

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

*For Overseers, Ministry and Counsel,
and others who provide pastoral care
in unprogrammed Friends meetings*

Vol. 6, No. 2 • January 1999

One Meeting's Response to Conflict and Abuse by Friends in Portland (Maine) Meeting

What can a meeting do when one member accuses another of abuse? How do we address strong conflicts that draw in other meeting members? These events sorely try those involved and the community in general.

After some difficult situations were addressed by Portland (Maine) Meeting over a period of several years, some within the meeting felt called to reflect on their experience, do research, and then try to draft guidelines that might help the meeting face any future difficulties with strong interpersonal conflicts or allegations of abuse.

The four members who volunteered to undertake this task met on a monthly basis from January through July of 1996, taking turns drafting and redrafting. They brought their work twice to Ministry & Counsel, once to Pastoral Oversight, and finally to a joint meeting of both, with redrafting ongoing.

As they proceeded, they considered the incidents that had happened in the past and projected incidents that might come up in the future. They did not explore the complexities involved in responding to abuse of a child. Also, they found that they were not prepared to write a special section addressing cases involving mental illness or character disorder. The guidelines that resulted address situations involving competent adults.

Copies of the proposed guidelines were made available to all members and attenders long before discussions were held during meeting for business in January and February 1997. At the February meeting, Portland Friends adopted the guidelines for an interim period of at least six months, subject to some conditions: (1) the guidelines were as a work in progress, to be amended and improved with time; (2) Ministry & Counsel was to arrange educational sessions to show how the guidelines might help in practice and to seek improvements to them; and (3) Ministry & Counsel might suggest to meeting for business an extension of the period of applicability.

Since then, the meeting has sponsored an experiential workshop to demonstrate the processes outlined in the guidelines. This workshop was found to be so helpful by its participants that the meeting has decided to hold it annually. The guidelines have been slightly modified as the meeting has worked with the *Pastoral Care Newsletter* to present them to a wider audience in the hope that other

Portland Friends have set a model for responding to difficult situations as an occasion for deep searching about who we are as Friends and what God requires of us. PCN has brought the guidelines to you as they were adopted by the meeting, with only a few minor modifications.

In preparing the guidelines, Friends in Portland balanced a wide range of concerns and of points of view. Situations of possible abuse often involve considerable ambiguity. Some in Portland and some on the *Pastoral Care Newsletter* committee would put a different emphasis on parts of the guidelines.

Do the guidelines say early enough and clearly enough that a first priority is to move to protect anyone who is fearful or at risk? This may need to be done before all the facts are known. Should the guidelines more clearly state that someone who is vulnerable should not be asked to meet face to face with a person who may be intimidating to him or her? A fear was expressed that in Friends' efforts to being caring to both abuser and abused we may perpetuate the abuse. It is an exacting discipline to be both caring *and* clear and firm. As Portland Friends point out, both are required in cases where there has been or may have been abuse.

Every situation has a unique set of circumstances. If your meeting were faced with a situation of serious conflict or abuse, you might want to take these concerns into account.

meetings might find them useful. Footnotes have been added by PCN in a few places where the editors felt special attention was called for.

As you read the guidelines we ask you to keep in mind two things: first that the guidelines were designed to deal with conflict or abuse between two competent adults; and second, that that they are a work in progress. Portland Meeting welcomes your comments and observations.

I. PURPOSE OF PORTLAND FRIENDS COMMUNITY

We are a spiritual community. We come together to worship, to seek divine guidance. We are diverse in our individual beliefs and outlooks, but we also hold dear our sense of community and of gathering together. We wish to seek the light *and* to see our community prosper. These guidelines are set out in furtherance of those goals.

II. ASSUMPTIONS

A. General Assumptions

Conflict is a fact of life. For each of us the question is how do we deal with it. Quakers, being as fallible as other people, are not immune to antagonistic or hurtful behavior, including abuse of a sexual, physical, or emotional nature.

When conflict or abuse occurs, we need in place a process that:

- a. seeks clearness about the facts and context of the behavior;
- b. always seeks to hold a compassionate regard for all involved, knowing that there is that of God in everyone and that each of us is more than the worst we have done;
- c. requires accountability and limit-setting with respect to the behavior of any participant who abuses another;
- d. determines at the outset whether anyone is at risk of abuse in the future, and, if so, takes all reasonable steps to minimize that risk and to ensure that person's safety.
- e. offers support, whenever that is possible and desired, for each person involved in a case of conflict or abuse;
- f. offers mediation or a clearness process to all involved, if and when mediation or a clearness process is appropriate;¹
- g. honors the importance of the prayerful holding of each person in the Light and of an openness to the intervention of the Spirit.

