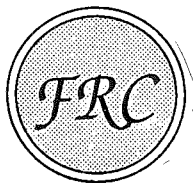


PASTORAL CARE NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED BY THE FAMILY RELATIONS COMMITTEE
OF PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING



Vol. IV, No. 4

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

June 1997

Pastoral Care of Men in Our Meetings

Is there anything meetings can or should do specifically for the pastoral care of the men in our communities? The needs of men tend not to be discussed separately from generic discussions of women and men together. Yet men's groups are developing in many meetings, and some seem to be tapping into a need for men to look at their life in the meeting as men.

Since perspectives on men's spiritual and pastoral needs seem to be as varied as men themselves, PCN has asked several men to write about their experience. The insert to this issue has information on resources in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting specifically for men and suggestions on how to start a men's group in your meeting. — ed.

Mike Hayes **Westfield (NJ) Meeting**

The standards for masculinity and the criteria for "success" as a human male are changing, and quickly. Some of us have been caught between our culture's expectations that a man maintain the appearance of strength and our internal thirst for spiritual connection.

For me, the concept of a spiritual path made little sense until I was ready for it. A busy life, full of family and career and diversion, seemed to leave little time or energy for the spiritual.

It seems that many spiritual journeys, like mine, begin with acknowledgment of a feeling that there is something missing from our lives. This may become a deep, growing desire for a

way to make sense of things, to relieve feelings of dissociation and powerlessness. This step often involves a great deal of confusion and pain. This can be a lonely process, especially for one conditioned to hide these perceived "deficiencies." With or without support, we make our best guess, put one foot in front of the other and stumble off down a path.

These experiences in my case took many years and a fair amount of discomfort. My own propensities prevented me from seeking support, and kept me from seeking to share my experiences with others. On the occasions when someone would offer support, I would deny any such need; I was ashamed of being found out. Whenever I felt led to offer support, I was met with similar defenses. I didn't want to intrude on their processes. Ironically, I now see that the most productive sharing between men often results from expressed concern over a friend's condition. It would be wonderful if we could teach spiritual navigation skills the way we teach sports skills and attract more travelers.

Having an individual guide or a functional men's group can be of great help as we seek to learn these spiritual navigation skills. Knowing that a respected male can meet weaknesses honestly in order to overcome them can encourage other men in their own challenges. Our meeting has had several exemplary individuals who would have been wonderful mentors, and I regret that I didn't spend more quality time in their company. They had much

to say that I want to hear now that they are not around.

There seems to be an element of Guidance in the timing of spiritual sharing between men. Each leg of a spiritual journey, each cycle of

I am amazed at the extraordinary sense of being present to one another.

Douglas Campbell

growth seems to need time to come to a point of readiness for tempering by discussion. Spiritual experiences are subject to adulteration by attempts to express them before their time.

There are those times of mutual trust, respect, and ripeness, however, that leave no doubt about Providence. At those times, an experience can be recounted to a depth which enlightens even the one who experienced it. Freely expressed feelings solidify respect and trust and lead to deeper sharing.

Crossing the gender boundary can be helpful under the right circumstances. There are more women among my informal mentors than men. The binocular perspective of male-female discussion can be an effective means of spiritual discovery.

I would dearly love to be able to provide Overseers with a handbook on how to support this. Not all men desire to embark on a spiritual path and no cookbook nurturing system will serve all the men who do.

As Overseers give attention to the needs of individual men in the meeting they can consider establishing mentoring relationships between a man who is known to be struggling with a certain issue and another who is known to have dealt successfully with a similar issue – such as the needs of fathers of young children or health issues or balancing career demands with other dimensions of life. If there are men in the meeting who wish to establish a men's group, Overseers can provide sponsorship and logistical support.

First Day school presents further opportunities to begin to practice those spiritual navigation skills, to help our young men be comfortable with the concept of seeking in the company of other males. Sponsoring a men's camping trip, work day, or sporting event can help to build community among the men of the meeting.

A healthy, growing spiritual condition is a priceless treasure. I believe we need to work harder at exploring ways to help our men envision and realize it. Our meetings need to explore and experiment with greater awareness and zeal.

