

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

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

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Growing into the Role of Pastoral Caregiver

by Gay Howard

Quakers think of a good meeting as a caring community. Caring for each other is laid on all members, but the meeting gives special responsibility for pastoral care to those called to our committees known as Overseers or Ministry and Counsel or Membership and Care – the folks reading this newsletter. The work of caring for another is important in the community of the meeting – important in the lives of the one cared for and the one caring.

How do we, often equipped with no more than a willingness to serve, learn to give the care that is needed? Overseers grow into the ability to do the work through apprenticeship and through the support of other overseers and the meeting. The outcome is God's responsibility.

How can the meeting wisely choose persons for this role?

Our meetings are made up of ordinary people who have some of the required gifts some of the time. The nominating committee might begin with those who already have skills and experience in caregiving and counseling. More importantly, perhaps, the nominating committee will seek those who will rely on experienced overseers and the Inner Light to help them grow into this role.

Willingness to serve and willingness to learn the art of caregiving are primary attributes. Compassion, tact, and discretion are all needed in this work. An active personal spiritual life and participation in the spiritual life of the meetings are a good training ground. Perhaps the most essential gift is the ability to listen. Being aware, in part, of one's own brokenness, faults, and failures is a valuable attribute

for pastoral caregivers; as is being aware when more support or skill is needed than you can give and being able to ask for help.

Discerning a calling to serve

Being asked to be an overseer can be overwhelming. Most of us find that our own lives are full of uncertainties, messes, failures, and making do. How then can we help someone else with problems perhaps far worse than our own?

In considering an invitation to serve, a prospective overseer might consider: how does this new commitment fit with the rest of my life? What experience and skills do I have that will be used? Am I willing to invest the time and energy in learning the art of being a good overseer? What can I learn in this context? Will this bring me closer to my community?



Gay Howard

Will the experience of being a caregiver and listener deepen my spiritual life?

We can ask the Inward Teacher whether this is work we should undertake, wait for the answer, and do our best to discern the response. What if I say "no," how will that feel? How will "yes" feel?

What skills are called for?

Pastoral care calls on us to support people as they work out practical problems: physical, psychological, emotional, financial, and medical. Below are some of the key skills an overseer can develop in order to be responsive to these needs.

Listening skills are important. Indeed listening skills are important in all aspects of the Quaker meeting. Meeting for Worship is listening to God and listening to other Friends as they speak. Meeting for Business and committee meetings are times when we listen. There are times to speak, but speaking too much is more likely to be a problem than speaking too little. One must be willing to be present to the other's distress without feeling obligated to fix it. Listening and especially active listening are skills which can be learned and can be honed with practice.

Plain speaking, or telling the truth with compassion, is also called for in giving pastoral care. Sometimes the overseer has to call a member's attention to behavior which is destructive to that member, to another person, or to the community. This is very hard to do. Overseers can help one another develop the skill of knowing when and how to state an uncomfortable truth with love and compassion.

It is also important to be able to stay present in difficult situation without running away. In serious circumstances it is important that the meeting and individuals in the meeting carry out their responsibilities and not just let things slide because the situation is so difficult. No action may lead to a worse situation.

An individual overseer is not expected to have the skills to deal with all of the issues that arise. We can look for resources among the other overseers, in the meeting, in the wider Quaker family, and the community. An important skill for an overseer is to be able to recognize when a situation is too much to be handled alone and to seek appropriate assistance. Overseers as a body need to develop the discernment to know when outside professional help is required.

Crucial decisions have to be made about what information should be communicated to whom and what information should be kept confidential. This, too, is a skill to be developed. Errors can be made in either direction. Often the clerk of overseers can be helpful in making these judgements.

Developing the needed skills

In the past, when Quakers were born into Quaker communities they had the opportunity to absorb all aspects of being a Quaker through life experience, perceiving the models of Quaker behavior and faith around them. The teaching of how to be and behave is still best imparted by being with a person who has the desired qualities and behaviors. However, in this time, when Quakers often have joined as adults and are dispersed throughout

Reflections on Overseers' Role

By Nadine Hoover

The Religious Society of Friends calls us to a God-centered way of life. We are called to shape our outward lives to reflect the inward experience of the Sacred. Early Friends claimed that the Second Coming is *now*. As each of us goes through the continuing process of conversion, the Christ Within sanctifies all that is of God and illuminates all adversaries. As experienced by early Friends, our lifelong work is the ongoing conversion of manners (change in our behavior and our very selves) as directed by the Inward Guide, submitting all relationships, habits, possessions, finances, commitments to the Living Spirit.

