNESS PROCESS

- What does it mean to be a member of my meeting?
- What is the responsibility of the meeting to its members, and of the members to the meeting?
- What is the difference, in my meeting, between being an attender and being a member?

These questions are at the very core of pastoral care.

Although Friends do not have a creed, we do have beliefs and commitments. Membership binds us together as a community. Our membership means something. But as we deal with inquirers or applicants, it is not easy to explain the meaning of membership.

Clearness committees can best carry out their work if the meeting as a whole has come to a sense of unity on some very important questions: What does a solid clearness for membership process consist of in our meeting? If we assume that an applicant needs to have a basic understanding of Quakerism, what are the meeting's expectations regarding that understanding? What is the breadth of beliefs which we can incorporate into our meeting and still experience ourselves as one community? Has the meeting ever said "no" to an applicant? What would be the circum-

stances under which our meeting would say "no"?

There is no single right answer to these questions, but it is important that a meeting reflect on what are the right answers for it as a community.

State College is one meeting which has done such reflection. It is a growing meeting with many new members. As a concern about the meaning of membership has developed, the issue has been raised at Overseers meetings and at meetings for business. In the fall of 1993, Overseers called on the Family Relations Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to help them organize a workshop on the clearness for membership process. The workshop was a success. All of the active overseers, along with sixteen additional meeting members, participated.

In the material that follows, direct quotations from interviews with members of State College Meeting are presented in italics. The quotations have been selected because they give voice to the experience of many meetings -- no matter the size. This article has been developed in the hope that the experience of State College Meeting may be useful for facilitating discussion in a wide variety of meetings.

## Does Our Meeting Need to Focus on the Issue of Membership?

*"One of our members made it known that he felt we were not emphasizing the spiritual journey enough -- that we were seen by some as a social club. I think that was true. We were too easy in the clearness process -- not discussing enough, and letting people in too easily. And then problems would arise, and sometimes people were drifting away."*

There are many legitimate facets of the meeting which serve as an initial attraction for attenders. For instance, people may be attracted by the sense of community in a meeting, the meeting's social testimonies, Friends style of worship, the meeting school or First Day School. It is a blessing to have differing avenues by which newcomers can find their way into our community. The challenge, thereafter, is to help the attender discover the essence of the meeting which binds it together as a faith community. As a first step, it is helpful to learn by listening to the newer members, in order to identify those things which tend to attract people. Then, the meeting can ask itself:

- Have we made it apparent to new people that at the core we are a religious society? Do we share information about the wider Society of Friends in order that attenders know that Quakerism is more than just this meeting?
- Can we describe to newcomers the ways in which the various meeting activities serve to deepen our life in the Spirit?
- Have we found ways to help new members become integrated into the heart of the meeting's life? Or do we find that they remain on the periphery and then drift away?

Depending on the answers to these and similar questions, a meeting will have some sense of whether the area of membership is needing the meeting's focused attention at this time.

## What Does Membership Mean in Our Meeting?

*"In order for the meeting to work, we need people who can take responsibility. The meeting needs some sort of commonality in terms of our sense of responsibility in addition to our spiritual seeking."*

Like other meetings, State College developed a statement on the meaning of membership. The statement went through several drafts over a period of years. One of the central values of writing a statement is that it helps make conscious, and thereby intentional, the expectations which the meeting has of its members. Once the meeting comes to such clearness, then interpreting the meaning of membership to attenders is much less difficult.

There is no single right answer in terms of membership expectations. They will vary according to the size of the meeting, its traditions and its needs. Some expectations, such as whether members carry full responsibility for care of the property, are quite concrete. Others are more subtle.

A number of years ago, for example, Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting was struggling with a very difficult issue -- whether a person who was an ordained minister could become a member of the meeting. No one had any doubt that the applicant, who had been active in the life of the meeting for some time, would make a fine member. The problem was the person's plan to retain his ordination.

It became clear during the discussion of this issue that differing concepts of membership are rooted in different images of the nature of the meeting community and, thereby, lead to

<p>This Newsletter is published quarterly by the Family Relations Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Trish Walat, clerk. Comments and suggestions are always welcome. <u>Please do not duplicate.</u> To obtain additional copies, contact Helene Pollock, Editor, at (215) 988-0140.</p>
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## Services Offered by the Family Relations Committee

For further information on any of the services shown here, contact Arlene Kelly at (215) 988-0140.

*"The workshop on clearness for membership was helpful because it enabled people to ask more serious questions in the clearness process -- to not withhold the questions that might be uncomfortable."*

--An overseer

### *FRC Workshops are designed:*

- *To address the particular needs of your meeting*
- *To strengthen skills*
- *To give opportunity for reflection*

*Sound helpful? Want to learn more?*

*Give us a call!*

### FRC Publications

In the Presence of God . . . A Quaker Marriage.

