




A Ministry of Prayer and Learning devoted to

the School of the Spirit



**THE
SPIRITUAL
CARE
COMMITTEE**

A Ministry of Prayer and Learning devoted to the School of the Spirit serves Friends throughout North America and is under the care of the Worship and Care Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

THE

SPIRITUAL

CARE

COMMITTEE

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FOREWORD

The words in this pamphlet have come from years of listening to and observing the interactions of participants in the School of the Spirit Ministry's *On Being a Spiritual Nurturer* program and their Spiritual Care Committees. The Spiritual Care Committee consists of those Friends and others that walk with the participant and witness their journey toward transformation. We have learned valuable lessons and skills that we believe others might find useful and we offer them herein.

The words have their roots in a particular way of knowing. In *the School of the Spirit Ministry*, the journey toward transformation is interpreted using a certain language and understanding of story. That language and story is what Quakers have used since their formational days, which is the language of Christianity and the still unfolding Judeo-Christian story. We would not be honest with ourselves or the user of this document if we did not name the place from which our knowing comes, which is Christ, the Inward Teacher, whose immediate and perceptible guidance in all things moves us into prayer, worship, and service. We have labored to make the language of the document accessible to all readers without denying the Truth of our own knowing.¹

Enter with an open heart. The journey of transformation is subverted if the heart is not open to hear another's song. We invite the user of this document into the freedom of the open space of Truth where all languages spoken from the Heart are heard by the One Creator of us all. Therein, we abide in unity and love and understanding, and beyond words.

15th day, 4th month, 2012

¹ The School of the Spirit Ministry clarifies its mission to "helping all who wish to be more faithful listeners and responders to the inward work of Christ" through a set of Core Characteristics. These are presented at the end of this document.

To “listen” another’s soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.

Douglas Steere²

² Douglas Steere, *Where Words Come From* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1955), 14.

I. Introduction

Since its inception in 1990, the School of the Spirit Ministry has required participants in its long-term program, *On Being a Spiritual Nurturer*, to be supported by a spiritual care committee comprised of members from a participant's home meeting or church. In an ongoing effort to deepen our understanding of spiritual care committees – their structure, function and value – numerous consultations and discussions have taken place over the course of twenty years. Conversations with program teachers, program participants and Friends serving on spiritual care committees have led the School of the Spirit Ministry to a keen awareness of the many blessings and gifts brought forth by the Spirit working through such committees. Seeing clearly the value that spiritual care committees can have for Friends' monthly meetings and churches, we are eager to communicate our experiences and findings with others.

Types of Care Committees

Meetings and churches are always under a call to care for individuals within the corporate body. To facilitate that charge, committees of care are formed to serve in a variety of situations. Under the care of Worship and Ministry, Ministry and Counsel, Care and Counsel, or equivalent meeting/church committees,³ care committees are called together to encourage and support spiritual development and growth among members of the community. Care committee members seek to be steeped and guided by prayer, to listen deeply to God and one another, and to respond from Spirit-led discernment.

Let us look briefly now at three different types of care committees used by Friends: clearness committees; pastoral care committees; and spiritual care committees. Each is similar in purpose, but has unique features as well.

³ For simplicity, the term **Ministry and Counsel** will be used throughout this document. The reader is asked to substitute the name of the equivalent committee that convenes within his/her meeting/church.

Clearness committees endeavor to assist a Friend seeking clarity about a concern. Historically, the clearness committee focused on issues of meeting membership and marriage. In more recent times clearness committees may meet with those who are seeking clearness in other personal decisions. Clearness committees are usually of short term duration and highly focused on a specific concern.

Pastoral care committees are formed to assist or to carry out the pastoral work of the faith community. Pastoral care committees serve as long as needed. All manner of care may be needed, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. As Arlene Kelly writes in the *Pastoral Care Newsletter*,

*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.*⁴

Spiritual Care Committees are charged to hold and nurture Friends who are spiritually gifted and called, through leadings or ministry, to the work of God’s continuing transformation.

A Spiritual Care Committee is sometimes referred to as an “anchor committee” (e.g. Traveling Ministries Program, FGC), as an “oversight” committee, or as a Spiritual Accountability Group (e.g. Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting).

Our faith communities are blessed by, depend upon, and are grateful for the gifts each and every person brings to our meetings/churches. Friends have long expressed the belief that when a faith community is in need, God sends who or what is needed. Often gifts come to us through the skills, talents and experiences offered by individuals. When our gifts are blended, we have a well-functioning community.

⁴ Arlene Kelly, “Ministry of Pastoral Care: The Healing Spirit Working Among Us,” *Pastoral Care Newsletter (Philadelphia Yearly Meeting)* 14:2 (January 2007).

The term “*spiritual gifts*” refers specifically to God-given ways of serving and God-given qualities brought to that service. The word “ministry” literally means “service.” As envisioned in this paper, ministry is defined as service devoted to God and to God’s beloved people, whether within our faith community or the world. One serving under a leading, or in ministry, is called to make and sustain an *intentional commitment* to use his/her spiritual gifts in Spirit-guided, loving service as long as he/she is led and graced with such gifts.

