

Madison Friends Meeting

Clearness Committees: Purpose and Process

What is a clearness committee? A [clearness committee](#) is a Quaker process to help a person who seeks clarity on how to proceed in a keenly felt decision, concern or dilemma. Through listening and asking questions, committee members help the individual discern the leading of the Spirit and way forward. The purpose is to help the focus person remove interference and discover their inner guidance. Committee members accompany the person rather than offering advice. The Clearness process assumes that each of us has an Inner Teacher, that the answers sought are within the person seeking clearness, and that a group of caring friends can serve as channels of divine guidance in drawing out that Inner Teacher.

Who can have a clearness committee? Anyone can request a clearness committee from their Monthly Meeting. People may use clearness committees for a variety of concerns such as a career change, which college to go to, or how to adapt to a major change in life. Friends often rely on clearness committees when they are considering an act of civil disobedience and seek spiritual grounding for the work. Children and youth can use clearness committees to make decisions when they face uncertainty. Clearness committees are appointed by the Meeting when a person seeks membership or when a couple seeks marriage under the care of the Meeting.

Purpose and process. The purpose is to help the focus person discover whether there is clarity to move forward with a matter, wait, or take other action. The focus person writes a brief description of the concern, and questions surrounding the concern. That description is provided to Committee members in advance, or at the beginning of the meeting.

The committee will:

- Worship together;
- Listen deeply to the questions and concerns brought by the individual;
- Question the individual in a careful, gentle and open-ended manner;
- Reflect back their understanding of the essence of the focus person's message;
- Seek clearness on whether further support is needed from the Meeting.

Choosing Friends to serve on a clearness committee. The process is initiated by the person seeking clearness, though a Friend may ask, "Would a clearness committee be helpful?" In Madison Meeting, clearness committees can be requested from Care Committee. Care Committee may ask the focus person whether there are specific Friends they would like to have on the Committee: Friends who would be able to listen, and who aren't too close to the issue. Formation should be under a discipline of worship, taking care that people are chosen not just because they are friends, but through a discernment process. Clearness committees for

membership are approved through Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business, then formed by Care Committee.

Administration of a clearness committee. At the beginning of the clearness meeting, a clerk and recorder are appointed. The *clerk* opens the meeting, reminds those present of the guidelines to be followed (including confidentiality), and sees to physical details such seating and silencing of devices. When the focus person is ready, they begin with a summary of the focus or concern. The recorder writes the questions asked and responses, then gives the record to the focus person at the end of the meeting. The clearness committee works best when everyone approaches it in a prayerful mood (which does not exclude playfulness!).

Quaker Speak Videos:

- **How to have a Clearness Committee:** <https://quakerspeak.com/video/quaker-clearness-committee/>
- **How to serve on a Clearness Committee:** <https://www.fgcquaker.org/fgcresources/spiritual-practices/clearness-committees/>

Queries:

- Have you ever been the focus person in a clearness committee? What was your experience?
- If you have served on a clearness committee, what was your experience?
- How can our Meeting nurture the use of clearness committees as spiritual practice?

References:

- **FGC:** <https://www.fgcquaker.org/fgcresources/spiritual-practices/clearness-committees/>
- **New England Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice**, 8B. Guidance for a Clearness Committee for Personal Discernment: <https://neym.org/faith-and-practice/appendices/pastoral-care-8>
- **Northern Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice**, Community Support for Discernment and Committees of Clearness, pp. 56-58: <https://northernyearlymeeting.org/publications/faith-and-practice/>