Clearness Committees at Midlothian Friends Meeting

Within the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the **Clearness committee** is a personal process for discernment. Clearness committees are often used when a member of the meeting seeks clarity on how to respond to a life concern or dilemma. Clearness committee meetings are a form of Quaker worship and are based on the principle that the inner Light is present in all people. Thus, the process is one of aiding a person (called the "focus person") to find the answer within, rather than getting outside advice, guidance, or judgment. The content and outcome of the Clearness committee meeting should always remain confidential among the participants and not shared with anyone outside the Clearness committee. The focus person may share what they want, of course.

In addition to Clearness committees requested by individuals, Clearness committees may be used at Midlothian Friends Meeting when a person requests recorded membership and when a couple seeks marriage under the care of the meeting.

Friends can initiate a Clearness committee for themselves or with the help of a Care coordinator by:

- Choosing a Facilitator who is associated with Midlothian Friends Meeting. Encouraging them to read this document may help with their decision to facilitate.
- Choosing another three or four Friends associated with Midlothian Friends Meeting to participate.
- Agreeing on a time and a quiet, private place (the meetinghouse or a private home may be used) to hold the Clearness committee meeting.
- Ensuring all participants read this document before the first Clearness committee meeting.
- It is not necessary to inform the participants of the reason for the Clearness committee in advance, unless the focus person wants to.

What does the Clearness committee do?

A Clearness committee's role is a simple one that requires no training or expertise. Its purpose is to help the focus person reach clarity to move forward with a matter, to wait for further clarity, or to take other action. This discovery process takes place within the focus person as a result of gentle, unbiased, non-judgmental and spontaneous (unplanned) questions asked by the participants.

During this process of one to two hours the committee will:

- Begin with silent worship and proceed with a backdrop of silent worship throughout the time together.
- When Friends are settled into the beginning silence, the Facilitator should encourage the focus person to explain why they have asked for the Clearness committee meeting.
- All participants should listen deeply to the issues, dilemmas, questions, and concerns described by the focus person during the silence.
- With the help of interspersed silence, the participants should question the focus person in a careful, gentle, non-judgmental, open-ended manner for as long as needed to help the focus person reach clarity. The participants should never devolve into telling their own life-event stories buried within their question, nor should they respond to the focus person's responses with their own life-event stories. The focus person should not be pressured to answer a question they are uncomfortable answering. Participants should not offer personal judgments or opinions disguised as questions, even if asked to do so by the focus person. They should answer questions from the focus person only with further non-judgmental questions.
- Once the Facilitator determines there are no further questions or responses, the Facilitator should ask for closing silence during which anyone may offer a reflection that summarizes what was heard or is affirming and helpful without being judgmental or opinionated about the focus person's concern/dilemma (no advice should be given). A follow-up Clearness committee meeting may be arranged if that seems appropriate to the focus person.

A Note of Advice to the Facilitator

The Facilitator should ensure that committee participants adhere to the guidelines outlined here so that the spirituality and purpose of the Clearness committee meeting is respected. It is all too easy for participants to slip into judgments, advice, opinions, or stories about themselves instead of focusing on the focus person. Don't hesitate to kindly stop a participant when they have slipped into these unhelpful actions.