

## Chapter 12

# Caring for one another

## INTRODUCTION

- 12.01 All of us in the meeting have needs. Sometimes the need will be for patient understanding, sometimes for practical help, sometimes for challenge and encouragement; but we cannot be aware of each other's needs unless we know each other. Although we may be busy we must take time to hear about the absent daughter, the examination result, the worries over a lease renewal, the revelation of an uplifting holiday, the joy of a new love. Every conversation with another Friend, every business meeting, every discussion group, and every meeting for worship can increase our loving and caring and our knowledge of each other.

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-organised lives do not need assistance. Many apparently secure carers live close to despair within themselves. We all have our needs.

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.

Plain speaking is a longstanding Quaker testimony. It is not only that we hold a witness to the value of truth but also that straightforwardness saves us from many mistakes and much time

## *Introduction*

wasted. On first acquaintance some Quakers can seem rather brusque; without the conventions of flattery and half-truths, we particularly need to make clear the steadfast love we have for one another.

Caring can take many forms. Some help will be beyond the resources of the local meeting, but it should not be beyond our resources to see when it is needed and to see that it is provided. Often it is what we are rather than anything we do which is of help to others. We should be wary of giving advice: a sympathetic ear, whilst a person finds their own way forward, will usually do more lasting good. Some people may not want to be helped, seeing our concern as an intrusion. Great sensitivity is called for.

The adults in a meeting have a shared responsibility for making a reality of our claim that the presence of children and young people is valued and that everybody's needs and feelings matter. People vary in how comfortable they feel with silent worship; some children, like some adults, take naturally to its disciplines and joys; others have to work at it. Some meetings offer other forms of worship from time to time. In any case it is important that the needs of all age groups are considered when we plan our activities.

- 12.02 To be without an ordained clergy is not to be without either leadership or ministry. The gifts of the Spirit to us include both. For us, calls to particular ministries are usually for a limited period of time, and those gifts pertain to the task rather than the person. In one lifetime a person may be called to a number of ministries.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

- 12.03 With our structure, we risk failures in understanding and transmitting our tradition, and failures in pastoral care. We do not always adequately support one another. When we appoint people to carry out tasks for us, there is a danger of approaching this in too secular a way... We can and must pray for them to receive the necessary gifts and strength from the Spirit.

London Yearly Meeting, 1986

## 12: Caring for one another

- 12.04 The great aim of a Christian community is to enable its members to know what their gift is and then to enable them to exercise it to the glory of God. This may sometimes involve a prolonged and perhaps painful exercise before some members come to accept that the gift they have to offer is not the one they thought.

*New life from old roots, 1965*

### ELDERSHIP AND OVERSIGHT

- 12.05 Some Friends, whether called elders or not, have been looked to for spiritual counsel from the beginning. So in 1653 William Dewsbury proposed that each meeting should appoint 'one or two most grown in the Power and the Life, in the pure discerning of the Truth' to take responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the meeting and its members.

While the nurture of the spiritual life and responsibility for the right holding of meeting for worship continued to rest with 'elders', the more practical aspects of pastoral care were, towards the end of the eighteenth century, assigned to appointed 'overseers'.

Most area meetings continue the practice of appointing elders and overseers from their membership to ensure that the needs of the worshipping groups within their compass are met.

### **Area meetings' responsibility for pastoral care**

- 12.06 The responsibility for providing each local meeting with the necessary resources for eldership and oversight rests with the area meeting, while much of the ongoing work is carried out in its constituent meetings. Good communication between these meetings and the area meeting should be maintained at all times so that items referred by one body to another are attended to and, where necessary, action is taken.

Elders and overseers (where appointed) will only be able to serve well if they are known and accessible to Friends and attenders. Care

### *Eldership and oversight*

should be taken that members of a meeting know which of their number are serving for the time being in each capacity.

Meetings of those responsible for eldership and oversight should be called at least once a year by the area meeting. Here they can consider the needs of other meetings besides their own as well as the fundamentals of their faith and practice. Here too, newly appointed elders and overseers can learn about the tasks laid upon them and about how these responsibilities are carried out in other meetings. The area meeting should ensure that opportunities for consultation and inspiration are made known and appoint representatives to conferences on pastoral care matters, which might also be arranged by general meetings. Meetings are urged to learn about, and make use of, the wide variety of experience and resources available. Guidance on many aspects of pastoral care is available from Quaker Life.

