

Another Quaker custom is that when a committee or smaller group reports back to the larger group about its work or recommendation, that committee is trusted to have done their work well. We trust their study and insight of the issue. ... The work of the larger group is to hear the details or recommendations, and make decisions regarding the ... broad implications of the decision, and to decide whether or not to go forward.

Rebecca Henderson, 2013

Worship & Ministry and Pastoral Care Committees

The important and closely related functions of these two committees are central to the life of the meeting. These committees have a special responsibility to encourage and develop the care of members for each other and for the life of the meeting (although all members share in the responsibility for such care). The primary focus of the Worship & Ministry Committee is the spiritual life of the meeting, while the Pastoral Care Committee is mainly concerned with care for members, including their relationship to the meeting.

The Pastoral Care Committee has sometimes been called an “Oversight Committee,” a name less often used today because “oversight” recalls the history of slavery. This committee may also be called the “Care & Counsel Committee.” This *Faith and Practice* uses “Pastoral Care Committee” for the sake of clarity when referring to the committee concerned with memberships, marriages, memorial meetings, and similar matters.

Some meetings, especially smaller meetings, have one committee with combined functions. This committee is sometimes called the “Ministry & Oversight Committee;” some meetings call it the “Ministry & Counsel Committee,” “Spiritual Nurture Committee,” or “Community Spiritual Life Committee.” Each Friends group names its own committees as it finds best.

Joint Responsibilities. In a meeting which has both a Worship & Ministry Committee and a Pastoral Care Committee, these committees share certain responsibilities. The monthly meeting sometimes asks these committees to share in the nurture of worship groups and preparative meetings under its care, although a separate committee is sometimes appointed for this purpose.

Although these committees usually meet separately, it is important that they keep in touch with each other. A joint retreat, for a day or a weekend, can be of benefit for the life of the committees and that of the meeting.

Worship & Ministry. The function of the Committee on Worship & Ministry is to foster and strengthen the spiritual life of the meeting by nurturing the meeting for worship and the spiritual growth of individuals in the meeting. Though this is a challenging assignment and one which is difficult to express in specifics, it is central to the life of the meeting. The first responsibility of members of this committee is to deepen their own spiritual lives and their preparation for worship.

This committee includes members of varied ages and gifts who are faithful in worship and sensitive to the life of the Spirit. It includes both Friends inclined to offer vocal ministry in meeting for worship and those less inclined to do so. It also includes Friends of good judgment who have a gift for encouraging sensitivity to divine prompting.

The committee meets regularly to consider the meeting for worship and to keep it under constant review, prayer, and care. Members of this committee strengthen meeting for worship by attending regularly, setting an example, demonstrating promptness and reverence in their approach to the meeting for worship, and adhering faithfully to the guidance of the Spirit. Through self-examination, prayer, and mutual counsel, committee members help one another and the meeting to grow in worship and ministry. An ever-renewed dedication to worship is almost always the best way to minister to difficulties in a meeting for worship.

This committee is responsible for the care of meeting for worship, including, for example, welcoming of visitors, encouraging promptness at meeting, protecting the sense of worship, and closing meeting for worship.

The committee may occasionally hold meetings for all members and attenders to share their experience and search for insight concerning the meeting for worship and the meeting for business. When appropriate, the committee may propose to the meeting

specially called meetings for worship. See, for instance, “Memorial Meetings” in Chapter 11, “Death and Memorials.”

Committee members are mindful that there are differences in background, fluency of expression, and power of interpretation among those who may be led to speak. The committee gives sympathetic encouragement to those who show promising gifts and gives loving and tender guidance to those whose vocal ministry may seem too frequent, too lengthy, not Spirit-led, or otherwise of concern to the meeting. The committee opens the way for those who are timid and inexperienced in vocal ministry and encourages all Friends in the ministry of listening. Committee members cultivate in themselves the search for right guidance.

The committee seeks to deepen the spiritual lives of individuals in the meeting and encourages varied gifts for ministry and service, whether through vocal ministry, teaching, deep listening, and counsel, or through artistic, interpersonal, and practical ways of expression. The committee encourages private worship, prayer, meditation, and devotional reading to promote growth in the spiritual life and prepare each individual for the corporate worship of the meeting. The committee may also obtain and circulate appropriate literature and arrange for retreats, study groups, and spiritual sharing groups.

Pastoral Care. The Pastoral Care Committee (sometimes called the Oversight Committee or Care & Counsel Committee) is responsible for the care of the meeting’s members. In providing pastoral care, the committee is concerned with the more outward aspects of building a fellowship in which all members find acceptance, loving care, and opportunity for service. Then all may grow in grace and, liberated from preoccupation with self, help to serve humanity creatively.

Membership on this committee calls for dedication, tact, confidentiality, and discretion, and is entered into prayerfully, with an alert willingness to be of service. The meeting selects members to serve on this committee who are representative of the varied make-up of the meeting and who are persons of experience, sympathy, and good judgment. The committee meets regularly to carry on its work in a spirit of dedication and love.

