

# Listening to the Spirit Together

## Developed from the Quaker's Clearness Committee<sup>1</sup>

*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. – James 1:5 ESV*

The purpose of a “clearness committee” is to help you to discern the leading of the Spirit in community. Some situations that might naturally lead to discerning the Spirit’s lead in community might be moving, a job decision, marriage, role in the community, leadership, gospel opportunities, etc. The friends are to help you discover whether there is clarity to move forward with a matter, wait, and/or consider your heart. The goal of the discernment process is not to reach any particular outcome, but to discern whether there is clarity on a matter and if there is clarity, where it lies.

### Gathering a Group of Friends

Gather trusted believers who will not offer their advice or opinion during the time of discernment, but who can speak only what they sense from the Spirit in open-handedness. It is good to find one friend who can help guide the time and can be trusted to help the group remain focused on discernment (perhaps a leading person from your community of faith).

Once you have approached a group of three to five friends, it is helpful for you to write out the situation or question you are bringing before the Lord in community for discernment before you meet. Below are suggestions of issues to reflect on in seeking discernment.

- **Confidence:** What confidence in the Lord and his purposes is leading you? How might it be your own impulses leading?
- **Clarity:** In what ways do you feel already clear? What questions and concerns are you seeking to clarify?
- **Benefits:** What are the potential benefits to you, your church, your community? What are the costs?
- **Readiness:** How does this fit into other obligations such as family, work, or community? Do you have the skills and resources to carry out this leading? What steps might be taken to become better prepared for undertaking the leading?
- **Resources:** How will you support yourself while carrying out this leading? If resources are not available, can the leading be carried forward faithfully in a less demanding form and/or can you wait?
- **Support:** Is it appropriate to ask others to join in this leading by providing spiritual, practical, or financial support? What expectations do you have of the church and are they realistic?
- **Next Steps:** Are there next steps required in preparation before moving forward in outward action?

### Responsibilities of Friends

The group of friends should be attentive to two responsibilities:

1. Assisting you in testing your next steps in faithfulness and considering your readiness to take these next steps in faith (trusting God) and practice (practical matters).
2. Assisting the group in discerning its appropriate role by worshiping together; asking careful, gentle open-ended questions; reflecting back what has been heard; avoiding advice or personal observations; listening carefully to how the Lord leads their heart on your behalf; not forcing a particular answer or decision, but allowing you to hear the Lord for yourself; not letting pressure to have a particular outcome drive their involvement; choosing to be silent more often than not

The group usually meets one to three times, or as needed, to come to clarity and unity. Should concerns arise at any stage in the discernment process consult with church leadership for support and guidance.

### Possibility of Outcomes

Discernment is not simply about a particular answer to a question. Whatever the outcome, be sure to share the outcome with your church community:

- You all may sense it is not the right time to move forward. Seek the Lord for what the leading was about.
- You all may sense it is the right time to take specific outward action. The group can discern what support from the church would be most appropriate.
- You all may sense that the leading is not about outward action but an inward move of the Spirit. Set aside any outward steps and consider what the Spirit is wanting to do in your heart.
- You, and the group, may not come to unity on how to proceed. It is an invitation for you, the group, or both, to further search and grow in the Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Borrowed & adapted from Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting’s “Handbook for Formal Care of Friends Called to Ministry or Witness” Approved April 10, 2005, Draft Revision 2010