

COMMITTEES ON CLEARNESS FOR MEMBERSHIP
FRESH POND MONTHLY MEETING OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF
FRIENDS

January 2000

The following document was written to provide guidance to Fresh Pond Monthly Meeting (FPMM) members serving on a Committee on Clearness for Membership.

Membership is also a way of saying to the meeting and to the world, that you accept at least the fundamental elements of being a Quaker: the understanding of divine guidance, the manner of corporate worship and the ordering of the meeting's business, the practical expression of inward convictions and the equality of all before God. In asking to be admitted into the community of the meeting you are affirming what the meeting stands for and declaring your willingness to contribute to its life (Britain Faith and Practice, 11:01)

Purpose of the Committee on Clearness for Membership

The purpose of the clearness committee is to worshipfully consider the applicant's request for membership in the Religious Society of Friends. While there is no prescription for the conversation, several topics are useful to become acquainted with the applicant on a deeper level. These include the motive for applying, the responsibilities of membership, spiritual and theological matters, Friends' practices and testimonies, relationship to other Friends, personal problems, and the membership process.

[The Committee on Clearness] will instruct and guide the applicant as seems appropriate...they should satisfy themselves that the applicant desires to live in a manner consistent with [Friends'] principles...the method and spirit in which Friends' meeting for worship and business are conducted should be carefully explained to the applicant, together with such responsibilities implied by membership as faithful attendance at meetings for worship and business, service on committees, a willingness to share a just portion of the financial support of the meeting, and participation in larger Friends' groups. (NEYM Faith and Practice, p. 236).

The Clearness Process

The clearness process is initiated when an attender feels led to seek it by writing a letter to the FPMM applying for membership in the Religious Society of Friends and FPMM. The clerk then notifies the Nominating Committee of the request. The Clerk announces the application for membership at meeting for business. The Nominating Committee proposes a convener and other members

of a Committee on Clearness for Membership. The Clerk then seeks the approval of the meeting for business for the appointment of the clearness committee. All clearness committees for membership, either for new memberships or transfers, have three members appointed.

It is suggested that FPMM give applicants a copy of Faith and Practice of New England Yearly Meeting prior to the membership clearness meeting, as well as a copy of *Considering Membership in the Religious Society of Friends? A Message from Friends at Fresh Pond Meeting/New England Yearly Meeting*.

Clearness committees can take time to reach clarity. All parties involved should begin the process anticipating several meetings may be needed. Like Friends' meeting for worship for business, gathering as a clearness committee is an opportunity to discern the will of God for the corporate purpose. Participants enter into waiting worship together to seek God's will. Since discernment of God's will is the foundation of the clearness process, these guidelines are shared in that spirit. They are suggestions rather than rules. Committee members are encouraged to rely on a greater wisdom during the clearness, weaving together what they know from the guidelines with what they know from discernment of God's message to them. The prayerful preparation of the members of the committee in advance of the meeting will assist their listening. If, in the end, the applicant is found clear for membership, both the committee and the applicant should experience a clear sense of the rightness of proceeding and unity with God.

When a decision has been reached, the convener promptly informs the Fresh Pond Meeting clerk of the committee's decision so the Clerk can put the decision on the agenda for the upcoming meeting for business. When reporting to the monthly meeting, it is only necessary to say that the applicant was or was not found clear. Some general comments about the tenor of the meeting may be made. The Clerk then seeks unity for the acceptance of the recommendation by the meeting for business.

When an applicant becomes a member, the nominating committee will appoint two members (not attenders) of FPMM to welcome the new member. Once the welcoming has taken place, this is reported to the Meeting for Worship for Business.

Role of the Convener

The convener obtains the applicant's membership letter from the Clerk of the Meeting and shares it with the other members prior to their meeting with the applicant. The purpose is to consider the focus and framework of the clearness meeting(s). The convener schedules the meeting and other subsequent meetings if needed for clearness. Some committees plan to meet for 15 - 20 minutes prior

to the applicant's arrival to review the letter. The convener schedules and facilitates this.

The convener facilitates the clearness meeting. The convener listens for opportunities to bring the group into waiting worship, not only at the expected times of start and end of the meeting, but in the midst of the gathering as well, when he or she senses the silent worship is most needed for the group to proceed with God. Toward the latter part of the meeting, the whole group will consider whether they are clear on the application at that time, or whether they wish another meeting to be scheduled. It is the convener who facilitates the group's consideration of this decision. The convener promptly contacts the Fresh Pond Meeting clerk to inform her or him of the committee's recommendation.

Regarding Applications for Transfer of Membership

Unlike most other Quaker meetings, Fresh Pond asks Friends transferring their membership to follow the clearness process. One of the functions of all membership clearness committees, and particularly those for transfers of membership, is to give the applicant an opportunity to reflect on their spiritual development and to share this with the committee as a way to help introduce themselves to the community. It is also an opportunity for the committee to share about what is unique about Fresh Pond Meeting, so the applicant can get to know the meeting better as well.

When a member of the Religious Society of Friends desires to transfer membership to FPMM, the member applying for transfer should write to the Clerk of FPMM to start a clearness process similar to the one described above. If clarity has been found, the applicant should contact the Clerk of the monthly meeting where their membership lies and request that a transfer certificate be sent to Fresh Pond Meeting.

When the clearness committee for a transfer reports to the monthly meeting, the meeting can accept the person into membership conditional upon receiving the certificate of transfer. If this is done, the receipt of the transfer and the final acceptance into membership needs to be reported and minuted at the next monthly meeting after the receipt of the transfer.

Questions and Issues For the Clearness Committee to Address

- 1.) What draws the applicant to membership in the Meeting? Ask them to share something of their spiritual journey or history and what led up to their wanting membership. (Committee members may want to briefly share their own spiritual journey and commitment toward the Society of Friends.)
- 2.) What strengths and gifts does the applicant bring to the Meeting?

- 3.) Is the applicant open to the experience of the continuing revelation of the Divine?
- 4.) Is the applicant open to Christian language? Universalist language? Can we hear the deeper meaning of each others ministries, even if the words we use for them may differ? *Since the concept [of the Inner Light or the Light of Christ] is a mystical one, it may be perceived differently by different Friends, yet it is ultimately the same.* (North Pacific Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, p. 58)
- 5.) Does she or he understand that Quakerism is rooted in Christianity but that Friends have a great diversity in their view of Jesus?
- 6.) It is important to address and, if needed, explain Fresh Pond Meeting's practices, worship, and responsibilities, including committee service and teaching of First Day School.
- 7.) Are there aspects of the Meeting with which the applicant has hesitation or difficulty?
- 8.) Is the applicant familiar and able to accept the particular qualities that define Fresh Pond Meeting? Some of these include a commitment to diversity, children, and supporting same gender relationships and marriages.
- 9.) Is the applicant clear of any other attachments or affiliations with other religious organizations? If the applicant does have a membership or affiliation with another religious organization, the clearness committee will ask him or her to contact the organization(s) and terminate the affiliation.
- 10.) Are there past or present actions, obligations, etc. that the individual brings to our community? There should be frank discussion of burdens that the applicant may be carrying.
- 11.) Does the applicant have beliefs or behaviors that would jeopardize the integrity of the community or the personal safety of the members?
- 12.) Will the applicant try to deeply listen to feedback? Will the applicant seek to give such feedback lovingly but directly? Is the applicant willing to participate in, and be subject to, the corporate discernment of the meeting?