Douglas Campbell
Moorestown, NJ

As I look into the eyes of the men gathered for our weekly meeting, I am always amazed that such a meeting is actually taking place. The type of meeting I am speaking of is not just the gathering of a group of men, but the extraordinary sense of being present to one another, seeing past the usual armor, roles, and defenses and glimpsing the essential man. What was once a rare event that happened only with my best friend or with my wife, has become a way of life. Thanks to the time spent in this men's group I have begun to see all men as potential brothers. This perspective is a tremendous blessing that all of us deserve.

I am a member of a men's group that has been meeting once a week for nearly three years to talk, listen, discuss and debate the major and minor issues of our lives and times. The issues run the gamut of joys, frustrations and rage, dreams, hopes and fears, sorrows, sex and shame, fathers, mothers and siblings, perception reception and deception, yesterday, today and tomorrow. Though we feel only marginally affiliated with anything resembling the men's

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.

Reader asks about "Overseers" & "Ministry & Counsel"

Dear Editor:

I'm really curious. The Pastoral Care Newsletter says it is for "Overseers, members of Ministry and Counsel, and others..." Is Ministry and Counsel the same as Worship and Ministry? Are there a lot of Ministry and Counsel's in PYM?

*Louise Heritage
Magnolia, NJ*

Dear Louise:

PCN circulates to many yearly meetings. "Overseers" is the term most used in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for the committee charged with pastoral care, though some in PYM call their committee "Ministry & Counsel." In other yearly meetings "Ministry and Counsel" is the more commonly used term, so we use both interchangeably.

I know it is confusing, but haven't figured out a better way of doing it. Maybe by printing your letter it will clarify for others our use of these terms.

ed.

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Bill Ratliffe/September 26-28

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Micky Edgerton & Linda Chidsey/November 14-16

For more information on these and other programs contact
Irene Ramsay, ext. 142 at (610) 566-4507 or (800) 742-3150
338 Plush Mill Road · Wallingford, Pennsylvania 19086

Starting a Men's Group in Your Meeting

The ultimate success of a men's group is dependent on there being a core group of men with enthusiasm and resilience to stick with a group as it finds its way. To begin the process and identify men who may be interested in a group, Overseers might schedule a one-time event for men, perhaps with a speaker. If there is interest in an ongoing group, Overseers can offer publicity and support.

PCN spoke with participants in men's groups and gathered the following list of issues to be addressed as a group is being formed:

Purpose: Is it worship? mutual support on personal issues? problem solving? projects? (or a hundred other ideas?) Two groups report that they had to struggle at first with questions of purpose. After a while the groups found a focus, and some participants left to find or create another group that better fit their needs.

Open vs. closed group: In an open group, the time and place are announced and whoever shows up for a given meeting is the group. There is no requirement that an individual attend all of the sessions, but it is essential that a core group attend regularly to provide stability. In a closed group, participants make a commitment to attend regularly for a fixed period (six months, a year), new members are only admitted at those fixed intervals. One group cited a commitment to regular attendance as essential to the success of their group. Another has prospered as an open group for over five years.

Size of the group: A men's group can thrive with five or six men committed to regular attendance. Some find a group larger than eight to ten begins to crowd the sharing time and to complicate questions of safety. On the other hand an open group in a large meeting frequently has 12-15 in attendance.

Frequency of meeting: Groups meet as frequently as weekly or as infrequently as monthly. Sometimes instead of a regular men's group, men in the meeting will schedule special event for men once or twice a year. Most men's groups find it helpful to meet on a regular, predictable schedule. More frequent meetings, such as once a week, contribute to greater depth of sharing.

Location: Will the group meet at the meeting or consistently in another location or will it rotate in member's homes or other locations? A consistent location is helpful in an open group so that occasional attenders can easily find the meeting. Meeting in members' homes can contribute to a greater sense of closeness.

Issues of safety have had to be dealt with in all of the groups we spoke with. Participants may have concerns about how deeply they can share and whether they will be treated with respect if they reveal issues with which they are struggling. A closed group can contribute to a greater sense of safety as participants come to know and have confidence in each other.