Area meetings shall keep under regular review the provision of pastoral care in their constituent meetings (see 4.13.d & 12.16). Area meetings should seek the forms of eldership and oversight in each constituent meeting that best meet needs (12.15).

### **Appointment of elders and overseers**

- 12.07 Appointment as elder or overseer does not imply that the Friends concerned are elevated to a higher position but that the meeting recognises that they may have the capacity to serve it in a particular way. Appointments are for a three-year period and may be renewed for a further three years; sometimes it may be necessary or desirable for a Friend to serve as elder or overseer for more than six consecutive years but this should not happen routinely (see 3.23). There is need for adequate continuity but there should be no expectation of continuous uninterrupted service. Care should be taken that newly appointed elders and overseers understand the duties involved. Those who are not to be re-nominated should be informed before new names are submitted to the area meeting.

Nominations to these offices are made either by the area meeting standing nominations committee or by a special area meeting

## 12: Caring for one another

nominating committee, consisting of a group of Friends drawn from the constituent meetings for this purpose. Members should bear in mind that they are not bringing forward names from their local meetings for ratification but nominating elders and overseers from the area meeting as a whole.

- 12.08 Beatrice Saxon Snell relates a story from her own experience, which reminds us that we are all potentially the instruments of God:

I had a salutary lesson in sober thinking when I was first asked to become an elder. The invitation appalled me; I felt I was not old enough, had not been in the Society long enough; I suspected strongly that my monthly meeting had asked me on the inadequate grounds of vocal ministry; I read up the appropriate passages in Church government and felt still more appalled. Nevertheless I had been in the Society just long enough to know that the group often has a wisdom which can seldom be justified on logical grounds but which is, nevertheless, superior to the wisdom of the individual. I therefore went to consult a much respected elder of my acquaintance. She and her house were late Victorian; she sat on her ugly sofa with the poker up her spine, her feet set neatly together and her hands folded in her lap; and she let me talk myself out. When I had quite finished she inclined herself slightly towards me and said: 'My dear, we have to take what we can get.' I have since been convinced that this is a text which ought to be framed and hung up over the bed of every elder in the Society: it ought to be hung over the bed of every Friend who is tempted to refer to the elders as 'they'.

1982

- 12.09 When asked to consider nomination for this service to the meeting, Friends should do so prayerfully and in the knowledge that the task will be entrusted to them for a period only. No one should be reluctant to pass on the responsibility to others when one triennial appointment comes to an end.

Once the area meeting has made the appointments, the area meeting clerk shall immediately notify every Friend appointed and shall convene the first meetings of elders and of overseers respectively

### *Eldership and oversight*

unless the area meeting has adopted other procedures for so doing. At the first meeting of each group a clerk or convener shall be appointed, unless the area meeting has already appointed one.

The area meeting clerk shall transmit to each constituent meeting and to the Recording Clerk the names of elders and overseers appointed for the next triennial period, and of their respective clerks or conveners, as soon as possible after their appointment.

An area meeting may release individual elders or overseers from service, and may make interim appointments, at any time during the triennial period. All such changes are to be notified to each constituent meeting and to the Recording Clerk. It is important that the area meeting make known to its members the method by which it wishes to receive nominations for such interim appointments. It may, for example, wish them to be brought forward by its standing nominations committee, or it may prefer to receive nominations from the existing area meeting elders and overseers or from the local meeting most directly concerned.

A Friend whose membership is transferred from the area meeting that made the appointment shall cease upon transfer to be an elder or overseer.

### **Caring for one another in the local meeting**

- 12.10 The work of eldership and oversight is mainly carried out locally. Those responsible for pastoral care will need wisdom and sensitivity. Their ability to inform, advise and counsel will often be called on. Those invited to serve in either capacity may feel that the challenges sound daunting and that they will not match up to expectations. The meeting will be a source of support to those asked to be elders or overseers. The responsibility of eldership and oversight will bring its own rewards.

Understanding of human personality and motivation gained from a variety of disciplines will be of help in effective pastoral caring. Additionally, it may be necessary to be informed about ways of acquiring skills and, where necessary, to seek information from

## 12: Caring for one another

those qualified to give it. Members of our meetings or those associated with us will often have the required knowledge and experience.

