

Notes:

Caring for Others, while Protecting their Privacy

Western Friend Connect – Workshop Meeting Room – 1/12/2017

Participants:

- Arthur Kegerreis – Orange Grove Meeting (Pasadena, CA)
- Claire Gorfinkel – Orange Grove Meeting (Pasadena, CA)
- Doreen Cornwell – University Meeting (Seattle, WA)
- Doug Smith – Reno Meeting (Reno, NV)
- Elizabeth Horstman – Orange Grove Meeting (Pasadena, CA)
- JoAnn Kidder – Missoula Meeting (Missoula, MT)
- Karen Gilbert – Lopez Island Meeting (Lopez Island, WA)
- Karen Steen – Bellingham Meeting (Bellingham, WA)
- Larry Spears – Duluth-Superior Meeting (Duluth, MN)
- Mary Klein – Palo Alto Meeting (Palo Alto, CA)
- Midi Cox – Honolulu Meeting (Honolulu, HI)
- Virginia Herrick – Bellingham Meeting (Bellingham, WA)

The following notes incorporate ideas shared orally during the online conversation and ideas shared in writing during the conversation through notes in the “chat” box. Thanks to Charlene Weir for taking notes.

Thematic Summary by the Note-Taker:

- Every issue of privacy and confidentiality is an individual, unique matter, whether it is related to being ill, to money matters, or to one-time needs for support. Each situation needs to be approached with careful attention to the wishes of the individual and the abilities of the meeting.
- The levels of intimacy and connection that can be reached during the process of helping someone are unparalleled. The opportunity to help another person can also be a great opportunity for personal and spiritual growth. It is a privilege to give help.
- You learn that you can ask for help by being asked and by helping others. If you ask for help, you help show other people that they can ask for help too. You offer others an opportunity for spiritual growth by asking for help.
- Meetings need to help people know about ways they can seek help from the meeting, and they need to invite newcomers to join in providing help.

Questions introduced for the discussion:**Set One – Regarding meetings**

- What are your meeting's experiences with caring for members and attenders who are suffering from illness, injury, or loss?
- What does your meeting actually do to help in such situations?
- How does your meeting demonstrate that it maintains the confidentiality of members and attenders who seek help?

Set Two – Regarding individuals

- What do you know about how individuals decide to inform your meeting about their personal crises?
- What do you know about individuals' decisions to seek help from the meeting?
- How do individuals determine which personal information to share and which to withhold from the meeting?
- How have individuals' personal crises affected the strength of relationships in your meeting?

Discussion of ways that meetings care for individuals while protecting their privacy:

- We don't always know each other's wishes, and we don't always know what our own wishes will be later when our lives change. I want to err on the side of over-communication. We want to be there for each other. How does the Pastoral Care Committee know what care is needed and exercise the right amount of discretion? It starts by getting to know one other on an ongoing basis.
- We have had different ways we have approached this in different situations. We sometimes have had Care Committees that offered formal support, especially for long-term care. We also offer informal support, such as checking in with people. Sometimes people make prayer requests at the end of meeting for worship.
- Privacy and confidentiality sometimes involves other things than being ill. Sometimes financial records are not kept as securely as they should be.
- When I joined our Ministry and Counsel Committee, I found out that our meeting had many support committees working in the background. Very few of us realize how many there are. I imagine this works differently in large meetings and small meetings.
- I wonder how many people know about the possibility of having a Support Committee. Our meeting needs to communicate better that members of the meeting are available to support you if you need it.
- We often lose track of people. We are torn between trying to reach out to people to tell them they could have support versus honoring their privacy.