The responsibilities that accompany spiritual giftedness are numerous, and each must be assumed and carried out in order for the full benefit of the gift to be felt in the faith community. For the individual, the responsibilities of giftedness include naming and accepting the gift and offering it to the faith community in God's service. For the faith community, the responsibilities include helping the individual name and develop the gift, and accepting its exercise within the community--agreeing to be ministered to. If these responsibilities are shirked on either side, the gift will not grow into its maturity and the faith of the community will not be nurtured as it needs.

Lloyd Lee Wilson⁵

⁵ Lloyd Lee Wilson, *Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order* (Quaker Press of FGC, 2002), 113-114.

II. The Spiritual Care Committee

Purpose

The general purpose of the Spiritual Care Committee is twofold:

1. to provide sustained support, loving guidance, and accountability to a Friend who labors under a leading;
2. to help the faith community fulfill its charge and obligation to develop and support spiritual growth in its membership and to utilize the gifts given in service to the community by God.

In serving the individual of focus (hereafter referred to in italics as *the Friend*), the Spiritual Care Committee recognizes that *the Friend* on a spiritual journey must daily confront the inward and outward implications of her/his leading. The Committee seeks to provide a safe and worshipful space where *the Friend* can be intentional about the life in the Spirit she/he is being asked to lead. Through listening deeply, attentively, and reverently, the Committee offers an invitation for *the Friend*, and all present on the Committee, to grow in right relationship with God. The Spiritual Care Committee anchors *the Friend* within the Meeting and holds him/her accountable to God and responsible to the community. The very fact that the Spiritual Care Committee meets on behalf of Ministry and Counsel and the Meeting/church validates *the Friend* and the ministry being undertaken indicates that, indeed, the leading is something worth nurturing.

We will now explore each of the four elements of the Spiritual Care Committee named above: **support, guidance, accountability** and **service to the community**.

Support. It is assumed that *the Friend* undertaking a spiritual journey involving service to God and others has experienced a clearness committee where he/she explored deeply his/her calling. Then, if *the Friend* receives clarity, Ministry and Counsel and *the*

Friend work together to assemble a Spiritual Care Committee. Usually, *the Friend* responding to a calling recognizes that his/her service may require a commitment of months or even years.

Many, perhaps most, Friends consider themselves on a life-long spiritual journey. So, it is not too difficult to put ourselves in the shoes of another on such a path. We can glimpse what may happen to *the Friend* under a calling or leading.

As an example, perhaps *the Friend's* work is to nurture the spiritual life of Friends or the religious life of those outside the Religious Society of Friends. Often, spiritual callings take Friends beyond the boundary of their immediate faith community.

In the process of serving the Spirit, *the Friend* may be invited to surrender herself to being searched by a loving God, requiring her to look deeply into herself, her beliefs, her prejudices, her practices. In her work, she may be challenged by others through comments or questions that jar her to the core. Through this turmoil, she must seek Truth and claim and integrate new perceptions and grow into her understanding, service, and accountability to God.

Or, perhaps, *the Friend* may have a spiritual leading to organize a coalition of counter-recruitment efforts within his county's schools, requiring him to stay with the process until some specific goal is achieved. He may find his path interesting, exciting, and deeply rewarding most of the time. Yet, at other times, he is called to reconsider aspects of his spiritual beliefs that he holds dear. Strong, disturbing spiritual disquiet may occur, leaving *the Friend* to feel uncertain about the value of his calling, or of his ability to carry it out. He may be anxious in the face of others who are angry or adversarial and find himself at a loss for an appropriate response.

One can see that is it very helpful to have a supportive body of Friends to accompany one on such a spiritual journey and to keep things in perspective. Fortunately, a spiritual journey does not happen in a vacuum.

The Spiritual Care Committee helps the Friend continue to do the **inward** work out of which the **outward** faithfulness issues.

The Spiritual Care Committee is an essential resource to provide grounded community support for the spiritual traveler. Support involves intentionally holding *the Friend* in prayer, listening deeply, responding tenderly, and expressing loving encouragement. In doing its work, the Committee brings to the forefront acceptance, patience, and faith and trust in God’s involvement in the process.

Guidance. By listening deeply and prayerfully from a centered place, two basic tools that are highly valued by Friends and important in guidance are most directly available: discernment and experience. The Spiritual Care Committee depends heavily on both in its work.

Guidance is likely to be most useful, effective and powerful when offered in a gentle, non-judgmental, loving manner. It may take time to learn the most effective way to present guidance to a particular *Friend* in a form that can be heard, accepted, and used. Often guidance is specifically requested by *the Friend* and if, *after discernment*, the Committee feels clear to respond, the guidance should be offered. Sometimes the leading to offer guidance comes from the Committee itself; it, too, should be respected and offered.

It must be remembered that the Committee is responsible for *offering* Spirit-led guidance or wisdom drawn from experience. *The Friend* is responsible for considering, accepting, working with, or rejecting the guidance.

Accountability. The term “accountability” refers to an understanding that *the Friend* is accountable, first and foremost, to God. *The Friend* is also accountable to his/her ministry or leading, to his/her faith community and to those whom he/she provides service. The core of accountability has to do with whether *the Friend* is making right use of his/her gifts in the service of God and God’s beloved. Such deep examination is ongoing as long as *the Friend* continues to walk the path to which he/she is being called.

