

Touchstones for Clearness and Support Committees

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The purpose of a **Clearness Committee** is to help a Friend discern his/her preparation and leading to engage more fully in a specific ministry. For the BYM Intervisitation Program, the preparation and leading are to visit other meetings within Friends United Meeting. Our program is about the ministry of presence and faith in the mutually transforming power of listening deeply and sharing compassionately. Please don't make the mistake of thinking you have to "get it all together" before you ask for a clearness committee. The job of the committee is to help, not simply to approve.

Individual clearness committees are under the care of a monthly meeting committee. These committees go by several names, depending on the size and history of your monthly meeting—for example, Ministry and Worship, Ministry and Oversight, Ministry and Pastoral Care, Care and Clearness. The clerk of your meeting or the clerk of the appropriate committee will help you with the process of gathering a clearness committee.

The purpose of a **Support Committee**, or in the language of Friends General Conference, an **Anchoring Committee**, is to care for the minister and support the gift. How does a Friend step gently into the culture of another yearly meeting? Is the traveler's gift being used fully and wisely? Have impediments or roadblocks appeared that hinder the ministry and stifle the gift?

Information and links to other resources can be found on the following sites:

<http://www.bym-rsf.org/quakers/committees/intervisitation.shtml>

http://www.fgcquaker.org/traveling/clearness_anchoring_committees.html

1. Mission Statement

The Intervisitation Program of Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) seeks to strengthen the Religious Society of Friends and nurture the beloved community of Friends, especially within Friends United Meeting (FUM). While BYM's concern regarding an FUM personnel policy planted the seed, that concern is not the program's focus. Rather, as we in BYM faced the pain we felt as a result of that policy, we awoke to the fragility, and in some cases brokenness, of the relationships among the yearly meetings and monthly meetings within FUM. Thus the goal of BYM's Intervisitation Program is to encourage, prepare, and support Friends to travel among Yearly Meetings with the faith that we can listen deeply, strengthen our relationships, and build our faith community. Our program assumes that intervisitation will be in all directions and those interested will offer and receive hospitality.

2. Travel Minutes/Letters of Introduction

The Committee asks that the Spirit behind our mission statement be included in some way in each Travel Minute or Letter of Introduction. It can be in the body—as a complete paragraph, as a few sentences, or as a paraphrase. It can even be an attachment. We ask clearness

committees or clerks to be led by the literary and spiritual integrity of the document they are writing. We ask that each traveler have a Travel Minute or Letter of Introduction.

A Minute or Letter is a symbol of community and mutual accountability. It is also a revival of one of our traditional practices for building bridges among Friends. The Intervisitation Committee can send you several patterns for Minutes or Letters. A Letter can be written by the Committee or under the oversight of the Committee. A Travel Minute must be approved by the local meeting, approved by the Intervisitation Committee for forwarding to Interim or Yearly Meeting, and endorsed by IM or YM. Unless specified, Minutes are good for 12-18 months.

3. Leadings to Travel in the Ministry to other FUM Yearly Meetings

Friends may well have several reasons for traveling in the ministry. Sometimes these are compatible; but they may also be in conflict from time to time. It is good to explore these different reasons and reflect on any conflicts that might arise.

The basic ministry of our program is the ministry of presence and faith in each other. The mission of our program is not to witness on issues, but to witness to the spiritual power of listening, mutual respect, reaching out, and community building among Friends. Within a year after we began traveling, Interim Meeting requested that our Mission Statement be modified so that it did not focus on the issues that divide us within FUM. The revised Mission Statement, as printed in Section 1, was approved by the next Interim Meeting and affirmed by following ones.

An individual traveling minister or elder, however, might be led to a personal witness with Friends who wish to discuss hot topics or share difficulties and pain. The discernment becomes how to balance these different leadings. Things to consider might be the traveler's public witness as a representative of BYM, the traveler's personal responses to individuals, and the traveler's own spiritual passion and integrity.