Various kinds of structures and norms can be established to enhance a sense of safety: some have found safety in a worship-sharing format with no feedback, others have structured feedback in mutually agreed upon ways, others require participants to speak only from one's own personal perspective avoiding discussing and interpreting the other men's experience. A commitment to confidentiality is an important ingredient in trust building.

Structure: Several of the groups we talked with said that they started with a "check-in." That is, a time when members report anything significant that has happened to them in the past week or raise an issue or question with which they are wrestling. After the check-in some groups proceed to informal sharing or they pick up on an issue that has been raised in the check-in and discuss it. One group rotates the leadership, and after the check-in the group member who has been given the leadership role for that meeting leads the group in a discussion on whatever topic he chooses.

Issues of power and leadership seem to shift over the life of a group. Most of the men's groups in meetings do not have a formal leader. Some rotate leadership from meeting to meeting. Others evolve a set of "elders" who embody and live out the norms of the apparently leaderless group. Conflict and competitiveness over power and leadership need to be addressed directly to establish the degree of safety necessary for the group to flourish.

Duration: Open groups can go on as long as there are people participating. Closed groups

that have required a commitment to regular attendance usually have a stopping point at least annually when those who are finding it difficult to attend regularly can leave the group and perhaps others can join.

<<< RESOURCES FOR MEN >>>

Books:

Hazelden Foundation, *Touchstones: A Book of Daily Meditations for Men*, NY, Harper and Row, 1986.

Jastrab, Joseph, *Sacred Manhood, Sacred Earth: A Vision Quest into the Wilderness of a Man's Heart*, NY, Harper Collins, 1994.

Kornfield, Jack, *A Path with Heart: A Guide through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*, NY, Bantam Books, 1993.

Meade, Michael, *Men and the Water of Life: Initiation and the Tempering of Men*, San Francisco, Harper, 1993.

Osherson, Samuel, *Finding our Fathers: The Unfinished Business of Manhood*, The Free Press, 1986.

Events:

Quaker Sweat Lodge. This Native American tradition has been adapted for Friends by George Price of Falls Meeting after more than ten years of study with Native American elders. Though the Quaker sweats are not exclusively for men, they are based on a traditional men's ceremony that was meant to connect men to the earth and its cycles. Sweats are generally held once a month on a Saturday evening. For more information contact George Price at (215)295-1560.

Performances by Rocky Wilson longtime attender of Central Philadelphia Meeting. Rocky is a poet, puppeteer, and performance artist whose performances speak to the deep issues in men's lives. He performs most frequently at the Walt Whitman Center in Camden, NJ. For information call Rocky at (609)964-4214.

Men's retreats sponsored by Family Relations Committee. Since 1991 the Family Relations Committee has sponsored annual retreats led by Brad Sheeks. The next one will be held in 1998. To receive information on the next men's retreat contact Family Relations Committee at (800)2200-PYM, ext. 7068.

movement, we share with men's groups all over the country the desires and yearnings of finding our own paths.

We are a leaderless group that rotates the role of facilitator each week. In the beginning our meetings operated very much in the twelve-step model. No comments were allowed during our check-in to the group about our previous week's experiences. We had space to speak and men willing to just listen to our words. Eventually there was modification to allow feedback, but no advice or criticism – only words of support.

So much feedback was shuttling back and forth that it got to be that no one could distinguish between where well meaning comments became advice. The boundaries got messy and fluid, and we were talking to one another! We were actively, emotionally, intensely, spontaneously, genuinely, compassionately engaging each other! When the smoke cleared, the only casualties were the inhibitions we had outgrown, and the victor was the man in each of us who had only dreamed that he could express it all and still love the men who share his weaknesses.

One of our greatest gifts to one another is that we can see changes in others that they haven't yet noticed in themselves. We can see them in their fullness and beauty and encourage and honor their development. We all grow strong by blessing one another's growth.

The final point is closure. We take some time and make it a practice to give attention to leaving each other. We close our eyes, link hand-over-hand in the center of our circle, and remain silent for a few minutes. Each man can give thanks in his own way. We end with the same eye contact that started our meeting.

Anonymous

To my knowledge, three of the active members of my small meeting have joined men's groups; in fact, three different men's groups.