It is important to distinguish between everyone's need to be listened to with sympathetic acceptance, especially when faced with bereavement or other painful situations, and those whose need goes beyond the competence of members of the meeting. It should not be thought of as failure to enlist specialist help from outside the meeting when what is needed cannot otherwise be provided. In all advisory work it is important to recognise that much of it is confidential. If in doubt as to what is confidential and what is not, it is good practice always to check with those involved before passing on any information.

In situations where a meeting for clearness may be appropriate, the individual(s) wishing to call it should consult those responsible for pastoral care in their meeting. An appropriate handbook may be available.

*See also 12.22-12.25 on meetings for clearness in general and 16.19-16.21 on meetings for clearness concerning intentions of marriage*

- 12.11 Traditionally the first concern of elders is for the nurture of the spiritual life of the group as a whole and of its individual members so that all may be brought closer to God and therefore to one another, thus enabling them to be more sensitive and obedient to the will of God. So the right holding of our meetings for worship will be their particular care. The chief concern of overseers is with the more outward aspects of pastoral care, with building a community in which all members find acceptance, loving care and opportunities for service.

Though there is a difference of function, much of the work of elders and overseers is of the same nature. It is important that the two groups should at all times work in close collaboration and should, wherever possible, share their common commitment to the service of their meetings. Whether they meet in separate groups or not, they should, from time to time, arrange joint meetings locally as well as in the area meeting area.

## **Responsibilities of eldership**

12.12 Some of the responsibilities listed here may be carried out by overseers, or by specially appointed groups or committees, but it is important that elders should see that they are fulfilled. It is laid upon elders:

- a. to meet regularly to uphold the meeting and its members in prayer; to guide those who share in our meetings towards a deeper experience of worship; to encourage preparation of mind and spirit, and study of the Bible and other writings that are spiritually helpful; to encourage individual and united prayer in the meeting;
- b. to promote the right holding of meetings for worship, remembering that responsibility for the meeting, including the fitness of the ministry, is shared among all the members of the worshipping group;
- c. to foster helpful vocal ministry, seeking to discern the needs and gifts both of individual contributors to the vocal ministry and of the meeting as a whole: some Friends may hesitate to risk speaking in meeting because they lack confidence in their own call to speak – they will need encouragement; others may too easily rise to their feet without being clear as to the helpfulness of the message; sometimes it may be necessary to restrain unsuitable ministry;
- d. to be responsible for the quiet gathering of the meeting for worship in order, reverence and harmony, for the arrangement of seating and for encouraging punctuality; elders will arrange for the closing of the meeting, normally by shaking hands;
- e. to ensure that the basis and method of conducting meetings for church affairs are understood; to accept responsibility for their right ordering (see chapter 3);
- f. to take responsibility for the right holding of meetings for worship on special occasions such as marriages (16.31) and funerals (17.08-17.09), and, if memorial meetings are asked for, to make sure that their purpose is clear to those who attend (17.10) – some meetings like to make special arrangements for welcoming new babies or celebrating other events (see also 10.12, 10.17 & 22.44-22.46);

## 12: Caring for one another

- g. to care for individual Friends and attenders, entering with sympathy into their needs; to remember those who are unable to attend our meetings through age, illness or for other reasons; to visit them or where helpful to make special arrangements for meetings for worship in their homes; to take special responsibility for ministry to the dying and comforting the bereaved;
- h. to encourage opportunities for all in the meeting to broaden and deepen their knowledge and understanding – this might include learning about the roots and foundations of our faith, becoming aware of the insights of other faiths and being challenged by new ideas, exploring with one another how to deepen our ministry, making opportunities for quiet reflection, increasing our understanding of ourselves and others and acknowledging our share of responsibility where there is conflict and loss;
- i. together with overseers, to care for the children and young people associated with our meetings; to listen to what they have to say and to enable them to take as full a part as possible in our life and worship; to ensure there are regular opportunities for their spiritual nurture (see also 12.13.f);
- j. together with overseers, to take care of the needs of enquirers and attenders, encouraging them to join in the life of the meeting;
- k. to encourage Friends to take responsibility for their rightful part in the life of the community in which the meeting is situated; to welcome to our meetings those who belong to other Christian bodies, to other faiths and to none;
- l. to consider the question of vocal ministry in the constituent meetings of the whole area meeting area and to give support where there is need for intervisitation.

