

# PASTORAL CARE NEWSLETTER

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of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting



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

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## Helping Friends Seek Professional Help

by Barbara T. Snipes

We are encouraged as Friends to "keep in loving fellowship with those who are growing in a living experimental faith in God, and be available also for individual consultation with members and with seekers facing religious problems." (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, *Faith and Practice*, 1972, p. 144).

As Friends, we know that living faith can be nurtured and fed in the depths of a centered meeting for worship and enlivened into service by the loving faith community. We also know that almost all problems or questions are religious or spiritual at heart and that, often, an individual consultation with an experienced Friend can ease a situation or point toward solutions.

But what about those among us who seem constantly stressed and anxious? What about the older Friend who lives alone, becomes handicapped, and can't afford a Friends retirement facility? What about the family whose teenage son is in trouble with drugs or alcohol or the law? What about the Friend who is excessively angry and becomes disruptive during worship, or the one who is withdrawn and may be considering suicide? What about the person who is just irritating and needy and with whom we experience a gut reaction that something is wrong? What about the married couple in trouble? The unmarried couple in trouble? The children of divorced parents who are angry and disruptive?

Overseers and Friends on the Ministry and Counsel Committee are increasingly inundated with human problems, reflecting the problems of the larger, stressed community. We have to be prudent in acknowledging our limitations, personally and as a committee, and be aware of when we are beyond our capacities. We have to be prepared and ready to facilitate a member's access to professional assistance.

But how do we go about getting additional help? When and how do we call on professional help? What is professional help anyway?

A person in the helping professions -- doctor, nurse, lawyer, teacher, counselor,

photo by Inge Snipes



Barbara Snipes

geriatric social worker, body work therapist, rescue worker, firefighter, police person -- has done extra study and is trained for the work she or he does. These professionals also have daily experience with the problems they deal with and can refer to someone with more expertise in the field when needed. If the person is also a practicing Friend, active in a meeting and nurturing a personal spiritual life, we can usually consult him or her with the expectation that they will understand the concerns of Friends.

### Identifying the Need

When a person is in emotional distress or exhibiting unusual behavior, meeting members are usually aware of it on some level. Those who sit near her in meeting or are with him during social hour or on committees often know that something is wrong. Reaching out to the person in a spirit of love, and without judgment, can be a first step. If someone can spend a little time over coffee after meeting with a person, ways may be found in which the meeting may be helpful. Simply asking the question "Do you see ways that we in the meeting might be helpful to you?" may open the way to explore with Overseers the advisability of calling on professional help.

On one Sunday, a young man wrote furiously during meeting and then tried to read his material to the group at announcement time. When he was asked to sit down, he became angry and walked out. A Friend followed him out, discovered he wanted help with his alcohol problem. The Friend felt free to recommend Alcoholics Anonymous. He found out where and when the local group met and went with the young man to the first meeting. He then went to Overseers with his concern that there were additional problems that needed addressing. The young man had severe periods of depression and thoughts of suicide. Overseers provided him with the telephone numbers of several alcohol treatment centers in the area and offered to talk with the man's parents about financial help from the meeting. The young man decided to take advantage of all that was offered and is in recovery now. He needed a residential program, medication, and individual counseling.

Sometimes it is better to first take the concern to Overseers. There we can receive greater light from the group and learn if there has been a history of outreach to this person. We can ask, "Have others been aware of the problem?" "Have Overseers tried to meet with that person?" "Do others in the group think that professional help is needed?"

Occasionally there is a Friend who has gone from one sympathetic meeting member to another, using a listening ear as a way to avoid taking positive action to work on the problem at hand. By consulting with Overseers, the concerned Friend creates an opportunity to recognize this pattern. Then the Overseers can develop a coordinated approach for helping the person move forward. Professional support is often needed in helping such persons face up to the issues and address them.

Discernment, as I understand Friends' use of the word, is a process whereby the larger group can test, focus, and hold an individual concern in the light through prayer and discussion. Overseers can help lift up a concern to see if others share it. If Friends feel clear to proceed, someone who knows the person can sit down with him or her, explore the situation, and recommend appropriate professional help.