Marriage in the Light: Reflections on Commitment and the Clearness Process.

A Quaker Look at Living with Death and Dying, by Phyllis Taylor.

Resource Guide to Be Used by a Same-Sex Couple and Their Monthly Meeting's Committee on Clearness.

Sexuality: A Part of Wholeness, by Elizabeth Watson.

*\$2.25 each, plus postage and handling.*

## The Friends Counseling Service

**Counseling.** Counseling needs of members and attenders may at times exceed what Overseers can provide. The Friends Counseling Service can be a resource. All counselors are active Friends whose spiritual lives are integral to their approach to counseling. Fees are on a sliding 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

**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, 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

## Three Meetings' Different Approaches to Membership

### Alapocas Meeting

Alapocas, a meeting of twenty-six members, does not own its own property but meets in Wilmington Friends School. From the earliest days of this young meeting, which was founded in 1976, there has been a desire to limit the membership list to persons who are currently active and committed to the Meeting. So all memberships are terminated every three years. At the end of the three-year period, the Meeting sends out a letter, asking all members to reaffirm their membership commitment. The letter lists the requirements of membership in terms of involvement and financial support, recognizing that exceptions can be made in light of individual circumstances. The meeting's membership roll is then made up of those persons who reaffirm their commitment.

There are various advantages to this approach. As Alden Josey, Clerk of Alapocas Meeting, points out, "People are so mobile these days." Having all memberships expire "prods people to move their membership when they move out of the area. It also helps us deal with people who have a sentimental attachment but not an actual involvement in the meeting. For us, membership consists of people willing to make a commitment to the meeting."

Alapocas' approach has also had an effect on the spirituality of the meeting. While it is not always easy to find the words, writing a re-commitment letter can be a spiritually meaningful experience. The letters, which vary from simple statements to deeply searching reflections, are preserved in notebooks which become part of the Meeting's permanent archives. What results is, in Alden Josey's words, "the collective valuing of the meeting, which is affirming to every single individual. I think it's important for a back-bench Friend to read the affirmations that others make about the meeting -- that is encouraging to that Friend. Otherwise, membership can become an assumed fact. It can become part of the landscape, so that the meaning gradually fades away."

For more information, contact Alden Josey at 302-478-6796.

### Uwchlan Meeting

Uwchlan (pronounced "U-clan"), a meeting of about 170 members located in a rural area, had a desire to bring greater consistency to their clearness for membership process. In 1981 the Meeting developed a two-page compendium on membership which lifts up key passages from *Faith and Practice* on such subjects as the Meeting for Worship and the Peace Testimony, and ends with eight queries. The queries encourage applicants to consider how fully they are able to subscribe to the precepts of *Faith and Practice* and to describe how they would interpret to a non-Friend the one main reason they wish to join the Society of Friends. The queries also relate to other practical aspects of membership. Uwchlan Meeting has a Standing Committee on Marriage and Membership which is clerked by Robert Krentel (215-942-3732). This committee is appointed by and works closely with the Overseers Committee, but its seven members do not attend Overseers meetings. Instead, the Committee reports directly to Monthly Meeting. This approach helps eliminate an overly long Overseers' agenda.

For more information, contact Robert Krentel at 215-942-3732.

### State College Meeting

The statement on membership developed by State College Meeting (see main article) includes sections entitled "The Spiritual Life," "Quaker Testimonies," and "Quaker History" and a suggested reading list. An additional section on "The Meeting as Community" lists six specific areas of responsibility for meeting members, both in the Meeting and in the larger world of Friends.

For more information contact Mary Shaw at 814-238-0009.

different expectations on members. At a critical point in one discussion, a member reflected that "Some of us think of the meeting as a large campfire which emanates warmth and light. People draw as close to the fire as they are feeling a need to be at a given time, and the boundaries of membership are determined by where the outermost ring of people falls." He went on to say that, "others of us see the meeting as a beautiful garden for which we care and by which we are nurtured. Any who share a sense of the specialness of what grows in the garden are welcome to enter the gate and be a part of it, but the boundaries of the garden are clearly established. The expectation is that those entering will join with what is there, rather than expecting it to be redefined to incorporate them."

As the discussion continued, it became clear that those who saw the meeting as a campfire had no trouble including in membership the person who retained ordination status. Those who saw the meeting as a garden felt that a very basic aspect of their beliefs as Friends would be threatened by a person's maintaining his or her ordination while becoming a member.