- Hearing general announcements about people I who were going through crises, when I didn't know who they were, has made me uncomfortable. I felt like I knew too much personal information. However, hearing an announcement about something I could do would be very helpful. Also, knowing people better is important for truly supporting them.
- There is guidance in *Faith and Practice* on committees that can provide pastoral care. Encourage everyone to read it. An anchor committee supports somebody who is working actively in the community. A care committee "walks along side" someone during a time of crisis. A clearness committee helps someone with a major decision.
- *From the "Chat box" in the online meeting room:* From the NPYM Faith & Practice, current draft: "A Support or Anchor Committee is an ad hoc committee acting as elders for a Friend who is filling a responsible position within the meeting or the Society. The clerk of a meeting, a hospital chaplain, a prison visitor, or a Friend with a leading in peace, social justice, or environmental action—all can benefit from a gentle, strong listening presence to help them stay faithful, grounded, and accountable in their ministry. The Friend may choose the committee name that best describes the type of assistance they need. The Pastoral Care Committee appoints the committee (usually two to five people) and names its clerk in consultation with the Friend concerned. The Support or Anchor Committee exists for the duration of the Friend's work. A Care Committee is an ad hoc committee that usually consists of two or three people who walk alongside a Friend during major life transitions, long-term illness, or incapacity. Clearness Committees are ad hoc committees appointed by the Pastoral Care Committee. Their original and continuing use has been for those requesting membership in the Religious Society of Friends and for those contemplating marriage. Over the years, the scope of Clearness Committees has widened to address personal problems and decision-making.
<http://npym.org/?q=fandp/all-versions>
- We need to learn to reach out to each other in personal ways – call, meet face to face, spend time together, get to know each other.

Discussion of ways that individuals approach the meeting for help in times of need:

- Many come to our meetings in middle age, and meeting becomes just one more activity in their busy lives. How can we encourage new people to view meeting as similar to a family?
- An early experience I had coming to my meeting was the shared experience of taking care of a member who was dying. That experience really changed my relationship with my meeting, created one of my bonds with the meeting.
- You learn that you can ask for help by being asked and by helping others. If you ask for help, it shows other people that they can ask for help too. It is a privilege to give help and it enriches our own life. You are offering an incredible spiritual experience.
- Teaching others how to ask for help is a job of our meeting.

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- I hadn't really appreciated how ready our meeting is to provide help to people in need until the family of a person we were helping reflected back to us that they were amazed by how much we were doing. It made me see how much we really are there for each other.
 - Sometimes people are reluctant to help. They are afraid of being overextended. New people need support to get involved.
 - *From the "Chat box" in the online meeting room:* "The way to call anyone into fellowship with us is not to offer them service, which is likely to arouse the resistance of their pride, but to ask service of them." Simeon Shitemi, 1991 at NPYM Annual Session
 - Someone who started attending our meeting when she was quite elderly would say at the end of worship, "Please pray for me, I am facing this challenge." She has since died, but her example made an impact. Those requests for prayer have become regular in our meeting. And people seem more able to ask for help in other ways, too.
 - *From the "Chat box" in the online meeting room:* I know LOTS of faith communities where transportation is a problem. . . . We had the same issues with public transit for seniors in Reno. . . . Our meeting also takes worship to people. Right now we have a whole bunch of elders all at one retirement community. . . . Bellingham Friends have also held worship with Friends in hospital rooms and nursing home rooms in a number of cases. . . . I developed the habit of attending meeting through the practice of giving a friend a ride there. When he moved, I didn't want to quit going.
 - In terms of confidentiality, it's critical to respect people's wishes for privacy. People can get quite angry if anonymous donations are not kept anonymous, if their private problems are made public, or if confidential conversations are brought up again later.
 - Sometimes people want more privacy, but as they need increasing amounts of help from the meeting, information that is private becomes more public as more people need to know. Sometimes, information is just "laying around," and it easy to make mistakes.
 - It can also be difficult with someone is "over dependent" on help from the meeting.
 - We had a situation where a lonely member was arriving at meeting a couple hours early so that she could visit with the caretakers of the meetinghouse. This was actually a burden on them, and we had to tell her, gently, that it would be best if she arrived at worship closer to the starting time. She understood, and it all worked out.