

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

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

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Ministry to Older People Experiencing Disabilities

by Rose Ketterer

I am not yet old, having just turned fifty-seven this spring. My background in aging comes from academic study, internships in two nursing homes, and participation in the care of several aged relatives. I have experienced temporary disability, both physical and cognitive, for about eighteen months. I could barely walk, was in constant pain, and suffered severe short-term memory disruption. The hardest part of my recuperation was my inability to live as an active Friend. My ministry shriveled and, at times, I wondered whether I really was a Quaker any more. What helped most was encouragement to attend a retreat for which one Friend made all financial and transportation arrangements, and the faithful calls, week after week, from a member of Worship and Ministry, offering rides to meeting. Most disappointing was a small "care circle" that met only once. My remarks rise from this background.

When I began to attend Friends worship, I was struck by the many quite old people who were extremely active in organizing and facilitating the life of the meeting. Since then, I've heard other convinced Friends describe their surprise and delight in the radical leadership of white-haired Friends. It is reassuring to know that none of us will ever be considered unfit for spiritual or social ministry simply by reason of age.

Although many people retain health and strength into their eighties and beyond, sometimes until the very end of their lives, others are not so fortunate. Old age afflicts many with decreased energy, less acute vision, and impaired hearing, as well as various chronic health problems. Disability activists sometimes refer to the able-bodied as "temporarily able-bodied," a caution that those of us who live long



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will probably encounter limitations on our mobility and sensory losses at some time in our lives.

My first experience with the changing needs of an aged person came when I was eleven years old. My grandmother, a strong and determined character, had asked me to accompany her to a social event. After the gathering, we climbed into a trolley car for the journey home. When the trolley started, Grandmom staggered and stumbled across the aisle, bumping her head on a pole. The conductor scolded me, "Why aren't you taking better care of your grandmother, a big girl like you?" My grandmother was tiny, less than five feet tall and slightly built, but I had never thought of her as needing anyone's care, certainly not mine. Shocked and apologetic, it didn't occur to me even then that she had asked me to come along, not as a child to a treat or a companion on an outing, but as an escort. I knew her eyesight was deteriorating because of cataracts. No one knew

of the cancer that would incapacitate her soon after that day. She never asked me for help, and I was not sensitive enough to offer any.

The situation reverberates for me today in relation to pastoral care in our Friends meetings. When my grandmother stumbled, I felt helpless. I had no idea how to respond to her weakness. Friends may also hesitate to offer help because of the shame and grief attached to disability in our culture. How often do we act as my grandmother did, hiding our needs, screening our important struggles? How often do we act as I did, failing to recognize problems that may be obvious to strangers? I believe that

refusing to ask for help and failing to perceive needs are vital aspects of pastoral care that challenge Friends, especially in regard to disabilities of aged members and those who care for elders.

Building a Supportive Community

Historically, Friends have responded to the needs of aged members by pioneering the development of group residences and by producing a number of publications on aging and old age. The writings tend to be optimistic about the opportunities for continued spiritual development and emotional well-being in late life. The topics of loss and

One meeting's experience:

Senior Concerns Committee at Millville Meeting

Millville Meeting is a small meeting (55 members) in rural north central Pennsylvania. Their Overseers committee has 5 members. In the spring of 1997, a few members became concerned about the needs of a growing number of older members. Overseers had been addressing these needs on an individual basis, but there was a sense that this care could be given in a more focused way. Thus was born the "Senior Concerns Committee," first on an *ad hoc* basis and now as a standing committee of the meeting.

The committee began by holding small group round table discussions with senior members to hear what were their concerns and what they would hope for from the meeting. This was followed by individual interviews with each of the 10 or so older people in the meeting. The interviews began with what are your concerns today and what are your worries for tomorrow? Those interviews have resulted in a range of responses based on the older member needs and desires from the meeting including: meeting jointly with family members to discuss plans for a possible period of disability; education about resources such as reverse mortgages, long term care facilities, living wills, durable power of attorney for health care; and helping assess the older persons' homes for safety hazards and accessibility.