4. Some things we have learned from Friends who have traveled with this program:

- *For some of our hosts, our presence is a witness against schism and for unity in our diversity. It is a peace-building witness, a search for a third way forward.*
- *For some of our hosts, who find themselves in the minority in their own yearly meetings, our presence is a sign of hope, encouragement, and connection. Our traveling ministers and elders bring with them a safe personal space to talk about difficult issues, including sexuality.*
- *Some of our hosts, however, feel threatened by our presence. Will we judge them as deficient in their witness for peace or stewardship of the environment? Will we try to "dialogue" them into exhaustion about issues relating to equality or sexuality? We have learned that dialogue is not a positive word for more conservative Friends. Their previous experience with "dialogue" (as used by liberal Friends) is that liberal Friends just want to keep talking at them until they acquiesce.*

- *Some yearly meetings are deeply involved in their own painful controversies. The last thing they want is for us to add the divisive issue of sexuality to the already roiling cauldron. In such cases, a prayerful presence from us is always appreciated.*
- *Within yearly meetings laboring with controversy, one faction might seek to use the presence of our traveling ministers and elders to obfuscate their own issues or to put the other faction on the defensive. We are visiting cousins who should stay on the sidelines.*

Discernment is very difficult when multiple situations arise similar to the ones described above. This is why we encourage traveling ministers to be accompanied by an elder or at least to have one a quick telephone call away. How can we respond with integrity when visiting a yearly meeting whose individual members might react to us in very different ways? Or in ways that could promote conflict?

In the last nine years of our relationship with the FUM General Board and Office, our General Board Representatives have made it abundantly clear that we oppose the FUM personnel policy on sexuality. Our members continue to make clear that we are a yearly meeting that has experienced the Gifts of the Spirit that have been given to our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Friends. We witness to the reality that our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Friends have exercised their Gifts of the Spirit for the up-building of our yearly and monthly meetings. This is a mantle that all our traveling ministers and elders wear. Most of our hosts see it, even when our travelers chose to wear it lightly out of respect for the Friends being visited. How comfortable is the traveler with this mantle? Can he or she wear this mantle of equality with kindness and humility, as well as personal integrity?

5. Reporting In and Reporting Back

It is important that all traveling ministers and elders attend our Training Workshop. In 2011 it is scheduled for the afternoon of March 27 at Langley Hill Friends Meeting. We would also like you to bring one or more members of your clearness committee. This is our best opportunity for those who have traveled to share with each other, with new travelers, and with supporters. We share both our experiences and the “signs of the times.” Our program needs to keep evolving as our Friends communities change and grow. In discerning the movement of the Spirit, it is helpful to talk with and listen to each other deeply.

We ask each traveling minister and elder to report back in a variety of ways. One is by giving us a written report. Another is by promptly turning in expenses to facilitate our budgetary process. A third is by sharing at formal and informal gatherings at monthly, quarterly, and yearly meeting events. In addition to the “who, what, when, where, and why” of the visitation, please consider questions such as:

- *What are the major concerns of the Friends that you visited? How are they dealing with these concerns? What part of the process is painful and what part is joyous? Where is connection?*

- *What are the strengths of the meeting you visited? What have you learned that can benefit our own faith and practice? Have you rediscovered a part of our tradition that is more highly lifted up by the Friends that you visited?*
- *How does Truth prosper among Friends?*
- *How do the Friends you visited relate to practices embedded in our own yearly meeting, such as our concern for equality and mutual respect for the Gifts of the Spirit given to Friends regardless of sexual orientation?*

The yearly meeting has devoted a lot of time, energy, money, expertise, and administrative support to this Intervisitation Program. So far, we have done a good job of reporting to those who attend Interim Meeting and the business sessions of Yearly Meeting. We are searching for ways to be more informative and accountable to other areas of the yearly meeting. Thoughtful and timely reports are essential for achieving this goal.

6. Some questions for traveling ministers and elders to consider

- *Some yearly meetings are explicitly Christian, Bible-based, and pastor-lead. How do you feel about different worship, theological, and leadership environments? Do you have buttons that might be pushed? How do you respond when your buttons are pushed?*
- *While some of our travelers consider themselves to be Christ-centered and Bible-based, the Friends being visited might define Christ-centered and Bible-based very differently. Do you have buttons that might be pushed? How do you respond when your buttons are pushed?*
- *Do you have any financial, physical, or health issues that need to be accommodated?*
- *If traveling outside of North America, what experience have you had living and worshipping in different cultures and languages? How do you think you will respond? How do you understand the struggles of people who were colonized for centuries?*
- *How inclusive is your concept of diversity?*

7. Support Committees

We encourage all our traveling ministers and elders to visit again. Successive visits to the same yearly meeting help to deepen our Friendships and mutual caring and understanding. An ongoing support committee will aid travelers in using their gifts fully and wisely. The FGC Traveling Ministries Program uses the acronym of Anchoring Committees:

A- accountability

N- nurture

C- continuing clearness

H - help

O - obedience

R - responsibility

I - integrity
N- 'n'
G- guidance