Overseers can keep from being overwhelmed by keeping informed about professional resources in their community and by knowing which ones of their number are more comfortable talking with persons in need about addictions, family crises, children, grief, death, loss of jobs, mental illness, depression and so on. One committee member may be able to talk more easily to the Friend who needs immediate attention and take him or her to the hospital. Another may feel able to visit a family in crisis and help to call a neighborhood mediator or a social worker. There are those among us who are familiar with therapists who

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## Where to turn when Overseers need professional support.

**Start at home.** Often by networking within the meeting it is possible to get information that will lead you to the resources you need.

**Call your Yearly Meeting Office or Yearly Meeting Committee on Ministry and Counsel.** They can inform you of resources within the yearly meeting. Even yearly meetings with little or no staff sometimes have volunteer consultants available to help meetings find resources. They may also be able to refer you to another meeting in the yearly meeting which has faced a similar issue who might have excellent information based on their experience.

**Consult your local council of churches** about resources utilized by other churches for counselors, attorneys, housing services, and other emergencies.

**Call a community referral service.** Most communities have an information and referral service run by the county government or by the United Way. These services have wide ranging listings for emergency hotlines, social services, housing, legal aid, protective services. They are useful in identifying low cost or free services.

## Referrals that Work

*PCN asked Deborah Cooper of the Friends Counseling Service and Betsy Balderston of the Friends Committee on Aging to share with us some case studies of instances when Overseers have reached out for professional support.*

*Friends Counseling Service provides a listing of Quaker counselors and consults meetings when a member's needs are beyond the scope of Overseers. Deborah Cooper can be reached for consultation at 215-988-0140.*


*The Friends Committee on Aging, can assist with discerning what services are needed by an aging Friend. It provides information on residences with various levels of care and on home care. It also is a resource for funds for residential care or to help older Friends stay in their homes. Betsy Balderston encourages you to call her with any questions that arise concerning older Friends in your meeting or to refer the Friend or family member directly to her. She can be reached at 215-241-7226 or through 1-800-2200-pym or e-mail her at [betsyb@pym.org](mailto:betsyb@pym.org).*

Deborah Cooper says that the usual phone call to **Friends Counseling Service** is from Overseers who find themselves in over their heads in dealing with the needs of a member. The anonymity of each friend is protected. The Overseers do not discuss the individual by name.

In many cases she is able to give the needed information over the phone, including some suggestions as to how to work with the person or suggestion of possible resources. On one occasion, two Overseers went to meet with Deborah to discuss their concerns and explore various options open to the meeting.

In other cases she has gone out to meet with the full Overseers committee. She finds it important to remind Overseers of the tools already available within the Friends structure such as eldering and clearness and support committees. Most importantly she finds herself discussing with Overseers how to maintain a balance between the care of a needy individual and the care of the meeting. Care must be taken not to invest so much attention in the individual case that the meeting is jeopardized.

Sometimes, the member is already working with a therapist. If not, Deborah will give the



### Pendle Hill

*Strengthening Meetings*

**Spiritual Nurture of Our Meetings**  
(For members of Ministry, Worship and Oversight)  
*Micky Edgerton & Linda Chidsey/Nov. 14-16*

**Inquirers' Weekend: Basic Quakerism**  
*Nov. 21-23 and July date to be announced*

**So That Our Meetings Can Grow**  
*Harvey Gillman/February 8-13*

**Clerking**  
*February 20-22*

**Joys and Challenges of  
New, Small or Isolated Meetings**  
*February 27-March 1*

**Caring for Your Historic Meeting House**  
*David Frederick/May date to be announced*

For more information on these and other programs contact  
Bobbi Kelly, ext. 137 at (610) 566-4507 or (800) 742-3150  
Box FR - 338 Plush Mill Road - Wallingford, PA 19086

meeting information on how to refer to the Friends Counseling Service. Of course, the member does not always agree to see a counselor. Even if the member does not agree to see a counselor, Deborah Cooper can help the meeting set appropriate limits on their involvement with this Friend.

Deborah has also been consulted in cases when there has been conflict between two members and Overseers were not able to bring it to resolution. Deborah met with the two members, gave each an opportunity to say what his/her concerns were. By providing a safe and neutral situation for clearing the air they were able not only to resolve the immediate conflict but also to negotiate a plan for how to deal with conflicts that might arise in the future.