It has also led to modifications at the meeting to be more responsive. Arrangements are being made for transportation to meeting for worship when needed. There is now a wheelchair available at the meetinghouse and plans are being made for a more accessible bathroom. Older members who can no longer carry full committee work continue on committees bringing the skills and energy they have available. Every older member has a "buddy" who phones every day to check in. Often, two older members are buddies for one another. Every few

months there is a special event for older members, often in the home of one of the older members.

The Senior Concerns Committee meets monthly and briefly reviews every senior's situation. A review may be just a 30 second check-in, but it provides an opportunity to be responsive if a special situation has come up. They have developed a "Senior Inventory," (see page 3) which has been continually revised to meet the evolving understanding of the committee and the seniors. This questionnaire helps the committee to be attentive to areas of concern. The committee includes a nutritionist, a psychologist, an attorney, and a person with skills in financial management so that these skills can be available for seniors planning for their futures.

The work of the committee is delicate and sensitive. At first there was a natural reserve on the part of some older members about sharing personal information and how it would be used. There is also a delicate balance of not usurping the responsibilities of family members. The committee has worked carefully with these concerns. They observe strict confidentiality on their work and their written records. They speak to family members or others only with the authorization of the older person. Over these two years the meeting has come to trust and value the work of the Senior Concerns Committee.

The work with seniors has produced new approaches to caring for younger members of the meeting as well. A new committee is forming to address issues of aging with middle-aged members. Every member, of any age, is encouraged to have emergency medical information on file with the meeting. Overseers have begun the process of visiting all meeting families in their homes.

*Information for this article was provide by
Robert Miller, Clerk of Overseers
Millville (PA) Meeting*

disability are generally cushioned with admonitions that old age is much more than a state of diminishment. There is little that addresses the effects of loss of mobility, limitations on driving, memory disruptions and lessened capacity for work.

No one wants to offend by offering help that isn't needed and no one wants to be a needy person who always asks for help. Most of our doubts about whether to offer or accept assistance are resolved when the people involved know each other well. Friends have an ideal forum for encouraging, awareness of the circumstances of others' lives in worship-sharing. A regular program of worship-sharing in small support groups fosters deep listening, respectful attention to the pressures of individual situations, and appreciation of each person's unique gifts and burdens. Sample queries could include: Where am I most stressed in my daily life? What support do I need to lead a happier, more centered life? How could the meeting help me? How could I help the meeting? What is the finest act of ministry ever done for me? Have I ever felt that Friends let me down?

The meeting can educate members in issues of aging and disability through called meetings, adult first day classes, and articles in the newsletter. Committees or an adult class can choose a pamphlet on aging, disability, or pastoral care to read together. After the reading, guided discussion, perhaps relating the material to queries, can help Friends express concerns and suggest action.

If this process of sharing and education reveals that the meeting is not being adequately responsive to the needs of older persons, the meeting's pastoral group (Overseers, Ministry and Oversight or other body) may call for those with special sensitivity to the changing needs of members to come forward. Announcements after worship and in the newsletter can help the whole meeting understand what to do and whom to alert in case of need. One strong strategy is to divide the entire membership into small sharing groups with clear lines of communication to the pastoral group.

Pastoral care can reach beyond simple adjustment to changing needs. It can facilitate the developmental tasks of old age by helping aged Friends to reflect on their lives, celebrate their mystical tendencies, summarize their wisdom, and find ways to nurture and encourage younger people. For example, one longtime first day teacher who no longer has the energy to work with children holds

workshops for inexperienced volunteers and has recorded topics that worked well with her classes.

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Senior Concerns Inventory

Millville (PA) Meeting

Below is a summary of the questionnaire used by the Senior Concerns Committee of Millville Meeting. For an explanation of how it is used, see sidebar article on page 2.