We recognize that without such a process at Portland Friends Meeting when the next case of conflict or abuse occurs, we are likely to experience avoidance, prejudice, gossip, confusion, distrust, and more conflict.

Finally, with the adoption of these guidelines, we affirm that Friends have conflict resolution processes that are likely to work, and we accept our duty to utilize them, to seek the truth in love, and to address behaviors which do much to rend our community or harm a member and little to further anyone's life or spiritual well being.

¹ Mediation may not be appropriate in cases of abuse. See discussion on page 5.

At a minimum this duty asks each of us to consult with the Clerk of Meeting, the Clerk of Ministry & Counsel, or the Clerk of Pastoral Oversight if we sense conflict or abuse in our midst, so that it might aptly be addressed.

B. Our Attitude in Confronting Instances of Conflict or Abuse

It may be helpful for us, whenever we are dealing with any difficult instance of conflict or abuse, to adopt the following attitude, individually and collectively.

Our prayer should be for *humility*, which allows us to look at our possible contribution to the problem, and for *simplicity*, to speak the truth in gentle and straightforward ways. We can pray for *rootedness*, which will allow us to be mindful of the values that bind us together as a community, and for *patience*, remembering that things will not change overnight. And always, we need a sense of *humor*. (*Arlene Kelly, "Dealing with Difficult Situations," PCN, October, 1994.*)

C. Limits of the Meeting.

Any case of conflict or abuse can bring an individual or group to its limits. How do we decide, individually or collectively, that we have reached the limits of what we can do in a seemingly unresolvable situation? Have we thought carefully enough about the simplest of needs, those for support, witnessing, prayer, and holding in the light? Is the situation not ours to resolve? If not, are we big enough to accept our smallness? Is this a situation



Pendle Hill

Strengthening Meetings

Strengthening and Nurturing Enduring Relationships

Arlene Kelly/January 22-24

Clerking

Katherine Smith/February 5-7

Ministry or Madness?

Quaker Educators in Public Schools

Cynthia Cox Crispin, George Crispin, Julia Digney/Feb. 12-14

Nurturing New, Small or Isolated Meetings

Betty Polster & Linda Chidsey/February 27-March 1

High School Youthcamp

July 11-18

Inquirer's Weekend: Basic Quakerism

July 16-18

For more information on these and other programs contact
Shirley Dodson, ext. 127 at (610) 566-4507 or (800) 742-3150
Box FR · 338 Plush Mill Road · Wallingford, PA 19086

where the most loving act is to set limits upon an individual's behavior (perhaps even to ask the individual to withdraw from the community) to protect either that individual, another, or the community? Can we so act while holding all those concerned in our hearts and prayers?

III. HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT SITUATIONS, IN GENERAL

The section of Portland's guidelines regarding conflict situations where there is not an issue of abuse is Arlene Kelly's article "Dealing With Difficult Situations," reprinted with permission from the October 1994 issue of *PCN*. Interested Friends can order a copy of that issue from *PCN*.

IV. HOW TO CONFRONT A SITUATION IN WHICH ONE FRIEND HAS ABUSED ANOTHER

A. Definition of Abuse

While there are many definitions of abuse, we have settled on a fairly simple one. Abuse occurs when one person has cause to know that certain behavior is hurtful, threatening, or offensive to another person and yet engages in that behavior with respect to that person.

Cause to know may take any one of several forms, including: the second person having signaled the first, by word or gesture, not to repeat certain conduct because it is unwelcome; a third person having warned the first person that such conduct is being experienced as unwelcome; or the community or society in general having put its members on notice that a particular behavior is typically experienced as unwelcome.²

² If the alleged abuser denies having had cause to know the behavior was experienced as abusive, that excuse is removed as soon as the meeting raises its concern with that person.

Additional Resources on Conflict and Abuse in Friends Meetings

Friends Meeting of Cambridge, MA, compilation of documents outlining one story of confronting a member's sexual abuse of a child (1987 - 95).

Arlene Kelly, "Dealing with Difficult Situations," *Pastoral Care Newsletter* Oct., 1994.

New England Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel Working Party on Sexual Abuse. "Addressing Sexual Abuse in Friends Meetings," 1994.

Rochester (NY) Friends Meeting, "Minute on the Meeting's Response to Child Sexual Abuse," (1995).

Lindley M. Winston, "A Challenge to be Clear and Caring," *Pastoral Care Newsletter*, June 1996.