The core issue here is diverse images of the meeting as community. How much diversity can we incorporate within the meeting and still remain a Friends meeting? If a meeting is to maintain a core -- have a sense of clarity about what binds it together as a community -- there must be a way of talking about this.

### **The Applicant's Need for Information**

*"When I went to my clearness committee it was the first time I knew that membership meant a financial obligation. . . . Another issue is; do we expect people to attend business meeting? We've been somewhat divided on that. Before people apply for membership, these are things they should know. So when we get to the clearness process, we can really be talking about their spiritual state. We want to be exploring what's leading them to become a member."*

When State College was looking for specific ideas about how to improve their clearness process, they learned a lot by asking some newer members what the experience had been like for them. While people spoke warmly of the clearness meeting, several applicants reported that they had felt some anxiety beforehand because of a lack of clarity about what to expect. They also said they had been afraid of being asked questions for which they did not know the answer.

Too often the task of communicating clearly to attenders about the expectations of membership is not really thought about -- it's left to chance. It is far friendlier to have a welcoming statement which outlines basic information such as how long a meeting would usually expect a person to attend before considering membership, what are the important elements to understand about Quakerism and where to get additional information. Such a statement could describe the steps in applying for membership, rather than leaving the person with the sense that they are on the outside, needing to guess how to proceed.

Attenders' kits, which include a copy of *Faith and Practice*, information about the particular meeting, and other useful material, can be helpful. How often do we think to announce informational weekends at Pendle Hill or elsewhere? Do we think of inviting an attender to a Quaker function outside the meeting?

### **Elements of a Thorough and Caring Clearness Process**

*"Several people said that during their clearness process they hadn't been challenged enough about their spiritual journey. They came through feeling as if they hadn't had a chance to discuss their deepest feelings."*

*"I've served on a number of clearness committees and they ran very differently. We have a person, for example, who feels strongly about the peace testimony. I can think of one time when that person was on a committee and the peace testimony was a weightier issue in that particular clearness."*

*"I think it's important that the clearness committee be a very personal and friendly/Friendly group so the person feels cherished as a person but feels that they are on a spiritual journey -- that they see this as a place where they are accepted with foibles. And I think that's a pretty tall order."*

*"In the workshop we had on membership I was struck by [the leader's skill in] talking to applicants in such a way that they would not feel that they were on a pass-fail examination, but that they were encouraged to talk about their views and feel whether we were a place that they would like to go. And not the idea that maybe we'd accept them and maybe we wouldn't or that we always accept everybody."*

These observations help us to deduce the elements of a sound clearness process. The process needs to be done in a manner that communicates a sense of caring and respect. The issue of commitment to the meeting -- and the level of participation which is expected -- needs to be dealt with, along with the meaning of being a Quaker, and being part of the wider Society of Friends. Often the applicant will be disappointed if members of clearness committees fail to discuss their sense of the spiritual dimension of life (recognizing that different people will use different language) and do not encourage open sharing about what it means to be a Friend. Some of the richest clearness meetings can occur as we both listen deeply and share something of our own search.

Consistency is also important. While some aspects of the discussion will be affected by the particular individuals involved, variations in the clearness experience in a given meeting should not be extreme.

In summary, an application to a Friends meeting is a serious step in one's spiritual journey. We are privileged when a person finds something in our witness which leads the person to apply for membership. We honor that witness and the witness of Friends who have gone before us if we, as a meeting, are clear about what membership in our par-

ticular Friends community means, and when we find a consistent way to share that understanding with attenders. In this process we not only discover our own truth in our own time and place, but we also reaffirm our connections with the history of Friends, and with the wider world of Quakerism.

In the clearness meeting it is important to create a climate in which the applicant feels comfortable in sharing the important elements of his or her spiritual life. The focus is not on "finding the right answers" but on seeking to discover whether or not the meeting can nurture the person's spiritual development, and the applicant can enrich the life of the community. To the extent that we are able to search for clearness prayerfully and in a deep and open way, then we have, in that moment, made real our belief that the Spirit will lead us.

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*Many thanks to the following members of State College Meeting who assisted in the development of this article: Jane Jenks, Mary Shaw, Russell Tuttle and Kerry Wiessmann.*

*This article was written by Helene Pollock and Arlene Kelly, with help from members of the Family Relations Committee.*

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

1. How well do we as a meeting do in nurturing attenders' understanding of Quakerism in general and our meeting in particular? If more needs to be done in this area, how might that be carried out?
2. Do we, as a meeting, have a sense of clarity and unity about what membership means to us? If further discussion is needed, what role might Overseers [Ministry and Counsel] play in facilitating that?
3. Do I feel that the essential elements of a good clearness process are in place in our meeting? If not, what might we do to strengthen our work in this area?