I. Background information

Name, address, phone number, birth date
Emergency contact, physician contact
Household members
Immediate family and close friends' address and phone
Millville Meeting buddy's name and phone
Persons to be notified in case of illness
Persons who have access to your house

II. Visit information

Date, names of visitors
Names of family or friends in attendance

III. Senior Concerns

[These topics is explored with the person being visited. On Millville Meeting's form there are lines after each item for writing information and evaluation.]

- A. Daily routines
- B. Transportation
- C. Household safety and maintenance
- D. Medical Needs
 medications, primary and other physicians
- E. Mental health
- F. Health habits and nutrition
- G. Spiritual needs
- H. Social life
- I. Recreational and avocational interests
- J. Financial and legal
 Will -- executor, date, location
 Living will -- date and location
 Durable health care agent -- name, date, location
 Power of attorney -- name, date, location
 Durable power of attorney -- name, date, location
 Location of information regarding financial institutions and account numbers
- K. Insurance
 Health insurance -- type & policy number
 Long term care insurance, other.
- L. Death Requests
 Role of Millville Meeting in making arrangements;
 Family members to be in contact with,
 Wishes regarding memorial service
 Wishes regarding burial or cremation.

IV. Summary

Present status
Recommendations and solutions
Concerns for the future

Books on Aging

Aging and Disabilities: Seeking Common Ground, edited by Edward F. Ansello and Nancy N. Eustis, Baywood Pub, 1992.

Aging: God's Challenge to Church and Synagogue, Richard H. Gentzler and Donald F. Clinger, 1996, Discipleship Resources.

Aging and the Life Course: An Introduction to Social Gerontology, Jill S. Quadagno, 1998, McGraw.

The Measure of My Days, Florida Scott-Maxwell, 1979, Viking Penguin.

Number Our Days, Barbara Myerhoff, 1980, Touchstone Books.

On Hallowing Life's Diminishments, by John Yungblut, 1990, Pendle Hill pamphlet 292.

Resources on Aging

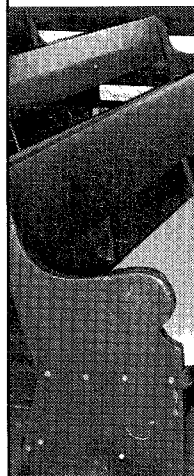
Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Aging Programs
Elizabeth Balderston, Coordinator 215-241-7226
Rich source of information on Friends' and other services and organizations.

Pennsylvania's Initiative on Assisted Technology (PIAT) Temple University 800-204-7428
Nationwide agency under federal mandate to increase access to technology for people with disabilities. **For contact in your state** check the PIAT website at www.temple.edu/inst_disabilities.



Pendle Hill

Strengthening Meetings



Life Integration Through Journal Work

Lois Frey · November 7-12

Clerking

Katherine Smith · November 19-21

An Introduction to Pastoral Care for Quakers

Judy Guerry · February 6-11

Exploring Our Faith: Looking at Books of Faith and Practice

Jan Hoffman · April 23-28

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Of Interest to Overseers...

WEEK LONG COURSE ON PASTORAL CARE AT PENDLE HILL February 6-11, 2000

For many of us providing pastoral care in our meetings is a new role and we have little or no professional training. Recognizing this need, Pendle Hill is offering a weeklong course *An Introduction to Pastoral Care for Quakers* led by Judy Guerry, a member of the Huntsville, Alabama Friends Meeting. This course is designed to give Friends the information needed to assess needs for pastoral care within meetings and to teach basic skills for providing this kind of service to one another.

If someone in your meeting is interested in this course, please call Pendle Hill (800) 742-3150, ext. 142, for more information. Scholarship aid, through a generous grant from the Thomas H. and Mary Williams Shoemaker Fund, is available.

Oops!

PCN regrets that in the June 1999 issue the credit was left off the article "As a Single Person." It was written by Nancy Irving of Olympia (Washington) Meeting.