The committee knows the members and attenders of meeting and maintains contact with them in a spirit of affectionate interest and loving care. To foster the knowledge of one another in things both temporal and eternal, the committee encourages members and attenders to visit in each other's homes and promotes activities that will deepen fellowship within the meeting. The committee also encourages Friends to attend the Annual Session of the yearly meeting and similar gatherings, advising on possible financial assistance for this purpose.

It is useful for the committee to keep in contact with nonresident members to give them news of the meeting and its activities and to let them know that the meeting is interested in their welfare. The committee keeps in touch with inactive members, hoping to rekindle their interest in the meeting. If an individual fails to attend meeting for worship for a prolonged period, the committee may encourage that person to withdraw from meeting (see Chapter 9, "Membership"). When appropriate, the meeting encourages distant members to transfer membership to a nearby meeting.

The committee also faithfully keeps an accurate record of the membership as provided for on the form recommended by the yearly meeting. Such records cover vital statistics pertaining to the member and the member's immediate family. It is important that changes relating to membership – such as births, deaths, transfers, releases, or marriages – be promptly recorded. Each spring the committee or an officer of the meeting completes a questionnaire from the yearly meeting to give statistical and other information regarding the monthly meeting. A copy of this report is part of the permanent records of the monthly meeting.

The Pastoral Care Committee considers and recommends action upon requests for membership and transfer and withdrawal of membership (see Chapter 9). It is concerned for the nurture of the religious life of children and young people, their participation in the meeting, and their preparation for membership. When young people near adulthood, the Pastoral Care Committee makes sure they understand that membership in the Religious Society of Friends is an individual conscious choice, not an automatic, age-dependent transition. The committee may discuss this with

young people informally or may offer the clearness process to them to discern whether they are led to request membership. The committee also helps to make newcomers and attenders welcome and gives them information concerning Quakers and Quakerism. When it seems right, the committee encourages those who may be holding back to consider applying for membership.

The committee assists those contemplating and entering into marriage under the care of the meeting (see Chapter 10, “Marriage and Committed Relationships”). It gives care and aid in needed arrangements at the time of death (see Chapter 11, “Death and Memorials”). The committee seeks to be of help in clearing up misunderstandings and reconciling differences that may come about in the meeting. Committee members are concerned with the welfare of any who are ill, incapacitated, troubled, or in material need. The committee is tender to the challenges of aging and long-term illness, helps to discern the appropriate limits of medical intervention, and offers a Care Committee as need arises. The Pastoral Care Committee sees that those in need are visited, counseled with, and assisted. The meeting provides this committee with a fund to be used at its discretion.

Particular responsibility for spiritual counseling and care lies with the Pastoral Care Committee, which should choose counselors fitted for particular needs from among themselves or from among other qualified persons in the meeting. Qualifications of a good counselor include approachability, warmth, sympathy, spiritual insight without prejudice, capacity to listen without judging, and ability to keep confidences.

In dealing with particular needs, the committee remembers the value of simply listening. To listen helpfully and creatively involves faith in the person and in God, a desire to understand, patience, and avoidance of giving advice. The committee is sensitive to those who may not be receptive to counseling, or who hesitate to seek help. The committee usually assigns one or two Friends to address a given situation. These Friends honor confidentiality, although they may rely on the Pastoral Care Committee as a whole for additional help. The assigned Friends suggest new ways of looking at the problem and possible solutions, but decisions must be left

to the person involved. The assigned Friends encourage growth, independence, and self-reliance while providing emotional support for those making hard decisions.

A problem may be too serious for the Pastoral Care Committee to handle alone, in which case a professional referral is made. Members of the committee make themselves familiar with assistance available in the wider community, including clinics, family and social services, therapists, physicians, and psychiatrists. The committee may call upon others in the meeting to be of assistance when professional help is required. Practical assistance such as Friends offer in other times of stress, illness, or sorrow may be appropriate. Standing by, listening, and helping to plan can also be of great help in a critical time.

Challenges in Pastoral Care

The Pastoral Care Committee is a confidential place for considering the needs and characteristics of individuals in a more complete way than would be comfortable with the meeting as a whole. Many Friends struggle at times with their own personal problems. Friends ordinarily want to extend themselves to help others. A meeting can get lost in the issues someone might bring. At the same time the meeting needs to attend to the safety of adults and children and the meeting community as a whole.

Safety of Children and Youth. Friends need to be aware that we are just as susceptible as any other group to those who would take advantage of our children and teenagers. Situations of trust can provide openings for abuse. We are responsible for ensuring the safety of children in our communities. Meetings educate themselves regarding indicators, prevention, and handling of incidents of abuse. All Friends groups exercise common-sense precautions in monitoring activities that include adult teachers or caregivers and children.¹

1. NPYM's Youth Safety Policy may serve as a reference or model: <http://npym.org/?q=content/npym-youth-safety-policy>. Multnomah Monthly Meeting also has an extensive child and youth safety policy; see "resources" on their website: <https://www.quakercloud.org/cloud/multnomah-friends-meeting>.