Wm. Penn raised a high standard: "They were changed men themselves before they went about to change others" (1694). We overseers can first

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Nadine Hoover

the population, we need to be intentional about learning the skills of providing pastoral care.

In large, mature meetings experienced overseers can mentor a new overseer or there can be an orientation session for new overseers. Some meetings even prepare an "Overseers Handbook" which explains procedures for membership and other basic work of the committee. In small or new meetings where there may not be a sense of grounding in Quaker practice, new pastoral caregivers can seek instruction from experienced Friends in the quarterly or yearly meeting. The traveling ministry program at Friends General Conference or the Pendle Hill on the Road program might bring an experienced overseer to your meeting to help the whole committee or the whole meeting understand more fully the work of overseers.

continued from previous page

practice being Friends ourselves: asking for clearness committees, bringing our life decisions before the meeting for discernment, and sharing the sufferings as well as the joys experienced in this formation. From experimenting with how to express the Divine in all that we are, do, and say and testing our discernment in the meeting, we become intimately acquainted with God, our lives speak, and we bear witness to God's Truth. Witness isn't attacking the wrong; rather it is truly knowing the Seed of Life and living it as we serve in providing oversight in our meeting.

At our best we are convinced of the Power of the Living Spirit and experience that Living Spirit in and among us. Many Friends experience that Power just fleetingly, if at all. Perhaps we too have felt the brush of the Spirit as we have stood in a field and felt that all was well, or laughed with abandon or fully trusted, or stood in a clean kitchen, grateful for everything. As we share experiences not just blissful mountaintop experiences, but calm, still, ordinary experiences, we find the Living Spirit there embracing and completing us even in our human condition of brokenness and separation. In our failings we see beyond ourselves to know, accept, and appreciate others and the Spirit.

It is the high calling of oversight committees to bring forward this quality in our community.

This direct modeling can be supplemented by reading and workshops. *Pastoral Care Newsletter* is intended to address just this need. Useful materials are available from Friends General Conference Bookstore and from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Library. Quaker retreat centers such as Quaker Center at Ben Lomond in California, Powell House in New York state, and Pendle Hill just outside Philadelphia periodically offer workshops to train overseers. Some yearly meetings give workshops at their annual gatherings, or at other times, to address concerns of overseers and impart skills. The annual Gathering of Friends General Conference often offers workshops useful in developing the skills of pastoral care.

PCN Orientation Packet for New Committee Members

You can make an orientation packet for new members of your committee by combining this issue "Growing into the Role of Pastoral Caregiver" with these back issues of PCN:

"The Ministry of Pastoral Care" by Arlene Kelly
"Reflections of an Overseer" by Regina H. Peasley
"Discerning Our Leadings as Overseers" by Martha Bush
"Helping Friends Seek Professional Help" by Barbara T. Snipes

You may also wish to compile a packet on the basic tasks of overseers.

"Membership and the Clearness Process" by the Editors of PCN
"Inactive Members: Keeping Some and Helping Others to Move on" by Sue Heath
"Clearness for Marriage or Commitment" by Jan Hoffman
"Meeting Support of Marriage and Couple Relationships" by Patricia McBee
"Supporting Families through Separation and Divorce" by Jean B. Robbins
"Nurturing the Meeting Community," by Arlene Kelly.

Back issues of PCN are available from Family Relations Concerns Group, PYM, 1515 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102. Please send us a list of back issues you are ordering and how many copies of each issue you want. Include your check in the amounts indicated below:

1-5 copies \$1.75 each

6-10 copies \$1.25 each

11 or more \$1.00 each

all plus 20% for postage and handling

How can overseers support each other in carrying out their work?

As a group overseers can teach each other either directly with words or indirectly by being who they are, modeling behavior. Initiative and ideas come from an individual but are affirmed or modified by the group. The variety of gifts among the members of the committee is a great asset. As overseers work together, they will notice each other's gifts. Naming these gifts and encouraging their growth enhances the individual and the group. Sometimes people do not

Some Thoughts on Listening

When I ask you to listen to me and you start by giving advice, you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn't feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problem, you have failed me, strange as it may seem.

