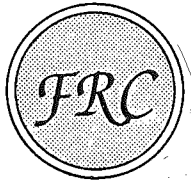


PASTORAL CARE NEWSLETTER

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*

Vol. IV, No. 3

March 1997

Nurturing the Meeting Community

by Arlene Kelly

Most often when Overseers think of pastoral care within our meetings, we think of those times of special need or transition when we have offered the support of the meeting to an individual, couple, or family. This issue of *Pastoral Care Newsletter* calls attention to the need for pastoral care of the meeting-as-a-whole. In reflecting on the question of how we nurture the meeting community, we are turning our attention to the context within which individual acts of pastoral care occur. Whether a newcomer feels led to become part of the community, whether members of the community in a period of crisis feel safe to reveal their need, or whether the meeting nurtures the gifts of each individual member depends a good deal on whether we, together, have become a caring community.

I feel that our meetings benefit when the committee charged with pastoral care is intentional in recognizing that a Friends meeting is an alive, dynamic entity that needs tending if its various parts are to be in a right harmony with each other. Some meetings intuitively care for and nurture their life as a community; other meetings go through periods of conflict and dissension by not being mindful of issues embedded in community life or in not knowing how to respond to them.

Community in the Spirit

I want to ground this article in the awareness that our Friends meetings are *faith*



Arlene Kelly

communities; i.e., communities of people who have come together out of a shared belief in a Spirit, a God, the Light. We give different names to that Spirit. Nevertheless, our joining together in a search to discern the will of that Spirit and to witness to its reality through our actions forms the glue which holds our spiritual community together.

Lloyd Lee Wilson, in his book, *Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order*, speaks compellingly of the difference there is when community is based on a belief that God can work in our lives. His comments begin to lead us toward one definition of community for Friends meetings:

The individual whose commitment to the community is based on a sense that these

community members are somehow special human beings, who have the right concerns and values and live the right lives, will find great difficulty when members of the community fail to live up to these standards and expectations.

In contrast, the individual whose commitment is based on an acceptance of a covenant relationship with God has a different reaction to these inevitable pains and disappointments. The covenant relationship says that we are given in relationship to each other precisely in order to help one another through these painful times into a fuller relationship with God and one another. What is a centrifugal force in one case is a bonding experience among a covenant people. Our individual sins and failures become opportunities for the community to practice true loving forgiveness, to offer spiritual counsel and guidance, and to offer spiritual and emotional healing.

(page 69)

Maintaining an awareness that our meetings are based on a covenant relationship with God can make a significant difference in our meetings and in the effectiveness of our work as Overseers.

Developing a Vision of Community

No article can prescribe what kind of community each meeting should form. It is important, therefore, that each meeting have opportunities to share assumptions and expectations. What can our meeting expect of its members? Who are we to each other?

Do we have a shared sense of what we wish to be as a community of Friends? How are we at welcoming and integrating new persons into our meeting community? Is there, on the whole, a climate of trust and openness among us, or do we find members of the community to be cautious or angry with each other? These are just a few of the questions which can help us begin to focus on the communal life of the meeting and to identify aspects of the meeting's life which would benefit from care and attention.

Overseers can play a valuable role by creating opportunities for meeting members and attenders to come together to learn about and discuss the issue of the meeting as a community. One approach to this would be to sponsor a pot luck dinner to be followed by an evening of discussion and/or worship sharing. The discussion is likely to be richer if one or two members of the committee prepare some opening remarks which address the different dimensions of community. Then people can break into groups of 8 to 10 to discuss a set of questions prepared ahead of time and based on the opening remarks. Some meetings I know have approached it by having a quote, such as that by Lloyd Lee Wilson cited above, or another found to be meaningful, and having people do worship sharing around it. Perhaps the queries included in this article would be a good beginning. The evening can be wrapped up by folks coming back together and identifying in the full group the ideas they found to be most stimulating and challenging and perhaps thinking together regarding what would be a good next step for carrying the discussion forward.

