

Clearness and Support Committees  
Unapproved draft – August 18, 2018

The discipline of asking honest, open questions is at the heart of the clearness committee.  
Parker Palmer, 2004

Clearness committees serve individual Friends who seek assistance in reaching clarity about a personal concern or decision. A clearness committee is convened to help the individual determine what God would have her or him do, based on the belief that each person has an “Inner Light” and that the individual will make her or his decision guided by this Light.

Any Friend is welcome to seek the assistance of a clearness committee to clarify an issue and seek a way forward, or to discern the truth of a leading. More specifically, Friends may seek clarity about a proposed marriage (see section on marriage pp. xx-xx), membership in a monthly meeting (see section on membership pp. xx-xx), divorce, a change in family circumstances, a move to another region, a change in vocation or job, taking a stand or witness on a public issue, travelling in the ministry, or any other personal concern.

The Friend with the concern generally approaches a member of the Care and Counsel committee (or equivalent) to ask that a clearness committee be formed. The Care and Counsel committee may inquire into the nature of the concern in an attempt to determine whether it is best taken up by a clearness committee or in some other way, such a support committee (see below) or a professional from outside of the meeting community. In the latter case, the Care and Counsel committee may provide resources to the individual with the concern.

Once a decision is made that a clearness committee is to be formed, the care and counsel committee (often in consultation with the individual Friend) establishes a clearness committee composed of 3-6 members. The committee is typically comprised of Friends representing a diversity of gifts and backgrounds. Friends who can deeply center, who are open to others and their situations, and who listen well and demonstrate empathy are good candidates for clearness committees. Before making a commitment to be part of a clearness committee, Friends who have been asked to serve should understand why they are being asked to be a part of the committee, the nature of the concern, and the likely time commitment. It is important that members of the committee commit to maintaining confidentiality. (*confidentiality, mandated reporter, respecting privacy of person, differentiate by nature of concern, confidentiality vs transparency*)

Once the clearness committee has been formed, a clerk or convener is chosen, as is a recorder. The clerk convenes the meeting(s), sets time parameters, and articulates the process to be followed. The clerk facilitates the meeting(s) and helps ensure a worshipful foundation. The recorder takes notes that can be given to the individual seeking clarity after the meeting.

The soul work that goes on in the clearness committee is quiet, subtle and nearly impossible to put into words.

A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life  
Parker Parmer, 2004

In beginning a meeting of a clearness committee, the clerk invites those present to enter into a period of waiting worship. The clerk or the person who has requested the clearness committee speaks out of silence and shares the question(s) to be answered and the issues involved. The Friends on the committee then engage with the individual to clarify the concern under consideration and with the help of Divine guidance seek a path forward. Drawing on the spirit that unites Friends in meeting for worship, the committee endeavors to listen without judgment, ask clarifying questions, and join with the individual seeking clarity as to God's will for her or him. The committee members help the individual see the problem more clearly, offering spiritual and emotional support. Committee members are not expected to impart advice, much less attempt to "solve" the problem or situation or make decisions for the seeker. All parties seek clearness hoping to find "truth and the right course of action."

Toward the end of the meeting, the clerk may ask each person present to share a sense of what has emerged. A determination is then made as to next steps. These might include the scheduling of another meeting or defining ways that the committee can support the individual in moving forward. The clerk ends the meeting with a period of waiting worship.

Clearness committees for membership or marriage report to the Care and Counsel committee, which makes a recommendation to the monthly meeting. The business meeting then makes a decision whether to approve the individual for membership or the couple for marriage under the care of the meeting. Clearness committees that discern whether their meeting should take a leading or ministry under its care report directly to the monthly meeting or to Care and Counsel, according to the practice of that meeting. (See "Recognizing Spiritual Gifts and Leadings," pp. xx-xx.) Clearness committees established for other personal concerns or decisions do not ordinarily involve business to be brought to the monthly meeting and therefore do not normally give reports or recommendations.

queries and advices-see SEYM

There are times when a Friend feels the need for ongoing support that does not necessarily involve reaching clearness about a personal concern or decision. For example, this may happen if the Friend takes on new responsibilities, or faces hardship or other challenges. In such cases, that individual may request that Care and Counsel form a support (or guidance) committee. Alternatively, Friends in a meeting who sense that a Friend who is struggling may offer to form a support committee. Much like a clearness committee, Friends who make up the support committee are there to listen and offer supportive feedback rather than to judge. As with a clearness committee, preferences by the Friend asking for the support committee concerning membership on the committee may be considered. *(when clerk when presiding clerk, when on a national organization, add a heading, finite, vs ongoing, fwcc, fgc, wider quaker organization,*

[O]ur guidance comes not from external authority but from the inner teacher and we need community to help us clarify and amplify the inner teacher's inner voice.

Parker Palmer 2004