The Monthly Meeting

The Monthly Meeting is the fundamental unit of the Religious Society of Friends. It consists of a group of Friends who meet together at regular intervals to wait upon God in Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Business. When these are meetings in the true Quaker sense, Friends are “joined with God and with each other” and there is order, unity, and power. It is upon this concept of a meeting that the good order of Friends is based. Through the corporate life of a Monthly Meeting, Friends order their lives in relation to God and, through that relationship, to the most profound realities of life: birth and death, marriage and family, community of spirit, and concern for humanity and all of God’s creation.

The Monthly Meeting is the “family” of Friends. It receives and records new members; terminates membership when necessary; provides spiritual and, if need be, material aid to those in its fellowship; counsels with members in troubled circumstances; oversees marriages; gives care at the time of death; collects and dispenses funds for its maintenance and work; witnesses to Friends’ testimonies; relates itself to its Quarterly and Yearly Meeting and to other bodies of Friends and to other organizations with common concerns; and carries on any work or assumes any function consistent with the faith of Friends and not specifically referred to some other Friends’ body. Good records are kept of all its proceedings.

The degree of organization of a Monthly Meeting depends upon its circumstances. Organization does not exist for its own sake but to provide what is needed for the Meeting’s orderly and effective operation, while allowing each person a maximum of freedom, participation, and responsibility. Simple in its early stages, a Meeting’s organization evolves with its needs. Experience has shown that organizational structure which has proved useful should not be changed unless there is good reason to do so, but that which no longer serves a vital function should be laid down.

See chapters ___ and ___ for the Monthly Meeting’s relationship to the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings.

Background

I was moved to recommend the setting up of Monthly Meetings throughout the nation. And the Lord opened to me what I must do and how the men’s and women’s monthly and quarterly meetings should be ordered and established in this and in other nations....

George Fox, 1667

George Fox preached the good news that “Christ has come to teach his people himself” and that the love and power of God are available to all people without the help of priests, ministers or sacraments. Early Friends testified that they were drawn together by shared experiences of Christ, the Inward Teacher, and that they knew that Christ to be present to all and in all, but that each person perceives the Light.
individually and in such measure as God wills; yet, there is but one Truth. The Light operating through each individual results in a gathered fellowship, the mystical union of individuals with each other. In this welding of many persons into one corporate body, many single openings and insights are forged into a more complete and unified understanding of God’s will.

In the first years of the preaching of Fox and the Valiant Sixty, organization was informal and was only as much as was necessary for communication and coordination among the Children of Light and for those traveling in the cause of Truth. It depended chiefly upon the personal influence and incessant work of the early leaders. As the Society grew, there came to be a need for organized nurture of groups, for communication among groups, for dealing with internal problems, and for a united response to government persecution. Fox recognized that a method had to be found for Friends as a body to take responsibility for needed decisions, rather than for it to be assumed by a few outstanding leaders.

Being aware of the hypocrisy and worldliness of the religious hierarchies and institutions of his day, Fox was led to proclaim the “true Gospel Order,” an order of which Christ was clearly the head and in which all Friends participated fully according to the measure of Light they had received. Some meetings which were essentially Monthly Meetings were established in the north of England as early as 1653, but the systematic establishment of Monthly Meetings and Quarterly Meetings came in 1667-71 as Fox traveled extensively throughout England to set these up.

Fox perceived that, in the male-dominated society of that time, women could take their rightful place in the Society of Friends only when they were freed from the control and interference of men. Therefore, in the beginning, men and women met separately to conduct business. When separate business meetings became unnecessary, they were laid down in favor of a combined meeting.

The basic framework of the Society of Friends as it exists today is essentially the system which Fox organized. It provides a channel for the Kingdom of God to be established on earth by providing both for the care and nourishment of the “People of God,” and also for the fulfillment of God’s will in the world at large. At various times in the life of the Society of Friends one or the other aspect has been foremost, but both have always been present and are necessary for healthy Meetings and a healthy Society.

Meeting for Worship

[Quotations about the spiritual nature of Meeting for Worship will be found under “Worship” in the “Faith” section of the revised Faith and Practice. The more nuts-and-bolts material remains here in the “Practice” section.]

The Meeting for Worship is the heart of the Monthly Meeting and of the Society of Friends, for worship together is central and fundamental to Friends. Its basis is direct communion with God. The Meeting for Worship is the only Quaker practice which has existed from the beginning of the Society of Friends and which remains essentially the same without having gone through a process of development.

Meetings for Worship are held at established times, usually once a week; appointed Meetings for Worship are arranged by the Monthly Meeting at the time of marriages, memorial services, or other special occasions.

See “Worship” in Chapter ___ about the spiritual nature and experience of Meeting for Worship, including our traditions around offering vocal ministry and the good order of Friends concerning worship.

Meeting for Business

[Most of the quotations about Meeting for Business and more discussion of the spiritual aspects of Friends’ decision-making will be found under “Discernment” in the “Faith” section of the revised Faith and Practice. The more nuts-and-bolts material remains here in the “Practice” section.]
The Meeting for Business is a Meeting for Worship where Friends care for their corporate business. It is essential for the functioning of the Monthly Meeting. It takes place in the same expectant waiting for the guidance of the Spirit as does any Meeting for Worship. Friends’ manner of conducting business is an expression of their basic faith that the Light which is in all, when heeded, draws all into agreement in their common affairs, and is an expression of their commitment to follow that Light. A Meeting for Business is usually held once a month and it is often referred to as “monthly meeting.” Care must be taken to distinguish between the Monthly Meeting, the fundamental unit of the Society of Friends, and the monthly meeting, the occasion for conducting business.

It is a weighty thing to speak in large meetings for business. First, except our minds are rightly prepared, and we clearly understand the case we speak to, instead of forwarding, we hinder the business and make more labour for those on whom the burden of work is laid.

If selfish views or a partial spirit have any room in our minds, we are unfit for the Lord’s work. If we have a clear prospect of the business and proper weight on our minds to speak, it behooves us to avoid useless apologies and repetitions. Where people are gathered from far, and adjourning a meeting of business attended with great difficulty, it behooves all to be cautious how they detain a meeting, especially when they have sat six or seven hours and a good way to ride home.

In three hundred minutes are five hours, and he that improperly detains three hundred people one minute, besides other evils that attend it, does an injury like that of imprisoning one man five hours without cause.

John Woolman, 1758

See “Discernment” in Chapter ___ about the spiritual nature and experience of Friends’ Meeting for Business.