The Spiritual Care Committee, in part, serves to lovingly help *the Friend* explore accountability in God’s presence. The Spiritual Care Committee is charged with consistently keeping an awareness of accountability on the table. Thus, the Committee may be led to query

and discuss problems *the Friend* encounters regarding accountability. As an example, does he take on too many opportunities to serve others at the cost of being unable to care for himself or his family? Is she shying away from applying her gifts where the faith community has needs for those gifts? Can the Committee assist *the Friend* in being faithful in exercising his gifts in God's service?

Service to the faith community. At the same time that the Spiritual Care Committee serves *the Friend*, it also serves the community. Committee members know and understand the community's needs, strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of today. The Committee is in a position to serve as intermediary between *the Friend* and the Meeting/Church. It can educate the Meeting to know about and understand the focus *Friend* and his/her mission. The Committee can help embed the focus *Friend's* experience within the Meeting and may be able to help match the needs of community with the gifts of *the Friend*, enabling the leading/ministry to go forward. It can help the Meeting struggle with the question of support of all kinds, including financial assistance. In many instances public backing is needed in order for the gifts to be exercised, thus requiring the Meeting to explore the need to officially record the ministry of the focus *Friend*. The Spiritual Care Committee also encourages the Meeting to hold this gift of ministry in communal prayer.

In serving in these various capacities, the Spiritual Care Committee deepens the spiritual lives of *the Friend*, the faith community, and the members of the Committee itself.

Summary

When the corporate body of the Meeting/church recognizes that *a Friend* is blessed with spiritual gifts, those gifts are taken under the care of the faith community. Ministry and Counsel appoints a Spiritual Care Committee to nurture *the Friend* who is being called into service to God. The Spiritual Care Committee provides *the Friend* with support, guidance, and a forum for accountability. The Committee also serves the faith community by helping the Meeting/church understand, hold, develop and use the gifts God has brought into the community's midst.

Formation, Structure and Responsibilities

Over time the School of the Spirit Ministry has observed various aspects of the Spiritual Care Committee – ones that are helpful and lead to growth for the focus *Friend* and ones that are detrimental. In that light we turn to examine useful characteristics of committee members and the committee formation process, structure and responsibilities. Most importantly, we will consider the three primary “tools” entrusted to both committee members and *the Friend* for the Spirit-guided work of spiritual growth and faithfulness.

Characteristics of Committee members. Those who are engaged in selecting committee members and those considering serving as a committee member will profit from considering the characteristics of Spiritual Care Committee members that have proven helpful to focus Friends and other committee members.

Spiritual Care Committee members need:

1. to be grounded in God and open to further learning and spiritual development, both for *the Friend* and for themselves.
2. to have belief and faith in the divine-human relationship. Members need to have sufficient shared faith understandings to be able to work together and to communicate successfully with *the Friend* and with other committee members.
3. to be attuned to and accepting of *the Friend* seeking a deeper awareness of his/her Inward Teacher.
4. to have the ability to wait in silence and patience.
5. to be able to accept *the Friend* where he/she is in the present moment, to maintain appropriate confidentiality, recognizing that *the Friend's* views and concerns may be in considerable flux during the journey.

6. to be able to accompany *the Friend* on his/her path in a caring, loving, non-judgmental manner. Gentle critique and challenge, often expressed in the form of questions, may also be helpful. Members need to be comfortable enough in their own faith that they can support one who may be experiencing spiritual struggles.
7. to be willing to hold *the Friend* and the Spiritual Care Committee members and process in prayer, or in the Light.
8. to be willing and able to devote the time necessary to prepare themselves to carry out the Committee's tasks and to attend monthly committee meetings with *the Friend*.
9. to be able to explore and translate the spiritual language of *the Friend* into that which is familiar and understood by the committee member so that communication flows freely. Similarly, each member is invited to speak his/her heart in a way that is comfortable to the speaker.
10. to be open to the creative, empowering forces of Truth and Love which are possible in corporate worship and collective discernment. A functioning Spiritual Care Committee often experiences outcomes (new insights, new confidence and peace) for most if not all of its members as well as for the committee's focus *Friend*. And, if attended to, this spiritual growth may also impact the larger faith community.

In addition, experience has taught the School of the Spirit Ministry teachers and elders (spiritual companions) that there are certain committee or member characteristics that are likely to impair committee functioning and lead to distress for all involved. Four issues that may prove especially challenging are:

1. Limited time. Committee members lead busy lives and may have trouble finding time to meet together for the requisite meetings (usually monthly). We recognize, of course, that serious life events can alter anyone's plans, sometimes drastically. However, leaving such unanticipated occurrences

aside, we trust that each potential committee member will take his/her participation under discernment to seek clearness *before* he/she makes a commitment to provide steady accompaniment for *the Friend*.

2. Acceptance. Members who have difficulty responding to *the Friend* where he/she is, rather than where the member thinks the Friend “should be,” lead the committee into trouble. In general, it will be helpful for members to remember that *the Friend* may be exactly where God is leading him/her. If the member can accept that premise, then it is easier to turn to deep listening and discernment, rather than worrying about desired “progress” within the committee member’s time-line. Trust, love and acceptance are key factors needed on this journey.
3. Not knowing what to do. Committee members may have difficulty knowing how to be helpfully and lovingly challenging and discerning, as these behaviors may not be expressed often in our home faith communities. Remembering that a safe and loving environment is fertile ground for growth may help members formulate a gentle challenge to ideas or perceptions. A past *focus Friend* commented that the most challenging thing said to her during the two-year experience with her committee was when a rather quiet member suddenly asked, “Do you feel this is how you are being led?” That gentle, yet powerful, question took her away from the “rational” views she had been expressing and brought her back to the core issue.

