

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

*For Member Care Committees,
Ministry and Counsel, Overseers,
and others who provide pastoral care
in unprogrammed Friends' meetings.*

Vol. 14, No. 2 • January 2007

Ministry of Pastoral Care: The Healing Spirit Working among Us by Arlene Kelly

During the past few decades, I have been grateful for opportunities to interact both with those who provide pastoral care and those who are the recipients of the meeting's care.

Both groups have taught me deep respect, indeed reverence for the ways in which the healing Spirit works among us. Both have exposed me to the wisdom of others as they have sought to meet the challenges placed in front of them in a way that is consistent with our values as Friends.

The term "pastoral care" may not be as common as some other Quaker language. Nevertheless, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice* states that pastoral care and counseling are the special responsibility of the committee charged with care of members.

What does that phrase encompass? Certainly it is the carrying out, on behalf of the meeting, of responsibilities in relation to membership and marriage. And still it is more.

Pastoral care is the way in which we journey with each other in times of celebration, sadness, turmoil, during transitions and along the quiet stretches. Together with our shared worship experience, it is the main glue that holds our meeting community together.

As we endeavor to be more faithful and skillful in carrying out the ministry of pastoral care, I have heard the following three questions lifted up with

Editor's note: This article, describing the fundamental philosophy and spiritual foundation of pastoral care giving in unprogrammed Friends' meetings, first appeared in the Pastoral Care Newsletter in September 1993—the very first issue of PCN. Caregivers who are new to the calling and others who may need to be refreshed in their endeavors will benefit from the exceptional insight the writer brings to her subject.

regularity. Let us consider them as a starting point:

Question #1: How can I be of help in a difficult situation when I have no experience in it? Doesn't this require help from someone with more experience or training than myself?

It is challenging to consider how to enter others' lives at times of crisis in a way that is caring and helpful. How do we journey with someone through the terminal illness or death of a loved one? How do we enter a marital crisis? What do we have to offer to those in situations of mental illness or substance abuse?

There are times and circumstances in which professional help is needed—sometimes directly for the person(s) in question and sometimes as a resource to the committee in carrying out their pastoral care role.

Discernment of when professional



Arlene Kelly

help is needed has generated an article of its own. (See PCN Sept. 1997, "Helping Friends Seek Professional Help" by Barbara Snipes.) Suffice it to say, that even when professional help is needed, it is not a substitute for pastoral care.

As we seek ways to be present, one essential ingredient is to recognize that we are not responsible for fixing the situation. Except for those few situations in which provisions of some material aid is needed, we are not likely to be able to resolve the situation, but rather to be with the person or family in the midst of it.

Our belief in the possibility of the Spirit being at work in this moment can be tremendously liberating if we allow ourselves to live into it. We are called to be instruments for the work of the living God; we are called to be channels through which the Spirit can move.

We are not responsible for determining what the outcome will be, for making the "right" thing happen any more than we are called to make a gathered meeting happen on Sunday morning. We are not called to be *perfect*, we are called to be *present*. How do we, in our caregiving committees, corporately ground ourselves in that awareness?

It is also important for individual committee members to be aware of their particular gifts. We are all gifted in different ways. More energy needs to be put into naming what it is we have to offer and less into feeling inadequate because we are not as good at something as another. Praying, accompanying, listening, problem solving, and offering relief on concrete things are all ways of caring.

A lovely story I heard years ago was told by a woman, who earlier in her family life, had gone through the crisis of having one of her three young children hospitalized with a critical illness over several weeks.

One day, a meeting member arrived at her door and told her she was there to pick up the family's laundry. She took it, washed it, ironed it and returned it. There were no words about the sick child, but there was love and caring. How do we support one another in naming and claiming our gifts?

Question #2: What right do I have to butt into someone else's business: Won't they tell us if they want us to know there's a problem?

Whenever I hear this question, I think of the questions which I have heard a multitude of times

from those whom we might have been serving:

"Why, when I was having so much difficulty, did the meeting not reach out to me? Someone must have noticed that I was not coming to meeting. When I was there I would cry in worship. I couldn't ask for help. I felt so alone. Why didn't someone let me know they cared?"

We need to consider seriously whom we are truly protecting when we have an overly strong caution about intruding. Very often, I think, we are protecting ourselves. Because we do not feel confident of our ability to express our caring well, we hold back and tell ourselves that the other person would not want us bothering them.