Friends’ Method of Reaching Decisions

Friends conduct business together in the faith that there is one divine Spirit which is accessible to all persons; when Friends wait upon, heed and follow the Light of Truth within them, its Spirit will lead to unity. This faith is the foundation for any group decision. Since it is of prime importance that Friends understand and follow this procedure for business in the Monthly Meeting, its basis and method are discussed in the present chapter, but the principle underlies all activities of the Society of Friends.

The basis for the Quaker method of reaching decisions is a religious one. Friends are expected to come to a Meeting for Business in expectation that the Holy Spirit will lead the assembled body to unity and correct action, and that unity is always possible because the same Light of Truth shines in some measure in every human heart. In practical terms this means that such meetings are held in a context of worship and that those present repeatedly and consciously seek Divine guidance. It is important that every Meeting for Business begin with a period of worship rather than with “a few moments of silence,” so that the spirit of worship will pervade the transaction of business. To emphasize this interdependence, some Friends speak of “Meeting for Worship for Business.” Only as Friends are aware that they are functioning in the Divine presence does the Quaker method work. The commitment to search for unity depends upon mutual trust, implies a willingness to labor and to submit to the leadings of the Spirit, and grows as members become better acquainted with one another.

Interested attenders as well as members are generally encouraged to attend and take part in business meetings. Responsibility for decisions, however, remains with members of the Meeting.

Bringing Items of Business before the Meeting. A matter requiring Meeting action may be brought
before the Meeting for Business by the Clerk, a committee, or another member. In the latter two instances, the Clerk should be informed in advance so that the matter can be included on the agenda. It helps if a written copy of the proposal is given to the Clerk before or at the time of presentation to the Meeting. Care in preparing the agenda and the Clerk’s judgment of the relative urgency and importance of matters can help greatly to facilitate the Meeting’s business.

**Good Order of Friends during Meeting for Business.** The Quaker method for reaching decisions involves searching for the right corporate decisions and arriving at a “sense of the meeting,” or reaching unity. Friends are urged to seek Divine guidance at all times, to be mutually forbearing, and to be concerned for the good of the Meeting as a whole rather than to press a personal preference. Time should be allowed for deliberate and prayerful consideration of the matter in hand. Everyone must want to reach a decision and be open to new understanding. Friends should come to each Meeting for Business expecting that their minds will be changed. It is important that all members be heard if they feel concerned to express a point of view. They should speak briefly and to the point, express their own view, avoid refuting statements made by others, and give each other credit for purity of motive. When someone has already stated a position satisfactorily Friends need offer only a word or two expressing agreement.

Before speaking, Friends should seek recognition from the Clerk; they should not speak to individuals, and should be hesitant about speaking more than once unless they have new light on an issue. Each vocal contribution should be something which adds to the ideas already presented.

**Role of the Clerk.** The Clerk, as gatherer of the sense of the Meeting, should be reluctant to state an opinion. If that view is being overlooked, the Clerk may be able to draw attention to it through questions. If the Clerk has strong views on the matter, the Assistant Clerk or another Friend is asked to serve as Clerk during its consideration. Throughout, the grace of humor can often help to relax the tensions of a Meeting so that new Light comes to it.

**Sense of the Meeting.** At times, those present become aware of a gathered insight, or an inner sense of rightness, and it is recognized that a decision has been reached. The Clerk then easily senses that the Meeting has reached unity and expresses the “sense of the Meeting” in a minute.

At other times, it is more difficult to reach a decision and the Clerk must carefully weigh the various points of view which have been expressed before offering a tentative formulation of a minute. If there are one or two members who do not agree, but feel that it is nevertheless the right decision for the Meeting at the time, they will remain silent or withdraw their objection and free the Meeting to proceed.

**Adjourned Meetings and Called Meetings.** Any session of a Meeting for Business may be adjourned to a later date and the business continued at an “adjourned Meeting for Business.” A special meeting may be called by the Clerk to consider a specific matter of business. Advance notice of such a “called Meeting for Business” should be given, and no business should be considered other than that for which the meeting was called.

[[paragraph above taken from “formulation of minutes” pp. 77]]

**Formulation of Minutes**

Once the Clerk has formulated a minute, any member may offer additions, corrections, or a substitute minute. When members approve and no objection is voiced, the minute is written down and read back to the Meeting by the Clerk or Assistant Clerk. The Clerk should be given authority to make minor editorial changes in the minute later, if any appear needed. At the next meeting, when the minutes of the previous meeting are read, attention may be called to the changes. When approved in its original or edited form, the minute becomes part of the Meeting’s permanent record.

[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: What is your group’s practice around formulation of minutes? What kinds of decisions are recorded as full formal minutes? Do you approve the wording of a formal minute during the meeting the topic is being discussed or at a subsequent Meeting for Business?]]

**Unity**
Friends strive to achieve unity—not uniformity, not unanimity, and not like-mindedness. Friends achieve unity because of their conviction that there is such a thing as corporate guidance where a group, meeting in the expectation of Divine leading, may be given a greater insight than any single person. The unity which Friends seek and hope to capture in a recorded minute is God’s will in relation to the matter under consideration. Assent to a minute, however, does not imply uniformity of judgment. Rather it is a recognition that the minute records what the group feels is right at a given time. There may be Friends who would wish the Meeting to move forward more adventurously and others who fear what seems dangerous experiment. Each might have wished the Meeting to take a different course from that agreed upon, but will give assent to the sense of the Meeting. Unity is always possible to those who go deep enough, for Truth is one and the nearer we come to the one Light of Truth, the nearer we come to unity. The search for Truth and unity is sometimes a long and difficult one, requiring much love, tolerance, and patience, but it is worth the effort. The method has not always succeeded; this has generally been because some members have not achieved the right attitude of mind and heart or because Friends have been too impatient for unity to develop. Nevertheless, Quakers have used this method with a large degree of success for more than three centuries. Rufus Jones said, “Friends have merely kept alive a sound method.”

Serious Differences of Opinion

When there are serious differences of opinion and some remain strongly convinced of the validity of their point of view, it is frequently possible to find unity by recourse to a period of silent worship and prayer. The effect of this quiet waiting is often powerful and a way may appear for the solution of the problem. Such a way transcends compromise; it is the discovery at a deeper level of what all really desire. If there continue to be Friends whose convictions make it impossible for them to unite with the Meeting, the decision may be postponed to a later time or the matter may be referred to a small committee. Such a committee includes Friends of diverse views and is charged with revising the proposal in light of the objections and with bringing recommendations to a later meeting. If the matter is urgent, the committee may withdraw to return before the meeting closes or may be given the power to act.

