Meeting Queries

In response to a request from the NPYM Committee on Revising the Discipline, Eugene Friends Meeting offered a series of potluck discussions to address relevant queries. Over three months, from September 24 through November 12, five potlucks were held and Friends enjoyed conversations and worship sharing that were deepening and useful to our own process of discernment. A summary of the notes taken from the discussions are posted in the Meeting Library.

We invite Friends who were not able to attend the potlucks to respond in writing to: Lucy McIver lucymceye@gmail.com or Helen Park helenlpark@gmail.com.

1. What is your experience of Eugene Friends Meeting?

2. Have you ever experienced a Clearness Committee? For yourself? For someone else? Has this experience deepened your spiritual journey?

3. Our Faith and Practice does not currently include a working definition of "ministry." How would you define it? Who do we minister to? What is our message?

4. New material will be added to our Faith and Practice regarding "special challenges" in nurturing our Meetings. These include anti-harassment policies; members or attenders with criminal histories, including sex offenders; members or attenders who tend to be cast out from wider society; members and attenders with mental illness. What is EFM's experience with handling these and similar challenges? Do we have guidelines, procedures or policies? Where is our heart? Where is our practice?

5. What is your experience of bringing children and adults together at EFM? How do we support and nurture that special relationship? New ideas???

6. When someone from our EFM community needs special support in hard times we offer a "Support Committee" to see them through their difficulties. Have you needed such a committee or served another on a support committee? Does EFM have guidelines for conflicts within the Meeting community? What do we need for these hard times?

7. How do we support and lead our young adults and teens? What would you like to see EFM offer for support during these transitional times?
Notes from September 24, 2011

1. What is your experience of Eugene Monthly Meeting?
   • For most, the quality of relationships is very meaningful. People form deep and lasting friendships; this may not be true for all.
   • There is deep spiritual seeking among Friends here; the Meeting supports this seeking.
   • The beautiful elders of the Meeting are models of lifelong spiritual seeking.
   • The examples of Friends with deep commitment to social justice is moving; very impressed with the Meeting’s commitment to the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980’s.
   • Friends have good reasons to think highly of themselves.
   • Have experienced strong community centered on worship, grateful for each worshipper in the room each meeting.
   • Not judgmental, labels not important.
   • Feel God’s presence in the variety of Creation, and in the odd assortment that comes together.
   • Our Meeting is a jewel.
   • It is an onion with many layers.
   • Everything is tied together by the meeting for worship.
   • This is a caring community, very welcoming.
   • EFM works to keep relationships among friends and families enriched.
   • It is felt by most that EFM is their spiritual home and they feel a sense of belonging.
   • Working on committees is important, enriching. One person expressed love for working on the Grounds Committee.
   • One person expressed an experience of 11 am Meeting for Worship feels unsettled, too much coming and going. She said she didn't feel that she could spiritually fit this worship but hopes to find a place. It was suggested that she try 9 am Meeting for Worship.
   • The group reaffirmed that EFM is a welcoming community. It was stated that EFM has the spirit of educating with kindness.

2. Have you ever experienced a Clearness Committee? For yourself? For someone else? Has this experience deepened your spiritual journey?
   • “Clearness:” What a concept! All our issues are resolved by listening to an internal silence and seeking “clearness.” That in itself is very deep.
   • The “committee” aspect is important, seeking clearness together about issues that are very personal, is powerful.
   • This is such a different model from other groups that seek to resolve issues by arguing their opinions with cleverness and persuasion. We don’t do that. The truth is not about rhetorical skill.
Clearness is leaving “space” around an issue, uncluttered by words and ideas, room for the Spirit

I knew I was a Quaker in my own heart, but my clearness committee made my experience of membership even deeper, rich sharing with others brought me into this community of faith

Other clearness committees have been powerful, receiving support in times of crisis or transition

I’d been in a “dark night of the soul,” went through separation and divorce, clearness committee held me in love

Nervous about clearness committee for marriage, but gritted my teeth and went, and was pleasantly surprised!

Clearness committees are equally wonderful for those who ask for them and for those who serve on them

Clearness process is deeply enriching, really get to know each other, spiritual intimacy

The quality of our clearness committees is no accident: we take them very seriously

Regret when clearness/support committees in divorce situations are unable to resolve anger, suffering and bitterness. Important to keep trying.

Notes from October 14, 2011

1. Our Faith and Practice does not currently include a working definition of "ministry." How would you define it? Who do we minister to?
   - Ministry is keeping one's self open to others, not judgmental.
   - Ministry is stepping out of one's comfort and caring for others less fortunate.
   - Ministry is caring for one's family both in the good times and the hard times.
   - Ministry is helping other's discern.
   - Ministry is being with a friend in time of need.
   - Ministry is tending, not to do harm
   - Aid or service to a precious need
   - Speaking to a spiritual condition, one’s own or another’s
   - Ministry might be physical, but has a spiritual connection or prompting
   - The message is not the ministry
   - Don't preach to someone who is hungry
   - Many messages are sign posts of where the person now is on their own spiritual journey
   - Some messages, one speaks and wonders, “Who is this message for?” one may never know. Sometimes a person comes to share that the message was meaningful to them.
   - We are all ministers to each other
   - A mystery of the spirit speaks and acts through us
   - We cannot speak beyond our light
   - Sometimes the light goes out suddenly. Just stand with it, or better yet, sit down and wait.
What is our message?