It is hard for *the Friend* and committee members not to have a road map for the journey, not to know where the hazardous curves are or what lies ahead. It must be sufficient to simply accept the course, tread gently, give encouragement and understanding, and patiently “walk with” *the Friend* and with God.

4. Departing the loving way. Lastly, members who have problems accepting or allowing new or different spiritual language and concepts, who have personality conflicts with *the Friend* or with other members of the committee, who are

not comfortable maintaining confidentiality, or who engage in attacking, belittling, or humiliating *the Friend* or other committee members are definitely harmful to the process.

We know that without love, we do not thrive and grow in the physical world. The same may be said of the spiritual world; the love of God and our faith community help us thrive and grow.

Selection of Committee Members. The need to be centered and aware of God's active participation in all aspects of the Spiritual Care Committee's work cannot be over-stressed. In considering whom to ask to serve on a Spiritual Care Committee, it is expected that Ministry and Counsel and the focus *Friend* will work together in prayerful discernment. Both *the Friend* and Ministry and Counsel intentionally invite God into the selection process and are seeking to attend to nudges and guidance that *indicate God's intention* in the matter at hand.

In large faith communities *the Friend* may profit from recommendations from Ministry and Counsel because not all community members are familiar to him/her. Also, in the absence of community members experienced in spiritual care, Ministry and Counsel may be able to suggest appropriate people who have the characteristics recommended above and who are, therefore, perfectly able to serve faithfully regardless of prior experience.

Following discernment, *the Friend* is usually responsible for approaching potential Spiritual Care Committee members. This is often a very difficult task for *the Friend*, who may be shy or embarrassed to ask for such time and attention for him/herself. Also, many times *the Friend* is far more comfortable giving support than asking for it. In some instances it may be useful if Ministry and Counsel contacts potential members with or for *the Friend*.

It is possible that *the Friend* has never before had a Spiritual Care Committee or any other committee of support. It is also possible that the local faith community may not include many, or any, people with much experience of *spiritual* nurture. In such a case, it is reasonable to expect that all involved may initially feel uneasy, vulnerable and lacking in confidence.

When a committee builds a God-centered, honest and open, safe, loving space of trust, confidence develops. Differences between members exist without divisions. Spiritual experiences deepen. It takes time to develop and sustain such a blessed environment. If all present maintain patience, good-will and God-centeredness, God will prevail and growth will occur for all.

It is recommended that the Spiritual Care Committee remain under the care and in relationship with the local faith community's Ministry and Counsel for the duration of the Spiritual Care Committee work. Continuing such a connection provides a way to carry out Friends' *communal* practice of care and support for the leadings and ministries of Friends.

Committee Clerk. It is important that *the Friend* is *not* the person responsible for the leadership or the guidance of process for the Committee. Rather, one of the Spiritual Care Committee members serves as clerk of the Committee.

The clerk's responsibilities involve tasks with which most Friends are quite familiar from experiences within their faith community. The clerk works with *the Friend* and Committee members to find a suitable place and time for committee meetings. He/she reminds members when a meeting is scheduled. The clerk confers with *the Friend* regarding the general agenda and guides the Committee through the agenda, being flexible to the movement of God as *the Friend* and Committee work together. Very importantly, the clerk gently keeps the meetings centered in worship, calling members into silence when the need arises.

The clerk oversees the preparation of any reports that need to be generated. It may prove useful to the local faith community's Ministry and Counsel to receive periodic reports on the work of the Spiritual Care Committee. The reports to the faith community need to be written in general statements, rather than specific comments, in order to maintain appropriate confidentiality. It is best if reports to the faith community are discussed and shared with *the Friend* before being released. Such discussions provide an opportunity for useful review and reflection for both the Committee and *the Friend*.

Setting the Agenda. Though each focus *Friend's* path is unique, the general format of a Spiritual Care Committee agenda includes the following items. The order may vary according to the needs expressed, or perceived, always allowing for the immediate movement of God within the Committee.

1. The committee and *the Friend* come together initially for a time of worship and centering.
2. A brief “check in” with Committee members provides an opportunity for attuning to each other.
3. *The Friend* may wish to share and talk about some of the following: experiences since the last Committee meeting; topics opened up for him/her during prayer or reflection; inward themes that have arisen in his/her life; passages from readings that have been particularly meaningful; ways to integrate his/her work with family and faith community life; concerns about the naming, claiming, development, and/or practice of his/her service to God; occasions of ministry.
4. Committee members, who are listening, encouraging, and discerning, may wish to: reflect upon *the Friend's* walk with God and the faith community; help *the Friend* reflect upon queries that assist *the Friend* in guiding his/her spiritual life and growth; help clarify questions and concerns that *the Friend* may need to consider; discuss how the faith community can more fully accept, support, or utilize *the Friend's* exercise of ministry.
5. It is recommended that the clerk, *the Friend* and/or committee members summarize some of the main points or concerns that were lifted up during the meeting. A summary helps clarify for *the Friend* and the Committee members that all were heard; it also allows fine tuning for better understanding.
6. The meeting closes with worship.