Betsy Balderston told us of a call to the **Friends Committee on Aging** from a meeting with a concern about an older member who seemed to need a greater level of support than was available in her current living situation. A few days later she got a call from the adult son of an older person looking for a more supportive setting for his mother. Both callers had been careful to preserve her privacy and did not give her name, but as the details came out, Betsy began to suspect that both were calling about the same person. She then asked the family member, "Is your mother a member of

meeting X?" When Betsy found that it was the same person, she was able to facilitate the meeting and the family working together. They arranged for Betsy Balderston to meet with the woman and assess her situation. It was arranged for the woman to receive more care, partially paid for by funds available through the Committee on Aging.

In another case, a meeting contacted Betsy about an older person who did not seem to be functioning well in his home. The meeting was afraid that it would reach crisis proportions. The Committee on Aging was already involved with this Friend, and taking the tip from the meeting Betsy did a home visit. She was able to reassure the meeting that the situation was not immediately at risk of crisis. However, during the visit she took the opportunity to urge the Friend to consider alternative living situations. Within the year, he had moved to a retirement facility and declared it the best decision he had ever made.

Frequently the spouse of an older person will contact Overseers with worries and concerns and be referred to the Committee on Aging. Betsy Balderston is then able to send information or to sit down with one or both spouses to discern what kinds of supports would be most useful.

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### Friends Counseling Service of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

Friends or meetings may call counselors directly or contact Deborah Cooper, Counseling Service Consultant, for a referral.

**Henry Beck, Ph.D.**  
Bala Cynwyd & Lansdale, PA  
(610) 664-5443

**Teresa A. Glatthorn, M.A.**  
Hatboro & Doylestown, PA  
(215) 672-6627

**Gary M. Johnson, Ph.D.**  
Wilmington, DE  
(302) 656-1295

**John Scardina, Ed.M.**  
West Chester, PA  
(610) 696-2153

**Ray Bentman, M.Ed.**  
Philadelphia, PA  
(215) 985-1314

**John L. Hall, M.A.**  
Chester Springs, PA  
(610) 458-9060

**Judith Owens, M.A.**  
Voorhees, NJ  
(609) 435-2121

**Ann Swain, M.S.W.**  
Glen Mills, PA  
(610) 399-1977

**Terence Carroll, ACSW**  
Philadelphia, PA  
(215) 473-2600

**Harriet Heath, Ph.D.**  
(parenting issues only)  
Haverford, PA  
(610) 649-7037

**Karin M. Sannwald, ACSW**  
Berlin, NJ  
(609) 767-6471

**Fran Van Allen, M.A.**  
Philadelphia & Media, PA  
(610) 358-3212

**Deborah Cooper, M.Ed.**  
Philadelphia, PA  
(215) 248-0489

**James J. Saxon, Ph.D.**  
Swarthmore, PA  
(610) 544-7583

**Lindley M. Winston, M.D.**  
West Chester, PA  
(610) 431-3955

are trained as addiction counselors and are able to talk sensitively to a troubled person about many of the nearby 12 step programs, including Alcoholics Anonymous, Alanon, Adult Children of Alcoholics, Overeaters Anonymous, and many others. Some Overseers know, or could find out about, low cost housing, welfare rights, how the local justice system works, and help the person decide if one of these resources would be helpful.

Most communities have Family Service Associations with professional counselors dedicated to strengthen and enrich family life including individual growth and adjustment. Baltimore Yearly Meeting maintains a list of Quaker counselors, and perhaps other yearly meetings do as well. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting sponsors the Friends Counseling Service with counselors available to Friends and consultation available to meetings.

Lawyers can deal with matters of custody, visitation, division of property, child support. They also can quickly obtain from a court a protective order against abuse. Increasingly, lawyers and some family counselors are being trained in mediation and can assist separating or divorcing couples and others with disputes to be less adversarial and to be more supportive.

The medical profession and many insurance providers are moving toward more holistic approaches that treat the whole person instead of just the symptoms. Clinics are available that offer chiropractic, homeopathy, naturopathy, and stress management programs. Yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, shiatsu, massage, and many other systems can be very helpful in maintaining bodily, mental, and spiritual health.

Meetings can be prepared to provide financial aid or to help with transportation and childcare to facilitate consultation with professional help. It is helpful to be informed about support available from your yearly meeting and other Quaker sources.