Listen! All I ask is that you listen, not talk or do ... just hear me.

When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and inadequacy.

And I can do for myself. I'm not helpless. Maybe discouraged and faltering, but not helpless.

But when you accept me as simple fact, that I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you and get about the business of understanding what's behind this irrational feeling. And when that's clear, the answers are obvious and I don't need advice.

Irrational feelings make sense when we understand what's behind them.

Perhaps that's why prayer works, sometimes, for some people ... because God is mute, and He or She doesn't give advice or try to fix things. God just listens and lets you work it out yourself.

So, please listen and just hear me. And if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn, and I'll listen to you.

Ralph Roughton, Quoted in Hartford, Connecticut, Meeting Newsletter April 1981.

recognize their own gifts. How wonderful to be affirmed by learning that I have a gift I did not know I had! The group and each person can participate in naming gifts and encouraging their growth.

Together overseers can assess the particular situation and pool information, insights, experience, and gifts. After an overseer has met with a member it may be unclear how to proceed. Then it may be appropriate to share the results with other overseers so that more insights, gifts, and experience can be used. In the group, people can give each other affirmation. Discussion (or worship sharing) may lead to a new approach. Input from a variety of people on the committee may give a better understanding of the reality of the situation. Through working together committee members help one another develop compassion, insight, and courage to act.

The spiritual basis of our work

The spiritual basis of pastoral care begins in the spiritual vitality of the meeting as a whole. If the Spirit is clearly felt in and out of meeting for worship, every person knows that he is deeply cared for. A

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Announcements

At PYM March 23, 2000 Pastoral Care Resources for Meetings

On Thursday afternoon during Philadelphia Yearly Meeting sessions there will be two occasions for Overseers and other pastoral caregivers to share questions, ideas, and resources. You are invited to participate in one or both of these sessions if you are concerned with pastoral care in your meeting. There will be time to meet with members of Family Relations Concerns Group, the editorial committee of *Pastoral Care Newsletter*, and other knowledgeable and experienced Friends. There will also be a display of resources of interest to Overseers.

Many meetings face similar issues, and this is an opportunity to share together, to gain support, and to get new information. These sessions will be shaped by the concerns and questions of the participants.

Time to Renew

Enclosed with this issue are subscription forms for Volume 8 of *Pastoral Care Newsletter*. We are looking forward to issues on helping new members learn the ways of Friends and on the meeting's care for the terminally ill. Other topics being considered are a new look at the role of elders, and helping the meeting address concerns over property issues.

By renewing in the spring you help us to plan and budget for the coming year and you insure that you'll receive the first issue of the fall. If you are not receiving a copy of *PCN* for each member of your committee, consider increasing your subscription to include everyone.

Friends Counseling Service

The Friends Counseling Service provides confidential services to individuals, couples, and families in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Service is not denied because of a person's lack of means. Friends may call a counselor directly or phone Deborah Cooper, Counseling Service Coordinator, at 215-248-0489 for a referral.

Henry Beck, Ph.D.

Bala Cynwyd & Lansdale PA
610-664-5443

Ray Bentman, M.Ed.

Philadelphia, PA
215-985-1314

Terence Carroll, ACSW

Philadelphia, PA
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John L. Hall, Ph.D.

Downingtown & Mt. Airy, PA
610-458-9060

Harriet Heath, Ph.D.

(parenting issues only)
Haverford, PA
610-649-7037

Gary M. Johnson, Ph.D.

Wilmington, DE
302-656-1295

Beth Resko, ACSW, LSW

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Karin M. Sannwald, ACSW

Haddonfield, NJ
609-427-9475

James J. Saxon, Ph.D.

Swarthmore, PA
610-544-7583

John Scardina, Ed.M.

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610-696-2153

Fran Van Allen, M.A.

Philadelphia & Media, PA
610-358-3212

Lindley M. Winston, M.D.

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spiritually alive meeting can be joyfully creative in its ways of caring. Ordinary women and men will be guided by the Holy Spirit to be tender and present in caring for one another. How we treat each other demonstrates our understanding of God and how we value other people.