Nurturing the Nurturer

attending to care of the soul

A CONFERENCE FOR FRIENDS WHO ARE CALLED TO CARE AND COUNSEL IN THEIR QUAKER COMMUNITIES

March 11-14, 1999 at Penn Center
St. Helena Island, South Carolina



Workshops • Youth Program • Child Care

For more information please contact:

Friends General Conference
Lyle Jenks or Marsha Holliday
1216 Arch Street, 2B • Philadelphia, PA 19107
TELEPHONE: 215-561-1700 • FAX: 215-561-0759
E-MAIL: nurture@fgc.quaker.org
www.quaker.org/fgc/nurtures/

We understand that on occasion someone may experience as abusive behavior which most people would find acceptable. In such a case, it is Ministry & Counsel's responsibility to initiate a process to discern whether or not the behavior is in fact hurtful, threatening, or offensive.

Abuse may be either emotional, physical, or sexual in nature. It may take the form of one person deliberately trying to upset another, an employer harassing an employee, a larger person picking on a smaller person. Most often the abusive behavior occurs because of a real or perceived difference in the relative power or sense of empowerment between the abuser and the abused.

To illustrate abuse, it may be helpful to look at but one of its manifestations: sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is any conduct by one person directed at another person when the first has cause to know that this conduct is experienced by the second person as sexual and unwelcome. The conduct may range from a sexually provocative remark, to seemingly harmless flirting, to unwanted touching, to stalking. The key questions are whether the second person experiences the conduct as sexual and unwelcome, and whether the first person has cause to know that the second so experiences the conduct. Has the second person signaled the first, either by word or gesture, not to repeat certain conduct because it is unwelcome and sexual? Has a third person warned the first person that such conduct is being experienced as sexual or unwelcome? Is it behavior that the community

or society in general has defined as typically experienced as sexual and unwelcome?

No matter what form abuse may take, it is always a violation of the Spirit.

B. Procedures for Confronting Instances When One PFM Participant Experiences Abusive Behavior by Another Participant

The following procedures might be implemented when one participant in the meeting, let us say Alpha, feels abused by another, say Beta.

Step 1. If Alpha is willing and feels safe enough to do so, Alpha can approach Beta, explain that Alpha experiences Beta's particular behavior as abusive, and ask Beta not to repeat it. (One variation: Alpha asks a Friend to come as a support person if both of them feel this would help Alpha to convey the message or help Beta to hear it.)

Step 2. If Beta does not agree to stop the behavior or if Beta does not actually stop it, or if Alpha is unwilling or unable to make a direct approach to Beta, then Alpha is encouraged to contact any one of the following: the Clerk of the Meeting, the Clerk of Ministry & Counsel, or the Clerk of Pastoral Oversight. (It is assumed here and throughout this section that Beta is not one of the three clerks.)

Step 3. Whichever clerk was contacted by Alpha would then inform the other two clerks (no one person being expected to bear such information alone) of Alpha's complaint. The three clerks (or persons designated by the clerks) would then meet with Alpha and listen with compassion and openness to Alpha's account of Beta's behavior and Alpha's experience of it. Then, in consultation with Alpha, the three clerks (or designees) would decide what the next steps should be: those that recognize the need for safety, justice, and the health of the community; those that give Beta a full chance to give Beta's account of what has transpired; those that will aid in the halting of any abusive conduct, the discernment of truth, the expression of regret or apology, and the beginning of healing.

Possible further step a. If Alpha agrees (see "c" below, if Alpha doesn't agree), the clerks/designees might meet with Beta to hear Beta's story; or a meeting might be arranged with both Alpha and Beta (each to have a support person if desired), wherein both stories are told to the clerks/designees, and Alpha and Beta have agreed to listen carefully and open-heartedly to one another's story.

Possible further step b. A carefully chosen, small committee of members, or an outside specialist specifically invited to address this problem, might facilitate a meeting such as that described in "a" above. Note that an outside specialist might help preserve a wanted confidentiality or bring much needed expertise at this early stage, but also note that the specialist may feel compelled by law or ethical requirements to report any ongoing abuse.

Possible further step c. If Alpha does not agree to representatives of PFM confronting Beta with Alpha's complaint of abusive behavior, then what can PFM do?

- offer to have a support committee formed for Alpha?
- make note of the reported incident in case other incidents involving Beta are reported later?
- seek clarity in prayer?
- advise Alpha to seek help from a professional or an agency?
- clearly inform Alpha of the limits of what PFM can do under these circumstances?

Possible ultimate steps. Steps beyond this point depend entirely upon the outcome of the initial meeting with Beta alone, or of that with Alpha and Beta together.

Clearly, if Alpha and Beta agree to what has happened and Beta acknowledges that the conduct was abusive, or

I Wish My Meeting Would Have Had These Guidelines....