SPREAD THE WORD ON PCN

Even though we are now in the 7th year of PCN, we find that there are many meetings who haven't learned about this resource. Please share your experience of PCN with Friends in other meetings.

Also, please remember not to photocopy PCN. By purchasing sufficient subscriptions for your meeting's needs, you help to support the editorial costs. Subscription rates are designed to make it easy to get enough for every overseer.

We are hoping to increase our circulation during this year so that we can avoid increasing subscription costs. You are our best ambassadors. Your help is appreciated.

FRIENDS COUNSELING SERVICE

Friends Counseling Service not only provides counseling to individuals, couples, and families, but also provides consultations and workshops for meetings on issues pertaining to care of members.

A complete list of counselors appeared in the March 1999 issue of PCN. For information or a referral, contact Deborah Cooper, Counseling Service Consultant, at (215)248-0489.

Accepting and Honoring the Changes that Come with Disability

Friends have chosen to belong to a religious society that requires a great deal of effort from each member. We value active commitment to spiritual ideals and active involvement in social concerns. One danger in the high valuation Friends place on activity is that we may inadvertently devalue those, including ourselves, who become less active.

Viktor Frankl, existential psychotherapist, survivor of Nazi death camps, and author of the inspirational *Man's Search for Meaning*, writes about a nurse who was incapacitated by terminal illness. The woman had derived great satisfaction from caring for and comforting others. Unable to work any longer, she sank into severe depression. Frankl struggled to help the woman find meaning in the final stages of her life but was defeated by her bitter judgment of her own uselessness until he asked whether the patients she had nursed had also been useless. The woman defended her patients fiercely, cherishing the many spiritual and emotional gifts they had given her. Then Frankl asked if she could give the same gift to those who cared for her, blessing their lives by allowing them to minister to her.

When health problems or conflicting obligations cause Friends to become less active in the ministry, they may, like Frankl's nurse, feel less worthy. Low self-esteem and depression can make asking for help almost impossible. Dependency imposed by health limitations is a hard way of life and one that is very different from an active life freely chosen. The humility needed to submit to the care of others is not a skill that is praised or taught in our individualistic culture.

Responding to Individual Needs

A few guidelines will spot most serious problems. Has an individual withdrawn from usual activities? Has movement become more limited? Has driving become difficult? Has there been a strong change in personal style, an assertive person becoming very quiet or an equable person irritable and touchy? Has memory deteriorated markedly, not just the common forgetting of names but troubling lapses that could cause danger or wildly unexpected or frequent lapses? Does someone frequently remark that s/he can't hear or see something when others seem to have no difficulty? Does someone uncharacteristically decline social invitations and requests for service?

Our Quaker tradition of forthright speech can empower honest, caring inquiries whenever a Friend seems overburdened. By asking what is happening and what is desired, the meeting can tailor its response to the needs of each individual.

Meetings can encourage all members to make plans in advance of a time of disability. If a problem should become obvious within the meeting, who should be notified? The next of kin or geographically nearest relative may not be the ideal contact. Do loved ones know what an individual would want?

Adapting a House or Apartment for an Elderly or Disabled Resident and good ideas for everyone...