The Three Tools. In a previous section, desirable characteristics of Spiritual Care Committee members were outlined. Essential attitudes, such as being grounded, open, and accepting were recommended. In addition, there are three primary and foundational “tools” that Committee members use in seeking to accompany *the Friend* on his/her spiritual path. Fortunately, all three tools are familiar to Friends and often and regularly experienced in Friends’ personal and corporate spiritual lives. The tools are: listening deeply; prayerful discernment; and faithful responding.

1. Listening deeply. Douglas Steere speaks eloquently of the gift and privilege of being invited to listen deeply to another.

*To “listen” another’s soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another. ... For in penetrating to what is involved in listening do we not disclose the thinness of the filament that separates listening openly to one another, and that of God intently listening to each soul?*⁶

Spiritual Care Committee members are asked again and again to “listen deeply” to the focus *Friend*. To do so is to reach a depth beneath the superficial or typical conversational level. It requires Committee members to maintain a worship or worship sharing mode from which God may touch our hearts, open our listening, and, perhaps, enable us to “see” how God loves *this Friend*, this leading, this ministry, this endeavor to be faithful. In 1st Samuel we are advised that

*... the Lord does not see as mortals see: they [mortals] look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.*⁷

⁶ Douglas Steere, *Where Words Come From: An Interpretation of the Ground and Practice of Quaker Worship and Ministry* (London: QHS, Swarthmore Lecture, 1955), 14.

⁷ 1st Samuel, 16:7, NRSV.

Of course, we will not see clearly as God does, but we can seek to look and listen as deeply as we are able in God's grace and presence.

The School of the Spirit Ministry has developed some queries that may be useful to Committee members in deepening the listening in spiritual care. While the listener remains anchored in awareness of God's love, he/she may wish to reflect on such queries as:

1. Through what practices does *the Friend* listen to or be attentive to Christ, the Light, the Seed, divine, God?
2. What are *the Friend's* experiences or assumptions about his/her life in the Spirit?
3. Is *the Friend* trusting in God? Or is that trust solely in his/her own effort, "know how," and competence? How can trust be fostered by the Spiritual Care Committee and allowed to grow?
4. Is *the Friend* surrendered to God, or still struggling with his/her own ego or expectations of others?
5. Is there something that is blocking the life of the Spirit in *the Friend* at this point in time?
6. Is *the Friend* aware of being divinely and completely loved by God?
7. In what way is *the Friend* growing now and how is that growth being manifested?
8. What is *the Friend's* relationship with the meeting/church? What expectations does *the Friend* have of the faith community and are they realistic? Is the minister's relationship to the meeting/church characterized by patience, humility, perseverance, and mutual trust?

9. Besides the Spiritual Care Committee, what other sources of guidance and support are available for *the Friend* to draw upon when needed?

Of course, whether reflected upon by *the Friend*, by the Committee, or by both the intent is to use whatever is gleaned in Truth for loving support and tender assistance, not for the purpose of rendering judgment.

2. Prayerful discernment. Put simply, discernment refers to seeking to understand the will of God, the direction of God, the guidance of God. Deep listening is the substrate for prayerful discernment and cannot be separated from it. Divine guidance is often sought by Friends, perhaps universally when individuals and the faith community are seeking clarity about spiritual gifts, leadings and calls to ministry.

Patricia Loring writes of the powerful significance of discernment when she refers to it as a dynamism involved in cooperation (co-creation) with God.

*Co-creation implies a still unfolding creation in which the Creator continues to work with and through us when we respond in faithfulness to the promptings of Love and Truth in our hearts ... [Discernment] is also invited, cultivated and lived into by the disciplined practice of living close to God over time in prayer.*⁸

Serving on a Spiritual Care Committee provides a wonderful and unique opportunity to witness an “unfolding creation” as *the Friend* follows and deepens his/her spiritual path. Through discernment, Committee members are “well used” in co-creation.

3. Faithful responding. Discerned responses given to the focus *Friend* are faithful when Committee members interact in a

⁸ Patricia Loring, *Listening Spirituality. Volume II: Corporate Spiritual Practice Among Friends* (Washington Grove, Maryland: Opening Press, 1999), 69.

tender, honest, caring manner that is reflective of God’s love for this beloved Friend.

Sometimes Spiritual Care Committee members are concerned about raising or exploring issues which they believe will be a “challenge” to *the Friend*. If the “challenging” issue comes forward from deep listening and prayerful discernment, then the issue may well be a part of the “unfolding creation” work of the moment. The Committee member then searches for a safe, loving, gentle way to approach the “challenge.” Will it be best to raise a question about the issue, share a relevant observation, or recall and revisit some related shared experience that has come up before? Once again, if the Committee stays centered and open to the Spirit, faithful responding is likely to occur and needed work will be done.

Another aspect of faithful responding is to refuse to abandon *the Friend* when he/she experiences fear, spiritual desolation, or deep doubts. Committee members may feel uncomfortable when valued opinions of their own are challenged by *the Friend*. The Committee stays stable throughout the rough times, still reflecting the unchanging love and care of God.