Occasionally one or two Friends object, and feel they cannot withdraw their objection to the Meeting’s taking action in a matter on which all other Friends in the Meeting unite. In such a situation, the opposing Friends may well question whether their objections should be considered binding on the Meeting. On the other hand, a Meeting may too readily agree to an action on plausible but superficial grounds, so it is well to ponder objections voiced by a few Friends, or even a single Friend, which may reach to the heart of the matter at hand. If the Meeting, after prolonged laboring, is convinced that it is following Divine guidance, it may set aside the objections and proceed. It may include reference to the objections in the minute recording the action. The growth of Truth among the members in the course of time will confirm the action or lead the Meeting to a sounder decision. A chronic objector whose opinions carry little weight may be dealt with considerately without the Meeting’s necessarily being disrupted. An objector, however, who insists, time after time, in putting a personal judgment against the clear unity of the Meeting in a disruptive manner, even after being eldered, may need the counsel of Friends as to whether that individual understands and can function in Friends’ way of doing business.

In the process of reaching a decision, the Clerk and the Meeting may quite properly take into consideration that some Friends have more wisdom and experience than others. It should also bear in mind that some members have specialized knowledge and training in certain areas and therefore their conviction may carry greater weight when the matter at hand is related to their expertise. In either case, the opposition of such Friends cannot as a rule be disregarded. The Meeting, however, must be on guard against always accepting words of weighty Friends as final and must also be wary of accepting the traditional pattern only because it is traditional. Fresh, powerful insights are often granted to new and younger members. When a committee brings a recommendation for consideration, the Meeting must keep in mind that the recommendation is the result of concentrated attention of a small group and must resist
temptation to repeat the work of the committee; the committee must avoid being so attached to its recommendation that it forgets that new insights can develop as the Meeting considers the matter.

[[from pp. 76-77 with no change]]

[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: What is your group’s practice and experience around handling serious difference of opinion? Should this section give more detail about “standing aside” and “standing in the way”?]]

**Threshing Sessions**

Friends should not avoid issues which may be difficult or controversial. It is better for the Meeting to allow full opportunity for differences to be aired and faced. In dealing with such issues, or those of a complex nature entailing information with which some Friends may be unfamiliar, it is often helpful to hold one or more preliminary “threshing meetings” in which no decision is made, but through which the chaff can be separated from the grain of truth. Such meetings can clear the way for later action on the issue. Full notice of a threshing session should be given and special efforts made to see that Friends of all shades of opinion can and will be present. To the extent that Friends of a given view are absent, the usefulness of such a meeting will be impaired. If factual material needs to be presented, persons knowledgeable in the area should be asked to present such material and be available to answer questions.

The Clerk or moderator of a threshing session should make it clear at the start that the Meeting not only expects but welcomes expressions of the widest differences. Friends are urged not to hold back whatever troubles them about the issues at hand. Hesitancy to share a strong conviction, because it may offend someone, reflects a lack of trust. The Clerk’s job, then, is to draw out the reticent, limit the time taken by too-ready talkers, and see that all have an opportunity to speak. It is useful to ask someone to take notes of the meeting for later reference. At times the threshing meeting may forward a recommendation to the Meeting for Business.

[[from pp. 77-78 with no change]]

[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: What is your group’s practice and experience with “threshing”? Is the description here adequate? If not, what should be added?]]

**State of the Society Report**

The State of Society Report is prepared once a year by each Monthly Meeting in time to be forwarded to the spring session of its Quarterly Meeting. In contrast to the informal reports of activities given to Quarterly Meetings at other times of the year, the State of Society Report should be a self-examination by the Meeting and its members of their spiritual strengths and weaknesses and of efforts to foster growth in the spiritual life. Reports may cover the full range of interest and concerns but should emphasize those indicative of the spiritual health of the Meeting.

To facilitate the preparation of this report, the Committee on Worship and Ministry and that on Oversight may meet together and explore the spiritual condition of the Meeting. They may then formulate a series of queries for a response from the Meeting as the basis of the report or may ask one or more of its members to draft a preliminary report for searching consideration by the Meeting. After revision and acceptance by the Meeting, the report is read at the Quarterly Meeting and given to the Quarterly Meeting Committee on Ministry and Oversight.

[[from p. 88 with no change]]

**Meeting Officers and Committees**

[[This section is based on pp. 80-89 in the current NPYM Faith & Practice, with some additional material tentatively borrowed from Intermountain YM.]]

[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: This section could be augmented with specific examples of the different ways Friends within NPYM organize themselves. What offices and committees does your group currently have?]]
This section of *Faith and Practice* describes the officers and committees typically seen in a moderate-sized Monthly Meeting in North Pacific Yearly Meeting. Organizational models vary widely throughout our Yearly Meeting. Some groups use different names for offices and committees, some groups combine functions and responsibilities differently.

[[New introductory paragraph, in acknowledgement that Faith and Practice is descriptive not prescriptive]]

Organization evolves as times and needs change; each Monthly Meeting discerns what officers and committees are currently necessary to carry out its concerns and business. While growing in strength and experience, a small Meeting may be able to function with only a Clerk and with the Meeting acting as a committee of the whole. As soon as possible the Meeting appoints a Committee on Ministry and Oversight whose clerk is someone other than the Clerk of the Meeting. Provision for the religious education of children who come under its care should also be an early concern of the Meeting. A Meeting should consider insurance and may consider legal incorporation, especially if it acquires property.

[[First sentence above has been rewritten – the original was “Each Monthly Meeting appoints whatever officers and committees are necessary for the corporate life of the Meeting.” Last sentence re: insurance and incorporation added by suggestion of Friends.]]

The Meeting selects its officers and committees from appropriate nominations which are presented by the Nominating Committee. The Meeting is concerned not only with appointing the most qualified person to each job but also with developing and using the talents and resources of all members and attenders. In asking people to assume various responsibilities, the Meeting recognizes that different individuals have different gifts which are not equally appropriate for all positions in the Meeting. Members and attenders should not be asked to take on inappropriate responsibilities out of a sense of “equality” or “taking turns.” An effective officer or committee should feel free to call upon persons in the Meeting whenever necessary to help in carrying out a particular responsibility. The Meeting must also be able to trust its officers and committees and spare the entire body from many small decisions. Ministry in word and act, responsibility for the good order and material needs of the Meeting, visitation, faithfulness in testimonies—all these things, in the measure of Light that is given, fall upon each person in the Meeting.

