

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice Revision Committee Proposed Advices, Queries and Voices

Caring for One Another: Advices

Friends are concerned about the welfare of every member of the Meeting community. While we need to guard against prying or invasion of privacy, it is nevertheless essential that Meetings be aware of the spiritual and material needs of members of the community and express caring concern in appropriate ways. To this end, we are to live affectionately as friends, entering with sympathy into the joys and sorrows of one another's lives.

As we are willing to offer help, so should we be willing to make our needs known and to accept help. In bereavement, give yourself time to grieve. When others mourn, let your love embrace them with the simple things of life: praying together, talking, planning meals, caring for children, and otherwise being of comfort. In offering pastoral care, it is not necessary to find the right words; it is important to be present.

Just as we do not leave pastoral care to a pastor, so we may not leave this most essential function to a committee alone. It is also important to recognize when it may be appropriate to reach within or beyond the community to involve persons with special expertise.

Caring for One Another: Queries

What impediments do I find to reaching out to those in distress?

What do I need to do to overcome them?

Am I comfortable making my own needs known to my meeting?

How do we share in the diverse joys and transitions in each other's lives?

Caring for One Another: Voices

When the members of a fellowship know one another, care for one another, visit one another in their homes, consult one another, hold one another up in the silence and feel responsibility before God for one another, then when they meet together for worship they are truly open as a corporate group for the deepest working of the Spirit.

Douglas Steere, 1940

Let us seek to live in compassion and patience with one another. Grace and latitude should mark our relationships. All too often we can injure each other unduly in our zeal for justice and truth and righteousness. The spirit of condemnation can creep into our relationships so subtly. We can begin to look at each other's possessions with a mental calculator. But there is a more excellent way: we simply need to be with one another, loving, supporting, caring. Of course, we live and speak the truth as it has been given to us, but the business of straightening each other out belongs to God, not us.

Richard J. Foster, 1981

When I touch the heart of prayer, I touch the lives of others, for in some mysterious way which we cannot depict more than to point toward it, we are all interconnected in the life of God, and we are never nearer to another than when we touch his life in the life of God. Intercessory prayer is going on all the time. There is something at the heart of things that cares and that carries on this never-pausing siege at the East window of each soul. When I pray for another, I enter into this siege. I add my caring to help lower the threshold in the heart of the other to this continuous caring.

Douglas Steere, 1980

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness, and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another — and helping one another up with a tender hand, if there has been any slip or fall... O, wait to feel this spirit, and to be guided to walk in this spirit, that ye may enjoy the Lord in sweetness, and walk sweetly, meekly, tenderly, peaceably and lovingly one with another ... the meek, innocent tender righteous life reigning in you, governing over you, and shining through you, in the eyes of all with whom ye converse.

Isaac Pennington

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In a true community we will not choose our companions, for our choices are so often limited by self-serving motives. Instead, our companions will be given to us by grace. Often they will be persons who will upset our settled view of self and world. In fact, we might define true community as the place where the person you least want to live with always lives!

Parker J. Palmer, 1977

Forgiveness does not mean “forgive and forget.” It stares the beast in the eye, names the hurt, and refuses to return it, seeking not to punish but to heal.

Desmond Tutu, 2007 (speech given in Washington, D.C.)

Loving care is not something that those sound in mind and body “do” for others but a process that binds us together. God has made us loving and the imparting of love to another satisfies something deep within us. It would be a mistake to assume that those with outwardly well-organized lives do not need assistance. Many apparently secure carers live close to despair within themselves. We all have our needs.

Britain Yearly Meeting, 12.01

Careful listening is fundamental to helping each other; it goes beyond finding out about needs and becomes part of meeting them. Some would say that it is the single most useful thing that we can do. Those churches that have formal confession understand its value, but confession does not have to be formal to bring benefits. Speaking the unspeakable, admitting the shameful, to someone who can be trusted and who will accept you in love as you are, is enormously helpful.

Britain Yearly Meeting, 12.01

And all such as behold their brother or sister in a transgression, go not in rough, light or upbraiding spirit to reprove or admonish him or her, but in the power of the Lord, and the spirit of the Lamb, and in the wisdom and love of the Truth, which suffers thereby, to admonish such an offender. So may the soul of such a brother or sister be seasonably and effectually reached unto and overcome, and they may have cause to bless the name of the Lord on their behalf, and so a blessing may be rewarded into the bosom of that faithful and tender brother or sister that so admonished them.

George Fox, 1669

Our labor is to bring all men to their own teacher in themselves.

George Fox, Journal

In addition to its many religious forms, Healing also includes many arts and sciences. There is the art of listening, the art of smiling, the art of empathy, of knowing just what people need, and not rushing in to offer help that is not suitable. Then there is the healing that comes through prayer in its various forms, through the laying on of hands, through music and dance, painting and colour, through communion with and understanding of the world of nature, and through friendship.

Jim Pym, 1990

O God who has carried us when we knew it not, and who faithfully seeks us when we are yet afar off, lay on us this ministry of intercession for others, that we may share this deepest of all ministries that brings us down into the very matrix of your yearning for souls and makes us members of the great chain of redemptive love that girdles our world for its healing.

Douglas Steere, 1980

The resources of the Meeting can be important for families undergoing crises. Friends should be particularly mindful of the needs of children who are experiencing pain or loss. A Meeting can provide care and understanding, acting as an extended family. Not only are we brothers and sisters in the spirit, but we may be beloved aunts and uncles of all the children in the Meeting. The resilience of the Meeting as a nurturing community encompassing many generations supports each of us throughout the many stages of our lives.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Advices, 1988