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Can we imagine, for example, seeking an opportunity to speak with someone who has seemed "down" lately, or in some way not him/herself and saying something like, "You've been in my thoughts a lot lately. I've had the sense that you've been not quite yourself and I've been concerned. I've been wondering if there is anything

you're struggling with that you might want to talk about?"

The person might say, "Oh yes, thank you..." and begin to share. S/he might say, "There is, thank you for asking, but I'm not ready to talk about it right now."

Or they might say, "No, I don't know why you would be thinking that!" (with the tone sharper if, in fact, there *is* something on the person's mind). To the latter person my response would be, simply "OK, I hope you don't mind my having asked. I care about you and felt it was better to check rather than leaving you hanging if there was something going on."

Whatever the answer, your reaching out is fine.

True caring, i.e., love, is something that needs to be nurtured within us. It can only flow fully when we suspend our judgment and leave judgment in God's hands. In our efforts to become effective caregivers, it is important that we come to know ourselves and to heal our own woundedness, in order that we can approach another in the time of their need, and be fully present to them.

How do we witness to our trust that the

Spirit can work in a healing way in their life?

Our role is to be a channel for that work rather than to control the outcome. How do we, as members of committees who minister to members of our meetings, work to ensure that all we do in pastoral care springs from this place of centeredness? What are the ways in which we work to develop some of the skills in listening, opening hard subjects etc., which will give us more confidence to enter a situation of need?

Question #3: Why don't people let us know when they're having difficulty? Why do we so often find out after the fact?

This question is related to the previous one, but it lifts up different facets of the issue of how to discern and respond to the need for help. This question leads into another question—one which I seldom hear asked, but which I feel we need to address with a great deal more intentionality. That is: How can we deepen and strengthen the fabric of our meeting community?

If we do not have a sense of community in our meeting—a reality which becomes the context for all else—then we can be pretty sure that we have not developed a climate of trust and safety which will allow people to acknowledge the vulnerability they feel in times of need.

Pastoral care involves finding ways to nurture vital authentic relationships among our members and attenders so that when problems arise the relationships are already in place to provide a context for exploring the problems. Meetings help this to happen through small group encounters—a spiritual journey group, Friendly Eights, or a book group are but a few of the examples.

It is important for a pastoral care committee to provide leadership in enabling the meeting to address queries presented here. A sense of community is not possible without a sense of common identity; a sense of what bonds us together.

The meeting's answers to the queries can, at the very least, identify common expectations for behavior that can help individuals in exercising their gifts within the life of the community. At most, the meeting's answers to the queries can serve as a mandate for those who act on behalf of the meeting.

For example, if the meeting has not developed a shared understanding of what it means to be married under the care of the meeting, then a given clearness committee does not know how thorough or superficial a clearness process to undertake.

Then, when a particular committee encounters an unusual or difficult situation, it will be operating in uncharted waters.

In addition to their lack of experience with the particular problem, committee members will not know what the meeting expects of it. In my experience, it is the committee's lack of clarity about the expectation of the meeting that is often more immobilizing than the situation itself. That immobilization can keep the response from being full and caring. Such situations reveal a lack of clarity and often are the cause of tremendous hurt in the meeting.

Developing a sense of community within the meeting does not occur simply as a result of our working together on committees nor, indeed, simply as a result of worshipping together. If a sense of community is to be developed, there must be opportunities to come to know each other outside the roles that we usually play within the meeting, and there must also be opportunities for sharing in some depth.

Conclusion

In this article I have described pastoral care as a ministry offering care and support to all persons in the meeting family, as well as a ministry which considers the well being of the meeting collectively.

How that ministry is best carried out will vary according to factors such as size of the meeting, the range and concentration of age groups, the transience or permanence of the meeting constituency, the amount of diversity, whether the meeting is in a time of transition, a spurt of growth, etc.

There is no one right way to carry out the ministry of pastoral care. As you, the caregivers within your meeting, search for a sense of what pastoral care is, we hope that you will discover how the healing Spirit works among us and that you will share your insights with others.

You will surely find the strength and sensitivity to carry out this vital ministry if you will continue to refresh and reinforce your spiritual grounding.

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Arlene Kelly, who revised her article for this issue of PCN, is a retired therapist and program consultant, a member of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting and has served, off and on, for several decades on the Membership Care Committee. She has also served as Clerk of her meeting and Clerk of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM). Most recently her work has included the development of the Center for Deepening and Strengthening Our Meetings which is under the care of PYM.