The work of the overseer will depend on his or her spiritual life, which will be tested and enriched by the work. One way to look at the work of pastoral care within a meeting is that with one hand one reaches to God and with the other hand to another person. Then God's power flows. God's power can shape the right response to a person's unique circumstances.

Love and the presence of God work together in pastoral care. Love of God, love of others, and love

of oneself are all needed. We cannot grow into our whole selves, the person we were destined to be, without receiving love and learning to love. When we love and when we are loved, we are in a reciprocal relationship. This is the unseen, and often ignored, fabric of our world; God is at the center, the source of all love. Pastoral care is an activity in which both participants are learning to give and receive compassion, the fundamental skill for life.

The forerunner and companion of love is respect. In caring for another human being, one is often required to speak a truth which is so painful that the receiving person can only hear it if it is spoken with compassion and respect. It is grace that enables us to speak a painful truth with love. Learning to love comes out of a continuing

relationship with God, others and oneself. These relationships are built by spending time listening to God, contemplation, listening to others, deep sharing, spiritual friendship, and listening to oneself as we ask, "What do I need? What can I give? What are my behavior and words saying to others?" Working with others who have this spiritual foundation can help one to grow in love and to learn how to care for others.

Summary

To respond to a call to pastoral care, one must be willing to serve and be committed to learning the art of caregiving. The ability to listen with compassion and awareness of one's own imperfections is important. Caregiving may make it possible to become closer to the meeting community and to deepen one's spiritual life. Mentoring and reading are primary ways for the new overseer to learn the craft. The overseer will find constant use for compassion, courage, and clear-sighted

understanding of human interactions. The support of other overseers and the meeting as a whole is important for the work. The spiritual life of the individual and of the meeting is the context for pastoral care and provides its energy and purpose.

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Gay Howard and Nadine Hoover collaborated on this issue of PCN. Gay Howard has served on Worship, Ministry, and Oversight Committee of Tallahassee (Florida) Meeting. She has served as clerk of that meeting and of Southeastern Yearly Meeting and is now clerk of the committee revising that yearly meeting's Faith and Practice. Gay has been a teacher and a lab technician. She has four children.

Nadine Hoover lives in Alfred, NY, and is transferring her membership from Tallahassee Monthly Meeting to the Alfred Meeting. Nadine has served as Administrative and Field Secretary for Southeastern Yearly Meeting. She also has been clerk of Tallahassee Meeting and member of that meeting's Worship, Ministry, and Oversight Committee.

Resources on the Role of Overseers

Caring for One Another: Notes for Overseers in the Society of Friends. Britain Yearly Meeting, 1978.

Corporate Eldership and Oversight. Britain YM, 1990.

Gifts and Ministries: A Discussion on Eldership by Alastair Heron. Britain Yearly Meeting, 1987.

Handbook for Elders. (Revised ed. of Handbook for Elders and Overseers, 1944) Western Yearly Meeting, 1955.

Handbook for Overseers and Other Friends. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1985.

Listening Spirituality, Volume II: Corporate Spiritual Practice Among Friends (Chapter 7) by Patricia Loring. Openings Press, 1999.

Nurturing Vital Friends Meetings Part Two: Resources for Working with Quaker Meetings by Jan Greene and Marty Walton. FGC, 1999.

Patterns of Eldership and Oversight by the Committee on Eldership and Oversight, London YM, 1997.

➔ These books and pamphlets are available from FGC Bookstore, 1-800-966-4556 and from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Library 1-800-220-0796, extension 7220.

Questions for Reflection

1. What criteria are used by our Nominating Committee for appointments to this committee? Should we communicate to them our sense of the gifts and skills that are required?
2. What do we do to orient new committee members? Would it be helpful to develop a committee handbook of practice and procedure and/or to have an orientation meeting for new members?
3. What do we do as a committee to help one another grow in the skills of pastoral care? How do we help each other deepen our listening, hone our compassionate plain speaking, and discern our gifts and limitations?
4. How do we support one another in maintaining confidentiality of members' personal matters?
5. How can we arrange for some of our members to attend a workshop to inform us about other meetings' practices?
6. How do we deepen the spiritual foundation of our work?

Pastoral Care Newsletter is published quarterly by the Family Relations Concerns Group of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. 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.