The dialogue might also take place in a series of articles and responses in the meeting's newsletter followed by discussion in adult forum or meeting for business.

Building Community

Community is built by doing it. It can grow out of the regular ebb and flow of the meeting's life: our meetings for worship and for business and our work together on committees.

Community occurs when we miss someone at meeting and call that person or family to say that they have been missed. It occurs when we reach out to the person whom we don't know well and have a substantive conversation. Not

Pastoral Care Newsletter is published quarterly by the Family Relations Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Lyle Jenks, clerk. Patricia McBee, editor. We are located at 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102. Comments are welcome. **Please do not duplicate.** To obtain additional copies or to subscribe, contact Steve Gulick, at 215-241-7068 or steveg@pym.org.

**Now Is the Time to
Renew Your Subscription to
Pastoral Care Newsletter for '97-'98**

Enclosed with this issue of *Pastoral Care Newsletter* is subscription information for '97-'98. It helps us in planning and budgeting when meetings order their subscriptions in the spring.

Also by renewing in the spring you will be sure to receive the fall issue. Written by Barbara Snipes of Falls Meeting, it will address the question of what Overseers can do when a member's situation is beyond the skills of the meeting and professional help is needed.

A word about why we ask you not to photocopy PCN: The cost of a copy of the newsletter is more than just the cost of duplication. It includes paying our editor for her work and paying the printer for set-up of the photographs. Everyone who subscribes is paying a share of those preparation costs.

If a meeting buys one subscription and makes photocopies it is putting an unfair burden on others for supporting the production costs. If you subscribe for all the copies you need, it will help us keep the costs down for everyone.

Thanks.



PENDLE HILL

A QUAKER CENTER FOR STUDY AND CONTEMPLATION

NEW! *Short Courses*

Six-day courses beginning in the fall of 1997. Participate in the Pendle Hill Community for a week or more. General topics include:

*** Putting Faith into Action**

Addressing issues of belief and practice.

*** Strengthening Friends' Meetings**

Enhancing our lives and work as Friends.

*** Deepening Spirituality**

Building on our tradition of prayer and meditation.

*** Arts and Literature**

Exploring poetry, literature, writing, painting, clay.

For more information on these and other programs contact Bobbi Kelly at (800) 742-3150 or (610) 566-4507, ext. 137. 338 Plush Mill Road • Wallingford, Pennsylvania 19086

Friends Counseling Service

If someone in your meeting needs counseling, you can call Deborah Cooper, the Friends Counseling Service Consultant, to discuss the best way to make a referral. She will help you consider both the styles and approaches of the counselors and their geographical accessibility. She can also help you in reaching out appropriately to the meeting member.

Our counselors are professionally trained and available to help people of all ages face and resolve a variety of situational and emotional difficulties. All counselors in the Friends Counseling Service are active Friends whose spiritual lives are integral to their approach to counseling. Confidential services are provided to individuals, couples, and families. Service is not denied because of a person's lack of means. You can reach Deborah Cooper at 215-988-0140.