Some years ago, when there was less public awareness and fewer resources for victims of abuse, I was being abused by my husband.

He was in many ways a good man with whom I shared similar interests and values. However, when I disagreed about something he wanted me to do, or not do, or even about an abstract idea he would sometimes become very angry and hit me repeatedly. Afterwards he would be sorry, but would blame me for having made him angry. The effects of his unpredictable anger have been long lasting for our children, now adults, as well as for me.

At the time, I had three sources of support: my extended family, my good friends, and members of my Friends meeting. I confided in a few in each group about what was going on in my marriage. Although they were sympathetic, no one intervened and told my husband that the violence had to stop.

A family member said she didn't want to be involved because she didn't want to hurt her relationship with my husband. A friend told me she and other friends had talked about my situation and had decided I "didn't mind." A sympathetic older Friend often said, "If thee just tries hard enough, everything will be all right." I did try, but it wasn't enough.

When I asked meeting members why they had never spoken of my marital difficulties, they said, kindly, "We didn't want to interfere."

If the Overseers of my meeting had the guidelines from Portland Meeting and followed them, there could have been great benefit for our family, my husband included. I am glad these guidelines are being distributed more widely and urge Friends to take seriously incidents of abuse among us.

Anonymous

Announcements

WHEN YOUR MEETING ENCOUNTERS A SPECIAL PROBLEM

Your meeting is faced with a painful divorce or perhaps the meeting is struggling with how to handle inactive members or a person with mental illness has become disruptive in meeting events. Where can you turn as you begin to seek a rightly ordered response?

In its five years of publication *Pastoral Care Newsletter* has addressed these and other topics of concern to Friends. Perhaps when that edition was published the topic was not on the front burner for your meeting, but now it is.

Kits of several copies of a single back issue of *PCN* can be sent to your meeting. Back titles include:

- Clearness for Membership
- Clearness Committees for Marriage or Commitment
- Meeting Support of Marriage and Couple Relationships
- Supporting Families through Separation & Divorce

To receive a full listing of back issues or to order a kit, contact Steve Gulick at 800-220-0796 ext. 7068 or steveg@pym.org. One to five copies - \$1.75 each; 6 to 10- \$1.25 each, 11 or more \$1.00 each plus postage.

MORE ON MEMORIAL SERVICES

Following the September 1998 issue of *PCN* on "Preparing for Memorial Services" we learned of an excellent set of guidelines developed by Twin Cities Meeting. "When Death Comes to Twin Cities Friends Meeting" is available on line at : <http://www.iss.stthomas.edu/decisions/when.htm>.

FRIENDS COUNSELING SERVICE

Professionally-trained counselors, who are active Friends and whose spiritual lives are integral to their approach to counseling, provide confidential services to individuals, couples, and families in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Service is not denied because of a person's lack of means. A complete list of counselors will appear in the March 1999 issue of *PCN*. For referral, contact Deborah Cooper, Counseling Service Consultant, at (215)248-0489.

COUPLE ENRICHMENT WEEKEND

April 16-18, 1999 at Camp Onas

Maintaining a strong and vital marriage in the current cultural climate can be a challenge. Overseers can support couples under their care by facilitating attendance at a couple enrichment event. Many meetings offer financial aid or provide child care to make it possible for a couple to attend.

This weekend, will be led by Gretta and Jacob Stone of Doylestown Meeting. It is open to any committed couple regardless of age, marital status, gender orientation, or membership in the Society of Friends. The cost for the weekend is \$150 per couple for room, board, and program. For information call Gretta and Jacob at (215)345-0575.

**In the Next Issue of *PCN*:
Facing Alcoholism within the Meeting**

experienced as abusive, apologizes for the conduct, agrees never to repeat it, and attempts to make amends, the further steps are likely to be fairly straightforward and a good outcome probable. If, however, there is either disagreement as to what happened, or as to whether Alpha should or should not have experienced the conduct as abusive or whether Beta should stop the conduct, then the clerks, committee, or consultant will be faced with more difficult questions, such as:

- Does PFM have the possibility, skills, time, willingness to address and resolve this situation?
- Do we need outside experts to help us?
- Would any larger Quaker body be of help in some way?
- Does safety or the law require notification of any governmental agency? What are the consequences to Alpha, to Beta, and to the community of taking this step? What are the consequences of not taking it?
- Could a support committee of three members be formed for each of Alpha and Beta? Could these two committees be set up so that there is some mechanism of communication between them, maybe through a third

person, so that each committee does not work in complete isolation from the other?