A Large Meeting Establishes a Structure for Care

Our large meeting's pastoral care needs became clear to me a few years ago when a member confided her disappointment that, after her mother died, she did not receive even one sympathy card from anyone in the meeting community.

She had told only one person in the meeting of the death, but a person in need should not have to make a general announcement. The word had not gotten around, and the Friend's need for condolences had not met.

Three years ago, what we then called the Overseers Committee of Sandy Spring Meeting recognized that the meeting missed many opportunities for pastoral care. We committed ourselves to devising and implementing a system for identifying needs and coordinating pasto-

ral care. We recognized that providing pastoral care is a ministry of all members of the spiritual community; our job was to facilitate care, both formally when structure is needed and informally by encouraging the many ways that Friends minister to one another's needs within the meeting.

We began by changing the outdated and confusing "Overseers" name to "Membership and Spiritual Care Committee." Then we established a structure for discerning needs, coordinating responses, and encouraging the whole spiritual community to be involved in pastoral care by means of:

- (1) an annual Pastoral Letter;
- (2) a system for coordinating particular areas of care;
- (3) an annual pastoral care training retreat.

Our annual Pastoral Letter goes out to every family (members and regular attenders) in our spiritual community—about 650 letters. The letter invites the recipients to share with the Membership and Spiritual Care Committee thoughts about what meets their needs and what can be improved, and it invites the sharing of particular pastoral care needs.

In addition, it asks recipients how they may feel led to provide pastoral care including being on call, as needs arise, to: hold people in the Light, send cards, make hospital or nursing home visits, provide rides, or provide food). A response form and reply envelope make it easy for Friends to respond. Our Pastoral Letter is available at www.sandyspring.org the Sandy Spring Meeting website.

A pastoral care subcommittee receives the completed forms, immediately responds to needs expressed, and contacts anyone who requests personal contact. We have found the Pastoral Letter to be effective in helping us to identify needs. Many Friends responded with thoughtful written comments, requests for help, and requests for further dialogue. Some who did not respond in writing have responded in conversation to members of the committee.

Of course, many Friends did not respond to the letter, but just receiving the letter heightened their awareness of the availability of pastoral care within the meeting. The Pastoral Letter has been instrumental in identifying our human resources for providing particular types of pastoral care. The Pastoral Care Subcommittee and the meeting secretary compile volunteer information from the responses into lists of potential pastoral care providers.

Questions for Reflection

- 1. What does our meeting expect of its pastoral care committee?**
- 2. How can we help the meeting clarify its expectations about the meaning of membership, marriage under the care of the meeting, care during life challenges, and other work of pastoral care?**
- 3. How do we show our caring when a meeting member is going through a difficult time?**
- 4. How do we call on the guidance of the Spirit as we reach out to meeting members?**
- 5. How can members of the caregiving committee help one another reach out to members for whom they have a concern?**
- 6. How do we assist a member in seeking professional help?**
- 7. How do we make it easier for a member to seek the support of the meeting?**
- 8. What are the ways that our meeting has found to be effective in developing a sense of community?**

The subcommittee designates coordinators for specific areas of care who will match the volunteers to needs as they arise. The secretary keeps email lists of those who will hold others in the Light or send out cards, and she alerts the lists when cards and prayers are needed.

We periodically announce that Friends should notify the meeting secretary if they learn of anyone who should receive cards (as in illness or a death in the family) or who wants to be held in the Light.

The Membership and Spiritual Care Committee

sponsors an annual retreat on pastoral care topics open to all in the meeting community. This helps us all learn skills to become better caregivers, and it provides support and fellowship for the caregivers.

In addition, as Friends hear announcements or read about the retreat in the newsletter, the whole community learns that pastoral care – both giving and receiving – is for everybody.

Elizabeth Meyer

Sandy Spring (MD) Friends Meeting

Baltimore Yearly Meeting

A Small, Growing Meeting Creates Nurturing Activities

Our Meeting traces its beginnings to 1952, with the arrival in Fayetteville (Arkansas) of one Quaker woman, Judy Fowler. She kept a Friendly presence throughout the years until a consistent group stabilized in the 1980's. During these early years, we were greatly nurtured by the elderying of this kind, weighty Friend. Our small numbers lent closeness, yet this also meant any conflict or decrease in attendance was strongly felt by the others.