• Preached to vs spiritually led; a personal responsibility for spiritual life
• Don’t have a consistent message
• Quaker history, the fact that we exist

We then looked up the word “ministry” in the other Bible...our dictionary.

Ministry:
1) Ministration, the act or process of ministering;
2) the office, duties or functions of a minister;
3) the body of ministers of religion

Minister
1) to perform the function of a minister of religion
2) to give aid

• The question on “need” or “aid” should be carefully defined. The Native American oppression was often done in the name of “giving aid” in a religious context
• We should minister to others where they are, not where we are
• When a person gets a leading they are answering a need
• It is hard to tend to others without interpreting that there is a need
• Spirit-led examination of our motives should be ongoing including the discernment of the individual or group being aided
• Clearness committees are helpful for checking in with each other
• What about if individual is mentally ill so has difficulty discerning need?

Who carries a ministry in our Meeting? Process of named ministers:
• Marcella, perhaps soon Shelley: named ministers in hospice and hospital
• Ethen, Graham and Helen, Serbu youth ministry
• Jill, Finance
• Peg, SOA watch and many other peace activist
• AVP - but maybe not named ministers from our Meeting

2. New material will be added to our Faith and Practice regarding "special challenges" in nurturing our Meetings. These include anti-harassment policies; members or attenders with criminal histories, including sex offenders; members or attenders who tend to be cast out from wider society; members and attenders with mental illness.

What is EFM's experience with handling these and similar challenges? Do we have guidelines, procedures or policies? Where is our heart? Where is our practice?

• Other than Welcoming Meeting - no policy
• Making other policies is not possible because the actions will come from clearness regarding the particular situation
• Try to be inclusive but there could be situations where it doesn’t work
• Example of political, discriminatory rant: The elders of the meeting silently rose and herded the individual out of Meeting for Worship to sit in clearness outside of Meeting for Worship
• Example of mentally ill person severly and consistently disrupting meeting: Clearness and ultimately a special, regularly scheduled meeting for worship for that person so they could be held in the light, be in the worship-centered surroundings that they craved, and not disrupt the worship of others
• Example of convicted sex offender: Clearness committee, several threshing sessions, a special regularly scheduled meeting for worship off-site in a home with no children so that person could be held in the Light in the worship-centered surroundings that they craved and not endanger the children of the Meeting.

Notes from November 12, 2011

1. What is your experience of bringing children and adults together at EFM? How do we support and nurture that special relationship? New ideas???

• Concern that children don’t feel like they are Quakers, don’t know if they believe in God. Don’t seem interested in the search. Spiritual community could help with that.
• The time spent with children in the meeting is an enriching gift for which I feel great gratitude.
• Concern about how much longer Meeting will hold my daughter’s interest. There’s not a large group of kids who attend. Concern that other families aren’t bringing their kids, aren’t making Meeting a priority.
• The queries are about how the Meeting nurtures community. It’s joyous to see children engage with people of all ages. As a newcomer, things ARE happening.
• When a child bonds with an adult who is not a parent, a whole different perspective on life happens. The same happens with the adult. It helps the growth of both adult and child.
• The community sense we get in meeting feels so powerful. Hopefully the kids feel that too. Idea: Mentorship for children.
• Kids feel very important coming to the center of the rug during meeting.
• Gratefulness to children’s program.

When someone from our EFM community needs special support in hard times we offer a "Support Committee" to see them through their difficulties. Have you needed such a committee or served another on a support committee? Does EFM have guidelines for conflicts within the Meeting community? What do we need for these hard times?
• Don’t know if there are guidelines around conflict in meeting. Do know there are people I could go to for help as well as Worship and Ministry. Not sure if there are specific people to go to if conflicts arise.
• We spent time talking about conflicts and how to manage them. It was felt that working through controversy is the essence of what it means to be a Friend.

**How do we support and lead our young adults and teens? What would you like to see EFM offer for support during these transitional times?**

• Past mentoring relationships: special relationships with other adults help kids to feel more connected.
• Young adults slip between the cracks
• **Idea:** Possibility of offering Quaker Quest and reaching out to invite young adults to participate
• Peace-a-Parties were a good thing. Need a youth group; need to put resources toward this. Either budget to hire someone or use our personal resources. We need to create something vital.
• Supporting Teens
• Teens at FGC show a great deal of love and support for each other. How do we create that kind of energy?
• **Idea:** What about hiring someone for 6 months to develop a plan to integrate and support teens and to create opportunities in Meeting for this to happen. Have been having discussions about teens forever. Yearly Meeting is where it’s at for the teens. It’s hard to get them to meeting on Sunday because it’s in the middle of the day and they are so busy.
• **Idea:** What about having Meeting on a Saturday night? It may be very different from what we’ve done.
• Sims talked about a 5 pm meeting on a Sunday for college students. (several people echoed this idea of looking at having Meeting at different times. **Sunday evening** was also mentioned as a potential time)
• **Idea:** What about going to a concert or doing something special with teens and/or young adults?
• **Idea:** Taking teens to visit different churches
• **Idea:** Need a committee that focuses on teen and young adults needs and outreach.
• **Idea:** Support / hire a volunteer, potentially a young Friend right out of college, to develop programs for teens and young adults. The Meeting could provide room and board for the individual and pay the volunteer a monthly stipend. There are many similar volunteer programs in the U.S. sponsored by religious communities. The Hyde Park Friends Meeting has recently started its own volunteer program. Their volunteer(s) live in the Quaker house with the community that lives there and work in various ministry sites. Kris Funk has more information about this.