

Clearness Committees: Personal Discernment and Support

All Clearness Committees are generated through the Care and Counsel Committee.

Why Clearness?

For centuries, Quaker Meetings used the clearness process before taking a person into membership, approving a marriage, recording a member as a minister or elder, or issuing a certificate to travel in the ministry.

In our time, individuals have also used Clearness Committees to help discern about important personal decisions, such as taking a new job, moving to a distant location, or following a leading of the Spirit. The role of the Clearness Committee is to help the person discern divine guidance in the decision they are making.

The Formation of the Clearness Committee:

An individual (or group) with a concern contacts the clerk of Care and Counsel with a request for a Discernment or Support Committee. After a brief discussion with the Clerk, the individual (or group) submits a written statement of the concern to Care and Counsel. The individual (or group) may also suggest individuals he/she/they might recommend or not recommend for the Clearness or Support committee.

Membership is frequently made up of 3 or 4 members recommended by Care and Counsel Committee and, if appropriate, from another committee, such as:

- Worship and Ministry Committee for spiritual direction/leadings
- Peace and Social Action Committee for social concern issues.

The Care and Counsel member contacts these individuals to determine their willingness and availability to serve on the committee. Once the committee is chosen the convener calls the first meeting and is then responsible for the times and dates of any future meetings.

The Clearness Meeting:

In preparation for the first meeting, the individual (or group's) written statement is distributed to the committee members. If indicated the individual (or group) may choose to write a more comprehensive statement with more history or other relevant information. The Clearness Committee usually meets in the home of the individual or another comfortable setting.

Atmosphere and Intention:

Sessions are conducted with a reverent, loving attitude of listening for the truth. We assume that each person has an Inner Teacher or Guide. With prayerful attention to the presence of the Spirit,

6 February 2024

committee members can assist an individual or group in becoming clearer about their deep inward knowing related to the question or concern brought to the group. Ideally, committees are composed of a group of people with gifts for listening and discernment, as well as diverse perspectives and experience.

Members gather with the intention of raising questions that may present new ways for the individual (or group) to explore or consider their interior landscape and outward situation in relation to the matter at hand. What is shared in the Clearness Committee session is sacred and confidential. Each committee member practices self-control, putting aside their personal curiosity, suggestions, ideas, or stories to be as fully present as possible to facilitate the person's attention to the movement of the Spirit and greater awareness of the dimensions of their situation. Questions need to be brief and probing for the individual (or group) and not to satisfy the curiosity of the questioner.

After at about an hour of questions, the clerk calls for a pause and asks the individual to choose how to spend the next period of time. Options include: a) worship and possibly vocal ministry; b) silence out of which committee members share images that come as they pray for or hold the focus person in the Light; c) more questions for the person; d) the committee mirroring what they have heard and seen; e) the committee reflecting on what has been said; f) the committee affirming the person's gifts; g) the person asking questions of the committee.

About fifteen minutes before the end of the meeting, the person is invited to share any clarity that has come to them, or which questions are especially alive for them.

The group agrees on next steps, if any are needed. (Another clearness committee meeting? Formation of an ongoing support/oversight/anchor committee? Asking the spiritual community to support the focus person's call or leading, witness, or ministry?)

A Clearness Committee meeting usually lasts about two hours. There is a period of closing worship or prayer.

Clearness Committees for Support

A Support Committee begins very much like a Clearness for Personal Discernment, following its Basic Format as written above.

The purpose of the Support Committee is to provide safe, loving, and spirit-led support around a specific concern or ongoing calling or leading, spiritual direction, life changes, an illness, a personal relationship, a personal crisis, or a work-related or parenting issue. It is often an ongoing committee that may either meet regularly or at the discretion of the individual or group requesting support.

Here are some useful resources for additional guidance about clearness committees:

1. A two-and-a-half page [document on Clearness Committees by Jan Hoffman](#).
2. The Pendle Hill pamphlet by Patricia Loring, [Spiritual Discernment: The Context and Goal of Clearness Committees](#).
3. The Pendle Hill pamphlet by Valerie Brown, [Coming to Light: Cultivating Spiritual Discernment through the Quaker Clearness Committee](#).
4. A 8 1/2 minute video on Using Evoking Questions for Deeper Listening (see below):
5. QuakerSpeak video "How to Have a Clearness Committee":
6. QuakerSpeak video "How to Serve on a Clearness Committee":