Henry Beck, Ph.D.
Bala Cynwyd, PA
(610) 664-5443

Deborah Cooper, M.Ed.
Philadelphia, PA
(215) 248-0489

Arlene Kelly, ACSW
Philadelphia, PA
(215) 849-0598

John Scardina, Ed.M.
West Chester, PA
(610) 696-2153

Ray Bentman, M.Ed.
Philadelphia, PA
(215) 985-1314

Teresa A. Glatthorn, M.A.
Hatboro & Doylestown, PA
(215) 672-6627

Judith Owens, M.A.
Voorhees, NJ
(609) 435-2121

Barbara T. Snipes, M.A.
Morrisville, PA & Riverton, NJ
(215) 428-0315

Annie C. Burrows, M.A.
Kennett Square & Phila., PA
(610) 444-1824

John L. Hall, M.A.
Chester Springs, PA
(610) 458-9060

Judith M. Robinson, M.Ed.
Bryn Mawr & Downingtown, PA
(610) 269-4661

Ann Swain, M.S.W.
Glen Mills, PA
(610) 399-1977

J. Roy Cannon, M.C.
Newark, DE
(302) 738-9963

Harriet Heath, Ph.D.
(parenting issues only)
Haverford, PA
(610) 649-7037

Karin M. Sannwald, ACSW
Berlin, NJ
(609) 767-6471

Fran Van Allen, M.A.
Philadelphia & Media, PA
(610) 358-3212

Terence Carroll, ACSW
Philadelphia, PA
(215) 473-2600

Gary M. Johnson, Ph.D.
Wilmington, DE
(302) 656-1295

James J. Saxon, Ph.D.
Swarthmore, PA
(610) 544-9634

Lindley M. Winston, M.D.
West Chester, PA
(610) 431-3955

surprisingly, it occurs when we, as a meeting, rally around a family or individual who is going through a crisis or when we, as a meeting, rally around an issue in our larger community which requires our care and attention. In each of these instances we have allowed the barriers between ourselves and others to dissolve, we have found our oneness in the Spirit.

These natural community building processes can be reinforced by intentionally creating opportunities for members of the community to get to know each other more fully. Overseers can play a valuable role in helping the meeting develop such opportunities.

Pot luck dinners are a time-honored way of bringing members together. In some meetings Overseers have elaborated the pot luck dinner into Friendly Eights -- groups of eight coming together for an evening of fellowship over dinner. There can be a focus for the evening or not, depending on the interest of the participants.

A meeting weekend or meeting retreat, with both a theme and opportunity for fun together is another approach which many meetings have found to be fruitful in building community.

These and other community building activities are spelled out in more detail in the insert to this issue of the *Pastoral Care Newsletter*.

In any of these efforts it is essential, I feel, to remain grounded in the reality that we are a community of seekers. We are held together as a religious society by our belief that something which is greater than ourselves is working in our lives.

The Changing Seasons of Community

Another important dimension of nurturing community is to realize that there are seasons in the life of a community. The ebb and flow in the size of the meeting and shifts in the age composition are two examples of changing seasons. Attentiveness to these cycles can help us move through them in ways that strengthen our sense of community.

Overseers can be mindful of the needs of each season. A number of meetings across the country experienced a significant increase in

meeting membership as the result of the Gulf War. Such growth is a blessing, but it also presents a challenge to a meeting if a sizable segment of people active in the meeting are newly convinced Friends. How is the tradition transmitted? How do we help new members to learn about Quaker processes? Much of our transmission of the tradition is non-verbal, by action and osmosis, but we need to ask ourselves whether that is sufficient during times of rapid growth.

Overseers' alertness can help to avert some of the strains brought about by rapid growth. We can encourage the Adult Education Committee to provide opportunities to learn about some of the basics of Friends faith and practice. We can support and encourage the more experienced members to be mentors, particularly in Friends business processes. We can encourage the Nominating Committee to be mindful of the need for newer members to have an opportunity for seasoning before giving them responsibilities for which they may be inadequately prepared. These are but a few of the ways Overseers can be helpful at a time of rapid growth in the meeting.

One meeting's experience was that its growth was steady, but not rapid. That presented different challenges as the meeting went from 25 or 30 members to 50 members. In reflecting on the impact of this growth, their Overseers realized that the informal word of mouth communication which had served them well wasn't working now that they had become a larger meeting. Newer members were not part of the informal systems and felt left out. If the meeting wanted to keep newer members of their community from becoming discontented and dropping out, it was time to think of a newsletter or other more formalized means of letting all concerned know of what was happening.

Most meetings are feeling the impact of changes in our larger society. In the U. S., people are working longer hours, we have more single parent families, children are becoming involved in team sports at younger ages. Free time has become far more precious. Overseers can help their meetings discern ways a faith based community can respond to these realities.