Summary

The Spiritual Care Committee is formed with members who are known to have demonstrated attitudes, beliefs and behaviors that taken together reflect the enduring love of God. At the surface level the structure of the Spiritual Care Committee is simple and generally familiar to Friends who serve their faith community. The task of nurturing growth in a person gifted and called into God’s service is, however, not surface level work. Rather, members of the Committee are asked to stay centered in the Spirit, drawing upon the practices of deep listening, prayerful discernment and faithful responding while accompanying the focus *Friend* on his/her spiritual journey.

III. Evaluating the Spiritual Care Committee

Both Committee members and the focus *Friend* work together periodically to evaluate their effectiveness and needs. As with many undertakings of Friends, the School of the Spirit Ministry finds that considering a set of queries facilitates evaluation. We hope the resultant insights (advices), passed on below, will be useful to future Spiritual Care Committees. The queries and advices are organized for Committee members and *the Friend* separately, however **both** sets are intended for the benefit of all.

Queries and Advices for Committee Members

1. **Do you mirror to *the Friend* the ways you see God acting, speaking, shining, loving, and serving through him/her?** *The Friend* attempting to be faithful often needs his/her care committee to reflect back to him/her the small acts and subtle moments, as well as the larger deeds, that reveal God working through *the Friend's* efforts to serve faithfully.
2. **Do you accompany *the Friend* in personal places of spiritual desolation and fear?** Members of the Committee cannot walk the path *for* the *Friend*; they can walk the path *with* the *Friend*. Courage and consolation will be found for *the Friend* when Committee members practice: listening deeply; being present; refraining from trying to “fix”; holding *the Friend* in prayer; trusting that God is caring for *the Friend*; and reminding him/her of God's loving support.
3. **Are you able to trust and remember that God sends *Friends* to serve the wounded and broken people and places?** Can you be open to supporting leadings in ministry that may take participants into uncomfortable or risky territory? Pray for the discernment and wisdom of the committee as well as for *the Friend* led to serve.

4. **In exploring the meeting's role in supporting *the Friend*, how can you help *the Friend* to engage prayerfully with others without resentment and disruption of his or her relationship to the meeting/church community?** Help *the Friend* to have realistic expectations of the meeting community/church. Consider what is necessary for *the Friend*, and Spiritual Care Committee members, to have a healthy relationship with the meeting/church.
5. **Can you lovingly challenge *the Friend* to live more deeply into his/her ministry and gifts so that he/she may grow in the measure of faithfulness given to God?** Help *the Friend* attend to the nudges or stirrings of the Spirit at the edges of his/her awareness, which may well be beyond *the Friend's* comfort zone. Support *the Friend* as he/she is Spirit-led to become more vulnerable, authentic, humble, and bold.
6. **Are you participating in evaluating the process and function of the committee with some regularity?** Periodic self-evaluation by the Spiritual Care Committee helps the Committee become more aware of what is needed at any given time. As *the Friend* progresses in responsiveness to God's call, the Committee will notice that different needs arise and call for attention. Some *Friends* need to be drawn out and affirmed. Some need help in finding the right language in which to communicate what is given them to share. Some need to be lovingly challenged to grow into that which God is asking of them. Periodic self-evaluation also aids the Spiritual Care Committee in understanding *its* role in God's ministry and thus improves the Committee's capacity to anchor and nurture spiritual gifts and faithful ministry.

Queries and Advices for the Friend

Behaviors and attitudes on the part of *the Friend* serve to facilitate both the work of the Spiritual Care Committee and the relationships involved.

1. **Do you help the committee prepare for meetings?** Though not always done, a brief written outline or report sent to Committee members prior to a scheduled meeting may prove very helpful. If the report reflects *the Friend's* current experiences, joys and concerns the Committee members have a chance to reflect upon and prayerfully discern how they might best respond faithfully.

Assisting and advising the Committee clerk in preparing the agenda helps the Committee and *the Friend* focus on what is uppermost in *the Friend's* mind and heart.

However, one does not want to overburden or “swamp” Committee members. If, at first, *the Friend* is unsure what information Committee members actually would like to have, *ask*.

2. **Are you as forthcoming as possible in what is shared?** *Friends* sometimes mention that they are reluctant to bring forth concerns, fears or thoughts to the Committee for two main reasons. One reason is *the Friend* is unsure that Committee members will *understand* what is being shared. The other, that members of the Committee will not *approve* of what is being shared.

It is understandable that *the Friend* feels vulnerable and unprotected if either of these situations occur. Yet, it will likely lead to growth on all parts if *the Friend* can lift up *exactly* these concerns – fear of not being understood or of not being approved. The Committee's response to and discussion about those fears will generally indicate the path forward.

3. **Are you keeping in mind the mutuality of the Spiritual Care Committee experience?** At least initially, both *the Friend* and Committee members are finding their way. Members of the Committee also feel uncertain and, perhaps, vulnerable themselves. They, too, want to do a “good” job, to be faithful to their task, to be understood and approved. Over time, members of the Committee may also feel challenged in their own spiritual relationships.

Just as it is helpful to *the Friend* to be accepted and encouraged, it will be helpful to the Committee members when *the Friend* is able to identify and share questions or comments that proved particularly helpful to him/her. Respect and consideration for each other are important factors in this mutual experience.