[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: It has been suggested that Faith and Practice include material about support for Friends in leadership roles – for example, advice to Friends to stay tender toward those who are in leadership positions, and encouragement to accept leadership in faith and without fear. Support committees for Meeting Clerks are a practical example. What would be helpful in a paragraph about Quaker leadership?]]

**Officers**

Ministry in word and act, responsibility for the good order and material needs of the Meeting, visitation, authenticity of the testimonies — all these are the responsibilities of individuals in the Meeting as they are guided by the Light. For practical reasons, Monthly Meetings appoint individuals to serve as officers and carry out specific functions such as presiding over meetings, keeping records, maintaining stewardship of property and funds, and nurturing the community. These officers are appointed for defined terms of service using the nomination process described below. Names for the offices may vary but it is important that responsibility for all necessary functions be assumed by willing and capable individuals. A good officer is one who, while assuming a particular responsibility, is committed to the leading of the Spirit in discerning what needs to be done and who seeks to engage others in the meeting, matching people to the task.

[[Intro paragraph above is adapted from Intermountain YM Faith and Practice p. 57. Is it suitable for NPYM?]]

[[Descriptions of offices which follow below come from pp. 81-83, with subheadings added for clarity.]]

**Clerk**

The Clerk presides at the business sessions of the Meeting, is responsible for the minutes of its
proceedings, and carries out the instructions of the Meeting on all matters pertaining to the accomplishment of its business.

The Clerk’s basic function is to facilitate the business of the Meeting. The Clerk performs the role well by seeing to it that all pertinent business and concerns are presented to the Monthly Meeting clearly and in good order. The following suggestions are meant especially for the Clerk of a Monthly Meeting, but they apply generally to the Clerk of any sort of a Friends Meeting and may be useful guidelines for clerks of Friends committees.

The Clerk should be a member of the Meeting who has the confidence of its membership and who, in turn, has a real respect and warm regard for its individual members and attenders. The Clerk should be spiritually sensitive so that the Meeting for Business may be helped to discover the leadership of the Spirit. A knowledge of Faith and Practice is essential and of other Quaker literature helpful. The Clerk should be able to comprehend readily, evaluate rightly, and state clearly and concisely an item of business or a concern which comes to the Meeting. In order to gather the sense of the Meeting at the proper time, the Clerk needs to be able to listen receptively to what is said.

The Clerk should faithfully attend Meeting for Worship, keep close to the work of committees, and attend meetings of the Worship and Ministry and Oversight Committees in order to be aware of the condition of the Meeting.

The Clerk presides at all Meetings for Business; if unavoidably prevented from attending, arrangements should be made for a substitute, usually the Assistant Clerk. The Clerk prepares an agenda prior to the Meeting and encourages committee clerks and others to provide ahead of time such reports, concerns and other proposals as ought to be placed on the agenda. The Clerk’s judgment of the relative urgency and importance of matters and their best place on the agenda can help greatly to facilitate the Meeting’s business, which can also be helped by the Clerk’s providing for sufficient background material when a matter is presented. The Clerk sees that correspondence which comes to the Meeting is properly handled.

The role of the Clerk, in general, is not to express his or her own views, but to see that others present participate as fully as possible in the business and that a few do not dominate it. A Clerk who feels led to express a strong opinion on a controversial matter should ask the Assistant Clerk or another Friend to act as Clerk and take the sense of the Meeting. A chief art of the Clerk is to set the pace of the meeting so that its business may be accomplished without either undue delay or undue hurry. A sense of proportion and a sense of humor are helpful. After action has been taken, the Clerk notifies, preferably in writing, the persons involved and makes sure that they understand their responsibility in carrying out their actions.

The Clerk signs all official papers and minutes. If there are both a Clerk and an Assistant or Recording Clerk, it is good practice for both to sign, particularly if legal documents or minutes are involved. The Clerk, or Assistant Clerk, prepares and endorses certificates of transfer, minutes for sojourning members, traveling minutes, and letters of introduction, as well as endorsing minutes or letters of visiting Friends.

The Clerk also has the responsibility to coordinate the activities of the Meeting with those of the Quarterly and Yearly Meetings of which it is a part. This includes seeing that the Meeting is represented where necessary, that reports are written and sent to the proper officers, that business and concerns are sent at the proper time to the Quarterly or Yearly Meeting, and that items received from those Meetings go to the proper persons and committees.

**Assistant Clerk, Recording Clerk, Corresponding Clerk**

An assistant to the Clerk, who may be called an Assistant Clerk, Alternate Clerk, or Recording Clerk, helps the Clerk during Meetings for Business, in preparing minutes and in whatever ways are mutually agreeable. The assistant acts for the Clerk when the latter is unable to serve. In some Meetings this clerk also serves as Recorder (see below).
A Corresponding Clerk who cares for the reception, acknowledgement, and transmission of communications may be appointed if needed.

**Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer**

The Treasurer receives and disburses funds as the Meeting directs, keeps the account books of the Meeting, and reports regularly. The accounts should be audited at regular intervals.

An Assistant Treasurer to work with and help the Treasurer may be appointed in larger Meetings or when there is need.

**Recorder**

The Recorder 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.

**[[Paragraph above amended from p. 83: the membership form (along with other YM forms) will be available as copy-ready appendix and on the NPYM website]]**

Each spring the Recorder is responsible for filling out a questionnaire from the Yearly Meeting giving statistical and other information regarding the Monthly Meeting. A copy of this report is part of the permanent records of the Monthly Meeting.

The Recorder should also make sure that other important records of the Meeting are being properly taken care of. Minute and record books in current use are kept by the officer responsible for them. All others are preserved together with important correspondence and legal papers, such as deeds, conveyances, and trusts, in a permanent repository protected from fire and loss. All minutes and records should be on paper of high quality. Typewritten records are preferable to those in handwriting.

**Committees**

**[[From pp. 83-89, with subheadings added for clarity.]]**

Committees are tools the Monthly Meeting may use to facilitate its business. Meetings have found that much of their work can be done more appropriately in small groups than in the body of the Meeting or by individuals. A committee can also be a “school of the Spirit” where Friends nurture one another and offer mutual accountability and support. Faithful service on a committee can be a spiritual discipline; see “Participation in the Life of the Meeting” in Chapter __.