All of us have been affected by social changes in sex roles: we are the first generation of males to be faced with anything approaching equality for women. The liberation of sexual

minorities has also shaken our social foundations. The roles we learned as children and adolescents are useless for today's relationships. We find ourselves strong, successful, and bewildered.

Our fathers were strong and successful, and if they were bewildered they, never let us see it. A few untrue stereotypes, an effects-only view of the world (either you did right or you did wrong), seemed to represent their knowledge of masculinity. These did not prepare us for the dynamics of truly close relationships, especially those with strong, successful women.

We turn to each other for release from bewilderment. One of us goes off into the woods and becomes a he-man with adventures

*I leave our meetings
feeling strengthened
and renewed.*

Nate Terrell

and good talk. Another goes off into Freudian and other psychologies, explores the "real" self, finds wonderful mouth-filling words to describe and thus to understand his states of mind. I attach myself to a guru whose spiritual journey has sent him around the world and who has garnered a world full of spiritual exercise. He guides the group into an openness. The warm, loving, sincerity of the group engendered by him leads me to find within myself some of my own answers.

The group gives self-help, not therapy. I came to the group needing therapy, and found strength in the group to go to therapy. But it also gives me a time to explore my life as a male human being, to take my maleness out of me and look at it, not as I alone see it, but also as the rest of the group sees it. It allays the bewilderment and some of the panic the bewilderment can create. It does this through loving where those warm common, everyday words of everyday experiences come from: working out a meaning for everyday life.

We had one guy who didn't make it. He was rather different from the rest of us because

he wasn't too verbal. I bet a he-man group would have done wonders for him. I guess the message here is not to give up if your first men's group experience doesn't work.

The only pitfall I can think of is the possibility of a breach of confidentiality, but to my knowledge this has not occurred within our group.

**Nate Terrell
Clementon, NJ**

Four years ago, I decided to start a men's group since I longed for the opportunity to share my fears, hopes, etc., with a group of men in a trusting, non-competitive forum. Consequently, I asked all the men I knew about their interest in such a group and eventually collected five men who appeared to share my vision. We agreed to meet on a monthly basis and began to discuss what we were trying to accomplish.

It took us three years to figure this out. Along the way, we have survived (1) endless discussions about whether we should focus on our own problems, on projects such as mentoring "at risk" youth, on achieving our personal goals, or on what seem in retrospect to be about a hundred other ideas; (2) personality and stylistic differences among group members which caused group tension; and (3) anger on the part of some group members about others missing meetings and subsequent discussions about the level of commitment each member should have towards the group.

Although I have no doubt this group will continue to evolve over time, we have finally reached a level of stability that most of us thought was impossible in the midst of our intense search to define ourselves. The group member who has been given the leadership role for that meeting leads the group in a discussion on whatever topic he wants. Recent topics have included what we feel good about ourselves as men, how the story of the prodigal son is relevant to our lives, and our relationships with our fathers.

Rather than give advice or feedback if a member brings up a personal problem, we usually simply "hear the person out" and ask

questions which might help him view his situation more clearly. Just as in a meeting for worship, common themes often emerge which speak to all of our conditions.

I almost always leave our meetings feeling strengthened and renewed by the deep connection I feel with my fellow group members and the support I receive from them. In fact, I get something completely unique from this group. Perhaps it is simply the sense that I have been bathed in positive male energy.

One of our long-term goals is to provide mentoring to "at risk" youth through outdoor education or fun activities such as canoe trips. In the meantime, we have chosen to sponsor a couple of scholarships to a Quaker summer camp in South Jersey which will be utilized by kids who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to gain the benefits of a camp experience.

I believe that men can gain a great deal of meaning and fulfillment by participating in a men's group. Since all the men's groups I know are a bit different in both focus and purpose, I would encourage interested men to shop around to find the right one or start their own if they can't find what they are looking for.

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Questions for Reflection

1. What activities can Overseers encourage to bring men in the meeting together?
2. Are there meeting opportunities – First Day school classes, forums, discussion evenings – specifically for men wanting to expand their spiritual contacts and personal resources?
3. How can men in the meeting be made aware of opportunities within the meeting and at the quarterly and yearly meeting level for men to share with one another as men?
4. What can Overseers do to determine the level of interest in the meeting for forming and maintaining a men's group?