4. **Are you keeping expectations reasonable?** Sometimes unreasonable expectations of what the Spiritual Care Committee can offer lead to considerable disappointment. Satisfaction in the experience is more likely if *the Friend* can appreciate and value the opportunities the Committee *is* able to offer, rather than focus on what the Committee is unable to offer. Remember: God gives us what we need – not necessarily all that we would like to have, but what is sufficient. Also, *the Friend* has, or needs to develop, other means of support and challenge to draw upon within his/her Meeting or broader faith community.

Consider an example: *The Friend* wants to “grow, stretch and be challenged.” So, *the Friend* brings up some topic to the Spiritual Care Committee and then says, “Ask me the ‘hard’ questions.” Very likely, the members of the Committee will return a blank stare or ask, “What *are* the ‘hard’ questions?” Rightly so. The request to the committee is unreasonable. If *the Friend* knows what he/she considers the ‘hard’ questions to be, then *the Friend* needs to lift up the questions and consider them in the care of the Committee. If *the Friend* does not know the ‘hard’ questions to ask, it seems a good time to turn to the Inward Teacher for further discernment. One needs to be mindful not to accidentally set up a potential “failure” experience for all involved.

AFTERWORD

It has been acknowledged above that most Quakers consider themselves to be on their own spiritual path and therefore can recognize what a solitary pursuit that experience can be. In addressing this issue, Laurence Freeman, a Benedictine monk, offers the following:

*The fellowship of others who are making the same solitary journey as ourselves is a form of the Spirit's grace accompanying us on the pilgrimage. In solitude we need to be strengthened by the warmth and affirmation of a spiritual family...Precisely because two people are never at the same point in the journey, friendship, mutual inspiration and encouragement are among the principal means by which the Spirit guides each one of us.*⁹

In mentioning the mutuality of “friendship...inspiration and encouragement,” Freeman declares that both (or all) parties are gifted and guided by the Spirit. Even in the smallest meeting/church the skills, attitudes, and values needed to accompany one another are regularly practiced among Friends.

The most basic and powerful tools available to Friends in supportive ministry lie in their trust in and openness to wisdom and guidance from Christ, the Inward Teacher. Realistic expectations about the outcome of the Spiritual Care Committee's work require that Friends rely on God for the outcome, as well as the process. As Friends we recognize that ultimately the power to touch hearts, to give courage, to bring light over darkness, and to effect transformation resides with God.

Most *Friends* report having positive, helpful, supportive and valuable experiences in their Spiritual Care Committees. They have benefited

⁹ Laurence Freeman, *Jesus the Teacher Within* (New York, Continuum, 2000), 225-226.

from an experience of eldering, or spiritual companioning, in its most positive sense. Often the committee members reflected the best example of nurturing the participant had witnessed in his/her local faith community.

In the School of the Spirit Ministry, Spiritual Care Committee members have reported experiencing a deeper sense of spirituality, encouragement, a personal call to more spiritual formation or development for themselves, and a renewed sense of place in the larger faith community. An increased sensitivity to leadings in one's own life and an increased awareness of insight, comfort and guidance have also been reported.

Those who are caring for the entire process, Ministry and Counsel and the entire Meeting, know they are fulfilling an important community function in fostering ministry and leadings. The faith community may also profit directly as the ministry develops in their midst.

The School of the Spirit Ministry wholeheartedly affirms that God is present to all who participate in furthering the loving ministry and service of God. We know the benefits and satisfactions of serving on a Spiritual Care Committee far outweigh the cost in effort and time. We pray that all who undertake spiritual care will be aware of the love and blessings that surround us in this work.

GLOSSARY

Accountability (Spiritual Accountability) means being answerable to God for the ministry, being responsible for one's right use of gifts and ministry, being answerable to one's faith community (meeting or church) for the ministry and answerable to those served by it. In a relationship of spiritual accountability, the faith community is also responsible and answerable for care of the minister and for the right use of the gifts and ministry carried by that Friend.

Calling is sometimes used interchangeably with **leading** (as being *called* by God to a specific ministry or course of action) – see below; but can also mean one's spiritual vocation in general.

Centered (Centering) is to be “grounded” or to “ground” oneself – as one might set a house on a firm foundation – in prayer, worship, and relationship with the Divine. To be centered is to be settled and “grounded in the Spirit.”

Clearness Committees meet with those who are seeking clarity around personal decisions. The Friend asks the meeting to appoint a clearness committee through the meeting's Ministry and Counsel Committee, or, in an informal clearness process, asks a few trusted friends to gather with her/him. In a formal clearness process, the clearness committee's job is to help the Friend discover whether there is clarity to move forward with a matter, wait, or take other action. This happens through:

- worship together
- deep listening to the questions and concerns brought to the committee
- careful, gentle, open-ended questions from clearness committee members
- reflecting back what has been heard.

(See also Jan Hoffman's “Clearness Committees and Their Use in Personal Discernment,” Quaker Books of FGC, 1996.)

Consolation/Desolation. *Spiritual consolation* occurs when one feels God to be very close and present to oneself. These are generally

powerful but fleeting experiences, and can even come at times of great loss, suffering or sadness. This sense of spiritual consolation may also be experienced when Friends receive solace from others, including the Spiritual Care Committee. *Spiritual desolation* is a time in our lives when God seems far away – it may be a time of spiritual loneliness, fear, confusion, or doubt; the feeling that one may be praying into a void, as if God does not hear or is hidden from oneself. It is important to remember times of *consolation* when one is in periods of *desolation* to help remember that God is indeed near, even when one cannot feel God’s presence. Remembering times of *consolation* during periods of *desolation* can also serve as a compass when one is lost in the “spiritual fog” of desolation.