**[[Last 2 sentence above are new]]**

Each Meeting decides which committees are necessary to carry out its business and concerns. There is no obligation to create any committee, although most Monthly Meetings find a Committee on Ministry and Oversight and a Nominating Committee essential. Other standing committees often found in Meetings are those on Religious Education, Finance and Budget, Peace and Social Order, Property, and Social. Ad hoc committees are sometimes useful for a particular project or concern. When a committee no longer serves its purpose, it should be laid down.

Members of committees need to be carefully selected according to their abilities and concerns. Appointments to a committee are for a definite term of service and often are arranged so that terms overlap, to insure continuity. Meetings customarily appoint experienced and capable members of the Society of Friends to the Committee on Worship and Ministry, the Committee on Oversight, the Nominating Committee, and as clerks of most committees. The purpose is to assign those responsibilities to persons of spiritual depth who are familiar with Friends’ faith and ways of organizing and conducting Meeting work. When Meetings identify such persons, even though they may not be members, they may choose to invest them with those responsibilities.

Committees conduct business in the same manner as does a Monthly Meeting, waiting on the Spirit to
find direction in their operation and unity in their decisions. It is important that members of committees, and clerks especially, attend Meeting for Business regularly in order to assure smooth coordination between the committees and the Meeting.

It is important that committees keep minutes of their meetings and report to the Monthly Meeting regularly. All action of committees in the name of the Meeting is subject to approval by the Monthly Meeting. In bringing a matter to the Meeting for Business, it is useful for the committee to supply a concise summary of background material and a clear statement of the kind of response wanted from the Meeting. In the Meeting for Business, Friends need to consider carefully the recommendations of a committee, and at the same time not re-do the work of the committee. Mutual trust between the Meeting and a committee and faith in the power of God over all will help achieve the proper balance.

Attention to the above guidelines will aid in making committees useful tools rather than extraneous burdens in carrying out the business of the Meeting.

**Committee on Worship and Ministry; Committee on Oversight**

[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: “Committee on Worship and Ministry” and “Committee on Oversight” are the names most often used in this chapter. “Ministry and Oversight Committee” is used for a committee combining the functions. What is your preferred name for the committee(s) carrying out these functions?]]

The closely related functions of these two committees are central to the life of the Meeting. The primary focus of the Committee on Worship and Ministry is the spiritual life of the Meeting, while the Committee on Oversight is mainly concerned with the members, including their relationship to the Meeting. Meetings should understand the different functions of these two committees and see that these functions are faithfully carried out. These committees have a special responsibility to oversee, encourage, and develop the care of members for each other and for the life of the Meeting, but all members share in the responsibility for such care. In smaller Meetings the functions of both committees are delegated to one committee, usually known as the Committee on Ministry and Oversight.*

Footnote to p. 84: Some Meetings call the single committee the “Committee on Ministry and Counsel” with the term “Counsel” covering the functions of the term “Oversight” as described in this Discipline. In historical Quaker usage, a Committee (or Meeting) on Ministry and Counsel, successor to the Meeting of Ministers and Elders, has usually been one concerned primarily with worship and vocal ministry and not also with care of the membership.

**Concern for Worship & Ministry.** The function of the Committee on Worship and 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, its importance to the life of the Meeting cannot be overemphasized. 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 speak in Meeting for Worship and those less inclined to do so. It also includes Friends of good judgment who have a gift for counseling with others concerning sensitiveness to Divine prompting.

The committee meets regularly to consider the Meeting for Worship and to keep it under constant review, prayer, and care. Their own example is an important means through which they can strengthen the Meeting for Worship. Their concern during the week, the promptness and reverence with which they approach the Meeting for Worship, and their faithfulness in responding to and staying within the guidance of the Spirit are the most effective ways through which they may deepen the quality of worship. Through self-examination, prayer, and mutual counsel they also may help one another and the Meeting to grow in worship and ministry. An ever-renewed dedication to worship is almost always the best cure for what may go wrong in a Meeting for Worship.
This committee is responsible for details in connection with Meeting for Worship, such as providing for the welcome of visitors, for encouraging promptness at Meeting, and for closing Meeting for Worship.

The committee should at times 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. Committee members should be mindful that there are differences in background, fluency of expression, and power of interpretation among those who may be led to speak. They have responsibility to give sympathetic encouragement to those who show promising gifts and to give loving and tender guidance to those who speak unacceptably or at undue length or with too great frequency. They should endeavor to open the way for those who are timid and inexperienced in vocal ministry and should encourage all Friends in the ministry of listening. In trying to be helpful, they should be governed by a sense of the common seeking of human beings for right guidance, rather than by an assumption of superior wisdom.

The committee should seek to deepen the spiritual lives of the individuals in the Meeting and to encourage their varied gifts for ministry and service, whether through vocal ministry, teaching, and counsel, or through aesthetic, social, and practical ways of expression. An important duty of Friends appointed to this committee is to help make diversity creative. This committee should encourage private worship, prayer, meditation, and devotional reading which may promote growth in the spiritual life and prepare each individual for the corporate worship of the Meeting. It may wish to obtain and circulate appropriate literature and arrange for retreats, study groups, and spiritual sharing groups.

**Concern for Oversight.** The Committee on Oversight (sometimes called Committee on Counsel or Pastoral Care Committee) is responsible for the care of the membership and of the corporate life of the Meeting. In providing this 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, be helped to serve humanity creatively.

Membership on this committee calls for dedication, tact, and discretion, and should be 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. Where possible, some members of the committee should have counseling skills. The committee should meet regularly and carry on their work in a spirit of dedication and love.

The committee should become acquainted with Meeting members, visit them in their homes, if possible, and maintain contact with all members and attenders in a spirit of affectionate interest and loving care. To foster the knowledge of one another in things both temporal and eternal, they encourage members and at tenders to visit in each other’s homes and stimulate the Meeting to undertake activities which will deepen the Meeting fellowship. They also encourage Friends to attend the Annual Session of the Yearly Meeting and similar gatherings, advising on possible financial assistance for this purpose. They keep in touch with inactive members, hoping to rekindle their interest in the Meeting. When nonparticipation continues for a prolonged period, the Friend should be encouraged to withdraw from membership (see p. __). At least once a year letters should be written to 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. When appropriate, transfer of membership to a nearby Meeting should be encouraged. The committee notifies other Monthly Meetings promptly when Friends and faithful attenders move into their area, whether or not transfer of membership is involved. This committee, often in cooperation with the Meeting Recorder, is responsible for preparing annually a list of Meeting members and attenders.

**Pastoral Care of Members.** The committee considers and recommends action upon requests for membership and transfer and withdrawal of membership (see pp. __-__). It is concerned for the nurture of
the religious life of children and young people, for their participation in the Meeting and their preparation for membership. The committee helps to make newcomers and attenders welcome and to provide to inquirers information concerning the Society of Friends. When it seems right, it encourages application for membership from those who may be holding back through shyness or a sense of unworthiness. Persons are sometimes drawn to the Meeting because of its acceptance of those with problems. A Meeting needs to be careful not to offer solutions entailing aid beyond its powers. Any question of membership should be considered on its own grounds, not as a solution to personal difficulties.

The committee assists those contemplating and entering into marriage under the care of the Meeting (see Chapter __). It gives care and aid in needed arrangements at the time of death (see Chapter __). The committee seeks to be of help in clarifying matters involving organization, practice and procedure in the Society of Friends and in clearing up misunderstandings and reconciling differences which 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 sees that they are visited, counseled with, and assisted as may be required. The Meeting needs to provide this committee with a fund to be used at its discretion.

Particular responsibility for care and counseling lies with the Committee on Oversight, which should choose counselors fitted for particular needs from among themselves or 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. The Meeting for Worship can be a basic resource in counseling; through corporate worship the strength and power of God’s love may open a way that reaches to the hidden depths of personal problems, as we all strive to grow in spiritual and emotional maturity. The Meeting for Worship, however, should remain worship-centered; it should not become an occasion for dialogue on personal problems.

In dealing with particular needs, the committee should keep in mind that listening is a key part of the helping process. It should be sensitive to those who may not recognize their need for counseling, or who hesitate to seek help. One or two persons should be assigned in a given situation. While confidential matters are left to them, they may call upon the Committee on Oversight as needed. To listen helpfully and creatively involves faith in the person and in God, a desire to understand, patience, and avoidance of giving advice. The counselor may suggest new ways of looking at the problem and possible solutions, but decisions must be left to the person involved. Growth, independence, and standing, on one’s own feet are to be encouraged. Emotional support in a hard decision can be most helpful.

A problem may be too serious for the Committee on Oversight to handle alone, in which case professional referral should be sought. Members of the committee need to have a knowledge of resources for counseling assistance in the wider community, such as clinics, family and social services, physicians, and psychiatrists. The committee may call upon 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.

Special Challenges in Oversight and Pastoral Care.
[[New material to be added about:

Anti-harassment policies

Members & attenders with criminal history, especially as sex offenders

Members & attenders who tend to be cast out from the wider society

Members & attenders with mental illness

[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: What is your group’s experience with handling these and similar challenges? Do you have guidelines, procedures, policies you could share?]]

Clearness Committees. When an individual, family or other group is facing a particularly difficult situation, a Committee on Clearness (or a Committee of Concern) may be requested or suggested by
members of the Meeting. The Committee on Oversight assumes responsibility for setting up the committee in consultation with the individual or group concerned. Situations in which clearness is sought may include adjustments in marriage, separation, divorce, stands to be taken on public issues, a new job, a required move to a distant area, a concern for personal witness, traveling in the ministry, and other personal decisions. The committee and the individual or group meet together in worship to seek God’s guidance. Valuable insights often result from the worship-sharing in one or more sessions.


[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: Is this description of Clearness Committees (with its footnote) adequate, or should our Faith and Practice include more detail on how they work, such as the tradition that Clearness Committee members ask open questions and listen, but refrain from giving specific advice?]]

[[What is your group’s practice and experience with Care Committees?]]

Joint Responsibilities. In a Meeting which has both a Committee on Worship and Ministry and a Committee on Oversight, these committees share certain responsibilities. These committees are sometimes asked by a Monthly Meeting to share in the nurture of Worship Groups and Preparative Meetings under its care, although a separate committee especially appointed for this is a more satisfactory arrangement.

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. They should meet together at least twice a year, at the beginning of the year to review responsibilities, and in the spring to help in the preparation of the State of Society Report.

Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee is one of the most important committees. The Meeting depends upon this small group of sensitive, wise, tactful and dedicated Friends to find the most appropriate persons to fulfill Meeting responsibilities and to use to best advantage the capabilities of Meeting members and attenders.

The Nominating Committee should be representative of the Meeting and its members should serve overlapping terms. In some Meetings the committee itself is nominated by a small ad hoc committee selected for this purpose by the Monthly Meeting, to which its nominations are reported for approval. This selection process is used to insure that the Nominating Committee does not perpetuate itself.

Members of the Nominating Committee should be familiar with the function and structure of the Meeting and with the “good order of Friends.” They should be aware of the interests, talents, proven experience, latent gifts, and potential leadership of Meeting participants. The committee must begin its work well in advance of the date when its nominations for new officers, committees, and committee clerks are presented to the Monthly Meeting. The Meeting postpones action upon the proposed slate for a month, during which time any member may seek clarification or suggest changes in the nominations to the Nominating Committee. This committee continues to serve as a standing committee throughout the year to nominate persons to fill vacancies which may occur or new positions which the Meeting may establish.

The best interests of the Meeting and its participants will be served if the Nominating Committee keeps in mind the following suggestions:

1. In approaching persons it should see that details of the nominating process are understood, including the fact that the Meeting, not the committee, is responsible for the ultimate appointment.

2. The approach should not be made casually and the duties involved in any position should be fully understood by the Nominating Committee and by the person approached for nomination. A written job description should be given to a prospective nominee.
3. Not all Friends are equally qualified for a particular responsibility, so “taking turns” and rewarding long service are to be avoided in making nominations.

4. The clerk of a committee should be consulted about members proposed for that committee; when two persons are to work together closely they should both be consulted about the proposed arrangement.

5. Clerks of committees, rather than convenors, should be named.

6. The Nominating Committee should consider the gifts and talents of younger members and attenders (high school and college age) and of newly-participating adults.

[[#6 is a new suggestion from the Committee on the Discipline]]

Other Committees

Additional standing or ad hoc committees can be selected by Meetings as needed.

[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: Should Faith and Practice include descriptions of other typical committees and their responsibilities and functions?]]

Friends in Ministry

[[this section is expanded from pp. 78-80 where it is called Concerns and Liberating Concerned Friends; material has been put into a new order, with subheadings, for a more logical flow. This section will be augmented with topics recommended by Friends, as noted.]]

Oversight, Accountability, and Support for Friends in Ministry

“Friends in Ministry” includes Friends with leadings to travel among, write for, and speak to other Friends, as well as Friends whose lives speak in a specific outward witness—for example, prison visitation, work among the mentally ill, or service at food banks or homeless shelters. In our time, “Friends in Ministry” is expanding to include Friends in professions with a pastoral or ministry component, such as chaplains, counselors, therapists, and spiritual directors.

Vocal ministry—that is, speaking during Meeting for Worship—is described in “Worship” in Chapter __.

[[These 2 introductory paragraphs are new.]]

[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: Our Faith and Practice does not currently include a working definition of “ministry.” How would you define it?]]

Liberated or Released Friends with a Concern

Although Friends endeavor to serve God through their daily lives, there sometimes comes to an individual a leading to some specific task, felt as an imperative claim of God which-cannot be denied even when this is accompanied by personal reluctance. This is what Friends call a concern. It is also possible for a concern to arise spontaneously in a Meeting in response to a particular need or opportunity. From early days the Society of Friends has greatly valued those leadings of the Spirit which result in individual and corporate concerns. It has learned, however, that concerns vary in merit, depending on the validity of their inspiration and the care with which they are considered and carried out. The concerns of even well known Friends have not always been of equal significance. Concerns vary, too, in their pertinence for others, some being meant only for an individual, others having a wider meaning. Friends are urged to be clear about the corporate consideration and support of a concern before proceeding with it publicly. A concerned person should have patience and humility in seeking support for a concern.

The appropriate place for a concern first to be considered and tested as a true leading of the Spirit is within the Monthly Meeting, the basic unit of the Society. Before a Friend brings a concern to the Meeting for Business, the Friend should consider it prayerfully, to be sure that it is rightly motivated and of more than personal or passing importance. The Friend should season the concern through consultation
with qualified Friends, a standing committee of the Meeting, or a specially requested Committee on
Clearness. The concern should come to the Meeting for Business in mature form with a clear, concise,
written statement of its purpose, means, and the support requested from the Meeting. Public expression
implying Meeting support for a concern is to be avoided unless and until such support has been received,
especially when possible disobedience to law or conflict with custom may be involved.

Unhurried consideration by the Meeting is important and this may extend over more than one
monthly meeting. During this process the Meeting may be enlightened by the insights of prophetic
individuals, and all may be helped to clarify their own insights.

The Meeting may unite with and support a Friend to carry out a concern personally. Such a concern
might be to travel in the ministry, to witness to Friends’ principles in a given situation, or to do other
religiously motivated service. The process of liberating a Friend to act on a concern should involve
careful consideration both of the merits and methods of the concern and the qualifications and situation of
the Friend to be liberated. Motivation, character, and family and financial situation need to be considered.
A Meeting’s support for a liberated or released Friend could include any of the following:

- Release from obligations such as holding Meeting office and serving on committees;
- Appointment of a support committee to offer advice, encouragement, accountability, and a
  place to test ideas and leadings;
- Material help as needed;
- Provision of a “traveling minute” outlining the nature of the Friend’s concern and stating the
  Meeting’s endorsement (see below).

Sometimes a Meeting may find itself brought so fully into sympathy that the concern is laid upon the
whole group and is carried out by the Meeting.

If a concern has wider meaning than for the Monthly Meeting, it may be shared directly with other
Monthly Meetings. It may also be forwarded to the Quarterly Meeting or to a standing committee of
North Pacific Yearly Meeting, which may result in its being shared with other Meetings or with the
Annual Session of the Yearly Meeting. (See “Bringing Concerns Before the Yearly Meeting,” p. ___.)

If a Meeting fails to unite with a member’s concern, the member generally reconsiders it very
carefully. If the Friend feels called upon to continue, the Meeting may be able to encourage the member
to go forward with the concern even when the Meeting is unable to unite with it. Occasionally, an
individual who is strongly convinced that the corporate life of the Meeting and of the Society will be
enriched if it can grow and unite with a particular concern brings that concern to the Meeting repeatedly
over an extended period. Many of the Quaker testimonies have evolved because of the patient persistence
of a valiant Friend who has perceived the Light more clearly than other members. Such persistence has
helped some Meetings and the Society come to unite with an insight which they could not at first accept.
Sometimes when a concern does not arise from a genuine spiritual leading and the Friend is “running
ahead of his Guide,” the Meeting continues to be unable to unite with the concern.

**Recorded Ministers**

NPYM is blessed with many members and attenders who exercise clear spiritual gifts and whose lives
speak in a variety of ministries. It is not the practice within NPYM Monthly Meetings to record
ministers—that is, to maintain a list of Friends who are recognized as having a special gift for offering
vocal ministry during worship.

[[new paragraph added to define the term.]]
[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: The Committee on the Discipline has heard from Friends that our Faith and Practice should include more material about support for Friends in ministry work such as chaplaincy, counseling, and spiritual direction. The Committee now senses a tension arising: we want to acknowledge and support members doing “ministry work” in their professional lives but we do not acknowledge and support members doing “ministry work” within our meetings and within the Society. It’s not within the Committee’s scope to suggest changes in NPYM practice; it is within our scope to point out possible inconsistencies and encourage discussion. What do you think?]]

Friends in Ministry Work

[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: What is your group’s practice and experience with Friends in Ministry Work—for instance, do you provide ‘denominational endorsement’ for a hospital chaplain, perhaps using a clearness process?]]

Support Committees

[[QUESTIONS FOR NPYM FRIENDS: What is your group’s practice and experience with Support Committees?]]

Traveling Minutes

When a member proposes to travel under the weight of a concern to be shared with other Friends, the matter is first considered by the Committee on Oversight. Upon recommendation by that committee, the Monthly Meeting may grant a Traveling Minute releasing the Friend for a particular concern. If the visit is to be beyond the Yearly Meeting, the minute should be forwarded to the Presiding Clerk for Yearly Meeting endorsement. Before such an endorsement is made, it should be clear that the traveling Friend is aware of and sensitive to the differences in theology and practice among the Friends to be visited. When a Meeting grants a minute of travel, it should take care that, as far as possible, the service is not hindered for lack of funds or other resources.

[[One change in paragraph above: Clerk of Steering Committee replaced with Presiding Clerk]]

Traveling minutes are submitted to and are customarily endorsed by the Clerk or other officer of Meetings visited by traveling Friends. Persons granted minutes should return them to the issuing Meeting within a reasonable time after the visitation has been completed. Friends should also report to other Meetings which have supported the concern.