In the last 20 years, we have maintained a consistency allowing patterns to become predictable rituals to help guide us. Once *very* small (7-10 people total), we are now *rather* small (25 -30 total). Many early aspirations—regular worship sharing, book study, and business meetings in the manner of Friends—have now become more tenable. We saw growing pains as inevitable and managed to avoid most sensations of guilt when we occasionally fell short of our goals.

As we grow, we are mindful to maintain our sense of a small, caring community. We are proud to be seen as the “fun” meeting and genuinely miss regulars who are absent. We seem to draw spiritual sustenance from three sources: our monthly meeting structure, individual efforts, and our larger Quaker organizations.

The Meeting's Formal Care: Our Ministry and Oversight Committee created an introductory handout (7"x9") to be placed on chairs during meeting for worship. This gives a brief history of Quakers, and explains what to expect during an unprogrammed meeting for worship. If visitors return, and so desire, they are added to our Quaker

e-mail list, which goes out to all in the meeting. We usually have a structured activity after worship—book study, worship sharing, meeting for business—and a monthly potluck in someone's home. These have become more reliable as our numbers have grown. A meeting fund, Friends Care Fund, was established and is administered by the committee. From this, individuals can request temporary monetary help.

Individual efforts: Most nurturing activities began with an individual's initiative. A youth voiced a need for a spiritual support group and within a week a Friendly adult had called for a meeting room and a time and a youth group was born. A Friend shares his talent and love for rock climbing with our youth at quarterly gatherings. A birthday party sing-along was held for a new-to-town attender celebrating a milestone birthday. When the mother in a family of new attenders developed cancer, individuals helped with childcare, food prep, and housework. A nursing home called saying a new resident was a Quaker but unable to attend meeting. Several individuals now meet with her at the nursing home twice monthly; others send her cards. Individuals have organized Quaker workdays with Habitat for Humanity, and projects to prepare AFSC aid kits with our young Friends group.

Wider Group of Quakers: Since we are a small group, our delightful, active Arkansas/Oklahoma Quarterly Meeting serves as extended family, meeting three times a year. Elders from this group were called upon many years ago when an ignored internal conflict caused our meeting to

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cease gathering. Members from our meeting have in turn worked with other meetings in our quarterly meeting during challenging times.

This past summer, a Quaker woman from Arkansas was fatally injured while traveling through Oklahoma. Arkansas Friends called Tulsa Quakers to stay with her husband until family and other f/Friends could arrive. South Central Yearly Meeting (SCYM) serves us also as extended family, and gives a sense of support, order, and structure to small meetings.

Our youth especially benefit from gathering with a significant number of supportive young Quaker friends. Our meeting has, in the past, benefited greatly from the traveling ministry of Friends from New England.

Of course, we do not always succeed in equally nurturing all aspects of meeting, but as we grow, we strive to keep Quaker process in our attempts.

And we keep on trying.

LaDeana Mullinex

Fayetteville (AR) Friends Monthly Meeting

South Central Yearly Meeting

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FUN?

Tell Us Your Stories!

For the June issue of PCN, Jacob and Gretta Stone will write about Light-ening the Life of the Meeting, building community by having fun together.

We'd like to hear from many meetings across the country who can tell us in 200 words about a creative and enjoyable event that helped bring your meeting together as a community. We'll publish as many as the space will allow. Email your meeting's story to the PCN editor cjsuplee@comcast.net by April 1.

Thanks.

Resources:

The Friends General Conference (FGC) web site provides a host of excellent articles under the heading, "Resources for Fostering Vital Friends Meetings," subheading, "Concerns of Ministry and Counsel" <http://www.fgcquaker.org/library/fosteringmeetings/0200.html>
Calling Forth & Nurturing Gifts of Ministry
FGC Consultation, <http://www.fgcquaker.org/connect/spring00/2.html>
FGC Connections Spring 2000: Quakers and Ministry
Ministry: Learning How Much We Don't Know, John Calvi *FGC Connections* Spring 2000: Quakers and Ministry
Grounded in God: Care and Nurture in Friends' Meetings Quaker Press of Friends General Conference 2002 (Note: This is a soft-bound collection of articles from the *Pastoral Care Newsletter* 1993-2000, edited by Patricia McBee.)
Pastoral Care in an Unprogrammed Meeting: The Experience of Beacon Hill Monthly Meeting BHMM Pastoral Care Committee Quaker Life July/August 1999.
Living with oneself and others: working papers on aspects of family life: New England Yearly Meeting Committee on Ministry and Counsel, 1993.

Next issue of PCN:

Loneliness:

A Ministry of Connection

by Rose Ketterer

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