### **What if the Help is Rejected**

The ideal Overseers would have developed a deep caring relationship among themselves. They would be able to share success and failures in their own lives. They would be able to hold

each other accountable to the light within, which makes it easier to call on professional help when needed. Overseers need to worship together, listen to one another, and have fun together, so that they can have the group stability to reach out to others. Being attentive to one another's feelings and concerns can help us to be aware of those difficulties that lie beyond the scope of caring Friends. When we feel supported ourselves, it is much easier to approach someone needing help in a relaxed natural way, without fear of rejection.

Now, supposing I am the one delegated by the Overseers to be in touch with a member or family in distress. I'm ready to recommend and help make the phone call to arrange the appointment for help in their situation. But, I'm afraid that instead of accepting my help they will become furious, accuse me of meddling and being intrusive, and reject any offers to set up appointments. What happens then?

These ideal Overseers would listen well to me and validate me as a person, as well as my gifts and skills. They may advise me that I'm off track in my suggested intervention. Overseers need to be able to say "No, you are not the one," or "This is not the time to help these people seek a professional." We need to be flexible and abide by the sense of the meeting.

Or they might select another Overseer to accompany me or to support me behind the scenes. We could remind ourselves to concentrate on the person's pain and point out how the professional can make things easier. The best way is probably to listen well ourselves, to pay full attention to the person needing outside help, and to take the person and the problem very, very seriously.

Overseers making these visits will need encouragement and help to realize that it is all right to fail.

### **Reluctance to Seek Counseling**

Friends are often reluctant to seek counseling. They may fear stigma attached to seeing a counselor or an implication of mental illness. We can help by sharing good experiences in counseling. We can normalize the experience of counseling by sharing personal

stories of growth and transformation resulting from counseling. Only a small proportion of people who need or seek counseling are mentally ill. Often short term therapy is all that's needed to help a person sort out the issue that is distressing them.

When our son Howard and his wife Susan were killed in a snow storm in Wyoming on their honeymoon, our family was in crisis. When Friends asked what they could do to help, we asked for a few Friends to come each evening for a week or so to meet with us in worship. As family members and meeting Friends gathered in our Quaker ritual of worship, we found we could weep together, or rail in anger and distress, and feel supported by the intimate group. We felt the true meaning of the phrase "under the care of the meeting."

I was led to seek professional help in my profound misery. I found that by repeating the story of their deaths over and over in the presence of a skilled counselor who helped me express my feelings of anger and despair, I could be eased into my long grief process (7 years) with more hope. I feel now that my meeting and professional help, along with loving husband and children were essential in my healing -- a growing and transforming process. I am convinced that a "deepening" can follow a major loss, debilitating accident, or illness and that greater compassion for others and a more profound capacity for joy can be the result. Somehow the terrible wounding of a tragedy or illness makes more room within for God's light and love.

### The Loving Community

If we could spend more time together with our meeting family, our faith community, it would deepen our relationships. Then we could be more clear and direct when we need help in asking for a professional. It would be easier to say, "I'm constantly depressed," or "My daughter won't go to school,. Do you know where I could get help?" It would be easier to say "Would you feel comfortable in taking this concern to Overseers? They have lists of professionals who can offer a variety of assistance."

Small groups are a good way to foster deeper relationships. Committee meetings needn't be all business. They could start with sharing meaningful events in our lives, followed by worship, then business, and ending with (short) hopes and dreams for ourselves and the meeting. A format that gets us sharing on a deeper, more personal level can lead to more openness and more joyful committee meetings, and can make it more natural to ask for and suggest outside help when needed.

The religious community implies that we are all part of one another. For those among us who are in crisis or whose lives are confused or painful, Friends may find times when it is helpful to call on professionals as a way to "keep in loving fellowship with those who are growing in a living experimental faith in God."

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*Barbara Snipes is a member of Falls Meeting in Bucks County, PA. She has recently resigned from the Friends Counseling Service to spend more time in spiritual nurture, but still sees clients in Morrisville, PA, and on Taylor's Farm in Cinnaminson, NJ.*

### Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways do we cultivate a climate that makes it easy for Friends to talk about their needs and for Overseers to acknowledge their limitations?
2. How do we, individually and as a committee, recognize when we are reaching our limitations?
3. How do we discern when to recommend to members that they seek professional assistance from outside the meeting?
4. What do we do to create a sense of loving community within Overseers?
5. What supports do we provide to a committee member who is charged with conveying the Overseers' recommendation that a member seek professional help?
6. What preparation have we made for identifying appropriate professional referrals when needed? What additional preparations would be useful?