Faith. More than just belief in God, faith is the act of “giving over” ourselves to God.

Faithfulness is attentiveness to the guidance of the Spirit and the earnest endeavor to submit to that guidance (from Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting’s “Nurturing Faithfulness to the Leadings of the Spirit,” April 10, 2005).

Gifts (Spiritual Gifts). As mentioned in 1st Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, spiritual gifts are God-given, arise in response to the community’s or the world’s needs and are to be used on behalf of others rather than for personal gain. Spiritual gifts do not belong to the individual. One might think of spiritual gifts as being “on loan” from God to be used for others. They also may not relate to an individual’s personal skills or abilities, for example, Moses’ gift of leadership, Exodus 4; Jeremiah’s gift of prophecy, Jeremiah 1.

Leading is the sense of being nudged, impelled, invited, or drawn by God or the Holy Spirit toward a particular action or ministry. Sometimes used interchangeably with *calling*. A leading may also come in the form of a nudge or stirrings of the Spirit.

The Meeting (Monthly Meeting, Quaker/Friends Meeting) is the local Quaker congregation of Friends, generally used in relationship to “unprogrammed” Friends’ meetings. (Unprogrammed meetings are held in silent worship. Generally there are not paid clergy in unprogrammed meetings. Friends wait for the inspiration of the Holy

Spirit to rise with a spoken message. Anyone might feel called to speak, although the expectation of ‘waiting worship’ is that one will not do so without clear, inward promptings from the Spirit.)

Ministry is a “God-given way of serving” – the many ways in which individuals help to make God’s love and transforming power manifest in the world. As with spiritual gifts (see above), ministry arises in response to the community’s or the world’s needs, is to be used on behalf of others rather than for personal gain, and may not relate to one’s personal skills or abilities.

Ministry and Counsel is a name used in some Quaker meetings for the committee responsible for care of the Meeting for Worship and for the spiritual nurture of members and attenders. In other faith communities, the equivalent might be, for example, Worship and Ministry, Ministry and Oversight, Care and Counsel.

Names for God, the Divine. As with early Friends who used many names interchangeably to name and describe their experience of God, this set of guidelines uses a variety of names or words for God – such as God, the Divine, the Spirit, Christ, Inward Teacher, Truth.

Pastoral Care is care which is directed towards the personal or interpersonal spiritual, physical or emotional needs of an individual or faith community (e.g., counsel; care for families, the needy, the elderly; conflict mediation) as opposed to care which is specifically directed towards the gifts and ministry carried by an individual on behalf of the community.

Spirit-led Guidance/Discernment is the guidance or decision-making which arises out of prayer and turning inward to God, rather than purely from logic, reason, or emotion.

Surrender is the action of giving over or releasing to God our own fears, opinions and preferences, judgments, desires, and ego-driven impulses. Surrender arises from **Faith**.

CORE CHARACTERISTICS

A Ministry of Prayer and Learning devoted to the School of the Spirit is dedicated to helping all who wish to be more faithful listeners and responders to the inward work of Christ. The Ministry in its conduct and programming has these ***Core Characteristics***:

- Is rooted, grounded, and lived out in prayer and expectant waiting upon Divine guidance.
- Understands our spirituality and spiritual journeys in the context of the ongoing Judeo-Christian story.
- Combines a clear Christian grounding with the ability to listen and recognize spiritual openings and committed journeys in whatever form they appear. This rare combination helps to lead one into deeper spiritual understanding and brings forth a greater tenderness with each other.
- Fosters a deeper appreciation of the rhythms of the contemplative life as lived out within a faith community.
- Strengthens understanding and appreciation of the roots of Quakerism, its theology, practices, and traditions.
- Enhances the understanding of the life of a faith community grounded in God and the service of members within it, thereby building up the Religious Society of Friends.

*Approved by the School of the Spirit Ministry Board
12th month, 2008*

The words in this pamphlet have come from years of listening to and observing the interactions of participants in the School of the Spirit Ministry's *On Being a Spiritual Nurturer* program and their Spiritual Care Committees. The Spiritual Care Committee consists of those Friends and others that walk with the participant and witness their journey toward transformation. We have learned valuable lessons and skills that we believe others might find useful and we offer them herein.

Enter with an open heart. The journey of transformation is subverted if the heart is not open to hear another's song. We invite the user of this document into the freedom of the open space of Truth where all languages spoken from the Heart are heard by the One Creator of us all. Therein, we abide in unity and love and understanding, and beyond words.

We desire this pamphlet to be used so that it deepens the life of the Spirit within the Religious Society of Friends. This pamphlet is available online at www.schoolofthespirit.org and can be downloaded for free for educational purposes. Hardcopies can be ordered from:

The School of the Spirit Ministry
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To order, call (919) 929-2339 or
email info@schoolofthespirit.org.

A Ministry of Prayer and Learning devoted to the School of the Spirit serves Friends throughout North America and is under the care of the Worship and Care Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting