

## Pastoral Care

*Proposed for a one-year provisional period*

Quakers regard all individuals in their meeting community as “members one of another” (Romans 12:4). As Friends, we regard ourselves as being called to care for each other’s spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. The traditional term for this form of ministry is “pastoral care.” For Quakers in Illinois Yearly Meeting, pastoral care is the collective responsibility of the entire meeting.

Pastoral care begins when we recognize the needs of our fellow worshippers. We do this by coming to know one another deeply and by listening to each other actively and lovingly. Every encounter, whether at the meeting house or elsewhere, is an opportunity for us to learn about the needs of others and to respond to those needs.

The spiritual welfare of a meeting is greatly helped if its social life is vigorous, and members take a warm personal interest in one another’s welfare. The pastoral work of the Society is specially committed to [the Care and Counsel Committee], but our members should generally not allow themselves to feel that they are relieved from responsibility. In the greater events of life, such as marriage, birth of a child, illness or death, it is our duty and privilege to share in one another’s joys and sorrows; and sympathy thus shown is a potent means of binding us in closer fellowship.

London Yearly Meeting, 1925

Pastoral care often takes place informally, as a natural consequence of our concern for one another. When Friends find that informal means of care are insufficient for a particular situation calling for pastoral care, they should bring that issue to the care and counsel or similar committee (pp xx-xx) or to the meeting as a whole if there is no committee for such matters. Members of the committee that undertakes pastoral care are expected to take a personal interest in the spiritual, emotional, and physical welfare of each member and regular attender in the meeting, thus assuring that everyone within the meeting community is supported in difficult times. (Ministry to individuals outside of the meeting community is also of major concern to Friends (see Section xx), but it is not normally referred to as “pastoral care.”)

Situations for which pastoral care might be in order are discussed elsewhere in this Faith & Practice, including conflict within the meeting (pp xx-xx) and death and bereavement (pp xx-xx), among others. Individuals who are not members of the committee that undertakes pastoral care are encouraged to bring such issues to the attention of that committee, particularly when they discern that their individual gifts are not likely to be sufficient to deal with the issue at hand.

In order to undertake responsibility for pastoral care, members of the care and counsel committee are encouraged to:

- acquaint themselves with all members and attenders in order to keep informed about their various needs for personal encouragement and assistance;
- inform others, as appropriate, if there are needs for which the Meeting can be helpful;
- communicate with any Friend whose relationship with the Meeting has gone amiss;
- facilitate communication between individual Friends and the Meeting’s official structures for clearness and support.

The care and counsel committee is expected to undertake pastoral care with humility, tact, and discretion. This involves the ability to listen carefully and tenderly, to “speak the truth in love,” to maintain confidentiality, and to refrain from giving advice unless asked. Gifts of insight, experience, and emotional maturity are especially helpful.

The humility with which the care and counsel committee is called to carry out its work includes acknowledging any limitations in its abilities and resources. It is therefore beneficial for the committee to be aware of the presence of gifts and expertise among the members and attenders of the meeting.

In cases in which the care and counsel committee discerns that the meeting’s resources are insufficient for a particular concern, it may wish to refer the Friend(s) under its care to an outside organization that provides practical or material assistance, counseling, or other services. The committee is urged to inform itself about the availability of such services and to keep an up-to-date directory with contact information on the organizations that offer them.

The role of the care and counsel committee, while important, should not detract from the responsibility of the entire meeting community concerning pastoral care. As “members one of another,” Friends are called to take this responsibility seriously and to undertake it tenderly. Even when primary assistance for someone in the meeting community is beyond the resources of that community, committees or individuals within the meeting might be able to offer a caring presence as well as practical support in matters such as transportation, meals, or childcare. While it is important that Friends do not “outrun their guide” in attempting to provide care in ways for which they are not equipped, it is equally important that we endeavor to act in support of each other as the Spirit leads.

I have come to know that one essential ingredient is to recognize that we are not responsible for fixing the situation. Except for the few situations in which provision of some material aid is needed, we are not likely to be able to resolve the situation, but rather to be with the person or family in the midst of it... We are called to be instruments for the work of the living God; we are called to be channels through which the Spirit can move.

Arlene Kelly  
“The Ministry of Pastoral Care”  
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