Letters of Introduction

Fellowship and the spiritual life of the Society of Friends have long been nourished by visitation outside a member’s own Meeting. When a member has occasion to travel and wishes to be in touch with other members of the Society of Friends, the Monthly Meeting Clerk may write a Letter of Introduction. The letter will certify the person’s membership, state something about the person’s participation in the life of the Meeting, and convey greetings to Friends who will be visited. The letter is usually presented by the traveler to Meetings or other Friends visited, who may choose to write a return greeting on the letter which is presented to the issuing Meeting upon return. When appropriate, the Meeting may also grant a letter of introduction to a faithful attender.

Friends who are traveling and wish to visit Friends in other Meetings may receive valuable guidance through Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of Americas, 1506 Race Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102.

Children and Youth in Local Meetings

[[The current Faith and Practice includes a few sentences concerning children, incorporated into Committee on Worship & Ministry/Committee on Oversight descriptions. Friends have identified several topics to be added to NPYM’s Faith and Practice, including

First Day School - with cross-ref to “religious education and study” in the “Faith” part of the book. Might include: First Day School Committee is not just for parents! Curriculum, activities, and projects

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to reflect our wide range of faith and practice

Children’s Safety to include: care for physical safety; recommendation to have 2 adults in supervision, not just 1; Friends and mandatory reporting

Transition to Adulthood - with cross-ref to chapter on membership. Might include: care for young people is for the whole Meeting, not just one committee; recognition of milestones such as HS graduation; nurturing spiritual gifts and spiritual contributions of young people; encouraging participation in meeting for worship

The Committee on the Discipline also suggests borrowing and adapting the following material from Intermountain Yearly Meeting’s Faith and Practice, pp. 91-95. Is it suitable? Is there anything that NPYM Friends would add, subtract, alter?]

Children

Children of Friends are born into or join their home family first of all, but they also become part of the spiritual family of their Meeting. This spiritual family is entrusted with a significant role in their upbringing. Like parents and loving caretakers, the Meeting shares responsibility for fostering the emerging spiritual life of its children—recognizing and nurturing their individual gifts, nourishing and guiding them as they experience the world and begin to assume the increasing responsibilities that are part of growing older.

As children grow older, as they grow into being themselves, it matters that both parents and Friends in the Meeting community try to be aware of changes as they take place, to be receptive to the children’s daily experiences, and to listen attentively to what children attempt to communicate of happiness, need, sadness. It is important that children have a sense that they have value, that they are loved by those around them, and that however young they are, their lives have meaning.

As a child begins to be aware of the spiritual world beyond the home, both the parents and the meeting need to find ways to talk about the mystery at the core of Quakerism. Because silence is at the heart of the way Quakers worship, it is hard to communicate with children about the sometimes difficult and demanding journey of a spirit seeking God. It may make the mystery easier to grasp if we tell stories from our history about how Quakers have tried to live in accordance with their beliefs. In addition, hearing adults’ vocal ministry in Meeting for Worship may slowly lead children toward understanding.

Most Meetings foster Quaker values in their children by providing First Day School classes during all or part of the adult Meeting for Worship. Although in smaller meetings and worship groups such an arrangement is not always possible, care is taken to give children a sense of comfort, understanding, and safety during the time they are at Meeting.

Friends need to be aware that we are just as susceptible as any other group—despite our self-image as peaceful people striving for good—to danger toward our children from those who would take advantage of their young age. Situations of trust can provide openings for abuse. We are responsible for ensuring the safety of children in our communities. Meetings are encouraged to educate themselves regarding the indicators, prevention, and handling of incidents of abuse.

Youth

As boys and girls become adolescents, they enter another stage of life. For many of them this is an especially risky period of transition, during which they work out a degree of independence from their immediate family. When they try out unfamiliar trappings of maturity, their behavior and ideas may challenge those of the adults in their lives. Parents may need to take a step back, to move away from being the center of their child’s experience. Yet at the same time it is important that they (and the other adults of the Meeting) continue to offer their trust, the comfort of familiar values, and an unfailing sense of loving security that the youth can rely on.

Youths, meanwhile, are engaged in the difficult job of adjusting to the world beyond their own home, where values, standards, and expectations are often quite unlike those they’ve grown up with. Yet it is
precisely at the same time as young people are confronting life-affecting decisions about education and occupation that our society lays upon them the burden of making important choices about fundamental social issues. Chief among these is the question of registration for or enlistment in the military. It is important that the Meeting counter the recruitment efforts and claims of the military, assist individual young Friends in documenting their conscientious objection to war, and make known to our young people the full range of options open to them. Clearness committees may help them find clarity about and security in their own deeply held values during this critical time of vulnerability to society’s expectations.

It is no easy task for adolescents to live up to their ideals while trying to find a place in the world among people of their own age group who do not share those ideals. Family meetings that engage everyone in the household and during which issues important to youth are openly and honestly discussed can be a source of mutual inquiry, support, and learning. It is important that young and old listen to each other. What matters most at these times is keeping the lines of communication open so that they young person does not feel lost and isolated as he or she goes through the changes—intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual. It is also important to remember that growing up does not happen at the same age and in the same way for all adolescents. Some young people at age 16 may be more mature than others who are 20.

Friends from the Meeting, as well as parents, may be able to offer support, guidance, and sympathy to adolescents. The Meeting can express its trust in the gifts of its young people by asking them to join in the work of meeting committees or projects and thereby to take on some of the responsibilities of being a Friend. This is not difficult if the Meeting has made a practice over the preceding years of clarifying for their younger members the various ways of contributing to the meeting. It is an especially easy transition if young people and elders have shared intergenerational activities in the past. When younger and older Friends are comfortable with one another the elders can serve as role models or mentors that they young people may feel they need to counterpoise the pressure from their peers at school. The Meeting elders have been there and done that.” If they are true friends of the young, they can be a treat help. Likewise it stands to reason that if the young are true friends of those who are older, they too can be a great help. It’s a two-way street.

It is important that meetings recognize that the needs of all age groups deserve consideration. Intergenerational activities, including worship-sharing, may help ease the tentativeness that accompanies differences of age when such activities are the product of mutual consultation and are entered into willingly. Young people become aware of themselves as Friends not only through attending Meeting for Worship and receiving religious instruction, but also through friendships within their own age group and participation in the Meeting. They need to be included in the structure of the Meeting, and the Meeting needs what they can offer. Such considerations add up to what is most important of all—a sense of belonging, which makes young people feel they are an integral spiritual part of Meeting.