- Smoke detectors, on a wall where they are accessible to turn off a false alarm and to change batteries
- Warning light on stove and oven to tell when it is on
- Doorbell(s) which can be heard throughout the house
- Audible telephone bell, and phones where person spends time: by bed, by TV, in bathroom, etc.
- Portable phones
- Special phone equipment for hearing or sight impaired
- Important numbers written large and near every phone
- Remove floor hazards – electric cords, slippery rugs, curled edges and corners of rugs, steps
- Bright lights on stairways, outside entrances, garage door
- Large, illuminated outside house numbers
- Light switches that are activated by noise or motion
- One of those long things with a grip to reach things on high shelves or things that fall down out of reach
- Grab bars in tub and shower
- Raised toilet, if person has trouble sitting or rising from sitting position
- Timed thermostat for warmth when getting out of bed
- Remote control TV
- Portable timers, with long-ringing bells, to use as reminder of things cooking, end of washer cycle, time to take pills, appointments
- Labeled, compartmentalized containers for medicine
- Sturdy step stool, with something to hold onto, near pantry and refrigerator, to reach high shelves in kitchen, basement, etc. One for each place
- Magnifying glasses near phone book, near pantry and refrigerator for reading food labels and cooking instructions, in bathroom for medicine directions
- Reorganize storage to avoid lifting and bending
- Large, readable outdoor thermometer
- More chairs with arms, raiseable (electric) seats on chairs
- Combination storm/screens, at least on windows the person will open frequently

Have long-term care insurance, living wills and powers of attorney been considered? Can an individual's home be modified for mobility limitations? A man once chose a long-term care facility for his mother based on his own preferences: the menu and the beauty of the grounds. Unfortunately, the most important aspect of the mother's daily life was the activities program, which did not meet her needs. Making one's own arrangements in advance may ease the loss of freedom when independent living can not be sustained.

Offers of help should be specific. Vagueness is usually received as lack of interest, so a general "Let us know if there's anything you need" is less useful than a direct offer of comfortable seating or help in using electronic mail. Skilled listeners and problem solvers can facilitate brainstorming with disabled or overstressed members about how to facilitate their full participation and ministry. Friends may discover simple, practical answers to some problems, such as making sure everyone can hear vocal ministry during worship or scheduling activities such as midweek meeting or study groups in elders' homes, if that is their wish.

The meeting need not, and probably cannot, provide all services, but the meeting can help in working with the member's support system and in helping to discover resources within the community. It is crucial, however, not to raise false hopes. One Friend was deeply disappointed by a support group that met twice, raising expectations of sustained and dramatic help that never materialized. The most important support may be simply letting Friends know that someone cares.

Intimacy based on deep knowledge of one another and appreciation for each one's gifts and limitations helps us to arrive at the most appropriate response. Support groups or clearness committees can be formed to help every member of the meeting to name their gifts, and to call forth those who love to minister in various ways. If a Friend's responsibilities have grown too heavy, others can suggest lightening the load, perhaps by reduced committee work or help with transportation. When members suffer changes in their abilities, the pastoral

group can search for other means of service that fit their gifts but require less strength and mobility. Thus ministry to elders can offer opportunities for deep and sustained spiritual growth to the whole meeting community.

I find the essence of Quaker community in one of Kenneth Boulding's Naylor Sonnets which opens "Are not my friends built round me like a wall?" Ministering to disabled older members and those who care for elders can help Friends stand together against the ravages of pain and loss. When Friends can rely on the constancy of communal support, we can say, as the sonnet continues:

"We stand together in a firm stockade
Around the cheerful fire our faith has made,
Its light reflected from the eyes of all."

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Rose Ketterer is a member of Haddonfield (NJ) Meeting. She has served on Worship and Ministry both for Haddonfield Meeting and for Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

Questions for Reflection

1. How do Friends feel when faced with illness or incapacity in ourselves or others? How do these feelings color our work in pastoral care?
2. How can Friends be encouraged to share their feelings and articulate their needs to others in the meeting?
3. What procedures are in place to assist Friends laboring under disabling circumstances?
4. Given our limitations, what reasonable expectations can we have for ministry to older members and members who care for disabled elders? If unsatisfied with our response, how can we achieve a more welcome answer?
5. Is everyone in the meeting equally likely to receive support in adversity? What personal characteristics do we most value and therefore respond to most readily? How can we be more receptive to the need of those to whom we are less drawn?
6. How can vocal ministry be more available to those with hearing impairments: voice projection training for the general membership, use of a sound system, recording a summary of verbal ministry, or other methods?

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.