-- Would a mediation committee or expert be of help? Note that whereas mediation is often helpful in other kinds of conflict, it is less likely to work and we are unlikely to find experts willing to try it in a case of abuse, where it appears that Beta is dishonestly denying what has occurred or refusing to accept that the conduct was abusive, or where there is a fear for safety or a significant difference in the sense of empowerment between Alpha and Beta.

All steps in this process will require deep, prayerful listening to the specifics of the situation. Our aim is to do all in our power to assist the work of the Spirit towards clarity, justice, safety and sanctuary for all in the meeting, and reconciliation, where possible. The need is to focus upon dealing with the *behavior* while holding each *being* in the Light.

We encourage anyone involved in a case of conflict or abuse -- Alpha, Beta, and those who meet with them to try to resolve the matter -- to read deeply in the literature listed in the resource section.

V. CONFIDENTIALITY

Difficult questions of confidentiality arise whenever conflict or abuse occurs within a community. Who needs to know what? Who has a right to privacy that should be honored? How do we strike a balance between the need of various individuals or groups for privacy and others' need for disclosure? Most cases of conflict will require an evaluation of these questions, a process which is related to but also beyond the consideration of the conflict itself.

When a question of confidentiality versus disclosure arises, Friends might consider, at a minimum, the following:

1. Is anyone's safety at risk? If so, how is his/her safety best insured -- by what degree of confidentiality and what degree of disclosure?
2. Is anyone's psychological well-being at risk? If so, by what degree of confidentiality or disclosure is her/his well-being best protected?
3. What is the need of any individual or part of the community to know certain information? Is that need of greater importance than the need for confidentiality that some other individual or group has?
4. If there is a need for the community as a whole to know something of the matter, how it's being processed, or its ultimate resolution, can publication of what needs to be known be done in a way that respects the individual's need for confidentiality?
5. Is there a need to contact the police, a government agency, an outside psychotherapist, mediator, lawyer or other professional, perhaps because of a legal requirement, a concern for safety, or a felt need for the bringing to bear of professional services from beyond the meeting? If so, and if that outsider might feel compelled by the facts and applicable law to commence legal action against a participant in the meeting or in some way involve outside agencies in the lives of a meeting participant, are we as Friends ready for this step and how do we need to adjust or maintain our Quaker processes in the face of such developments?

VI. SOME PROACTIVE STEPS FRIENDS CAN TAKE TO AVERT OR REDUCE CONFLICT OR INJURY TO THE COMMUNITY OR TO ANOTHER FRIEND

A. Whenever a Friend or a Committee is dealing with a conflict between two participants in the meeting, every care should be taken to provide equal support, opportunity for prayer, and chance to use Quaker processes to each person in conflict and notify each that

such is being offered to all those involved.

B. Friends have a dual obligation -- to be as compassionate as is possible toward all parties *and* to set very clear and firm limits when they are necessary to protect the safety of a person. Experience shows that many of us have trouble with one or both of these obligations. Any workshop or exercise that a meeting holds to reflect upon these obligations and to role play through difficult hypothetical situations may help the meeting meet both obligations when real conflict or abuse arises within the meeting community.

C. If any Friend is considering taking any action, legal or otherwise, that is likely to affect the PFM community or meeting for worship, that Friend is asked to notify the Clerk of Meeting of that action, preferably before it is taken and in any case as soon as possible thereafter.

D. If any Friend attends any function in a way that is likely to give the appearance that the Friend represents Portland Friends Meeting when she/he is there only in her/his personal capacity, that Friend should strongly consider finding ways to inform those present that she/he is not representing the meeting.

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*Portland Meeting invites your comments and suggestions:
Portland Friends Meeting, 1837 Forest Avenue, Portland, ME
04103*

Questions for Reflection

1. How can our meeting immediately protect victims of harassment or abuse?
2. If a someone in the meeting had a concern about an incident of harassment or abuse how would they know whom to contact?
3. What do we need to do to prepare our meeting to respond promptly and appropriately when a concern is raised?
4. What process do we have for being clear and firm with members or attenders who behave inappropriately?
5. What resources are available to overseers if a situation arises that seems to be beyond our ability to respond adequately?
6. In what ways might the guidelines developed by Portland Friends need to be modified to be appropriate for our meeting?

Pastoral Care Newsletter is published quarterly by the Family Relations Concerns Group of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Harriet Heath, clerk. Patricia McBee, editor. We are located at 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia, PA 19102. Comments are welcome. **Please do not duplicate without permission.** To obtain additional copies or to subscribe, contact Steve Gulick, at 215-241-7068 or steveg@pym.org.