It is advised that elders keep minutes of their meetings.

*For responsibilities of elders in relation to non-members wishing to attend Yearly Meeting see 6.15. On the participation of elders in meetings for clearness see 12.22-12.25 and in meetings for clearness concerning intentions of marriage see 16.19-16.21. See also 12.10.*

## **Responsibilities of oversight**

- 12.13 Some of the responsibilities listed here may be carried out by elders, or by specially appointed groups or committees, but it is important that overseers should see that they are fulfilled. It is laid upon overseers:
- a. to encourage attendance at meeting for worship and to make sure that newcomers to the meeting are welcomed and introduced to other members of the worshipping group;
  - b. to encourage members to attend meetings for church affairs whenever possible and to take their rightful part in them;
  - c. to make opportunities for Friends and attenders to get to know one another so that their diverse needs can be discovered and so that all will become aware of their gifts and experience, which may be of service to the meeting and to the Society – to be valued and needed is an enrichment for all concerned;
  - d. together with elders, to take particular care of the needs of enquirers and attenders;
  - e. to meet regularly to ensure that the pastoral needs of everyone associated with the meeting are being noticed; to check the membership list frequently, not only for accuracy but also in order to cover unmet needs – each child and young person should be considered as an individual and not solely as a member of a family group;
  - f. together with elders, to exercise care over the children and young people associated with the meeting, whether in membership or not, and to see that suitable activities are arranged (see also 12.12.i); to encourage them, where appropriate, to take part in gatherings arranged for young people at local or national level, consulting with parents when appropriate;
  - g. to make opportunities to talk with young people whose parents have brought them into membership about whether they wish to confirm it; at this stage they, and young attenders, may like to address a personal application to the area meeting and to be visited in the usual way; some may, at this point, wish to resign from the membership acquired for them by their parents (see also 11.17-11.19);

## 12: Caring for one another

- h. to give advice and information about how to apply for membership both to attenders and to parents who may wish to make application on behalf of their children; some attenders, either through shyness or because of a feeling of unworthiness, may be holding back from seeking membership – they may need encouragement to apply to the area meeting; it will be helpful to remind them that the letter of application to the area meeting clerk need not necessarily be more than a statement of the wish for membership, and that when they meet with the Friends appointed as visitors there is opportunity for asking questions and exploring matters of faith rather than examining fitness for membership (see also 11.10);
- i. to visit members and attenders who have recently joined the meeting or moved into the area and to visit new-born babies; to see that the regulations on notices of change of address (11.23) and certificates of transfer of membership (11.26, 16.52) are promptly attended to and that certificates are applied for when not duly received; to advise the area meeting on the acceptance or non-acceptance of certificates of transfer;
- j. to encourage caring friendship within the Quaker community: should difficulties between Friends arise, overseers may be able to offer help at an early stage so that misunderstandings may be resolved; overseers are encouraged to make opportunities to talk privately with a Friend whose behaviour and manner of life is inconsistent with a Quaker witness, to explore underlying causes and endeavour to restore harmony (see also 11.32-11.35);
- k. to send recommendations to the area meeting for the termination of membership in accordance with 11.31-11.35, once every effort has been made to follow up those who have drifted away from the meeting or have not been heard from for several years;
- l. to ensure that young members and attenders living away from home are cared for and made welcome; to maintain contact with Friends residing abroad or in other parts of the country;
- m. to advise local treasurers, collectors or finance committees, as appropriate, which members and attenders should and which should not receive contribution schedules;

### *Eldership and oversight*

- n. to advise Friends who are in financial difficulty or who need help with education or training of their children about ways of obtaining assistance; to ensure that financial help is available, where this is needed, to enable Friends to attend meetings for church affairs and to accept appointments connected therewith;
- o. to make sure that those intending to marry understand the principles on which the Society's usage is based and to refer them to the registering officer (see 16.05);
- p. to see that sick people and elderly people, whether in their own homes, in hospital or in sheltered housing, are visited and cared for; to seek means of alleviating financial hardship; where overseers become aware that an elderly person is no longer able to look after herself or himself, it may be appropriate to offer help in consultation with the person concerned and any relatives or others involved: overseers should try to be aware of the statutory and voluntary provision of residential and other care in their locality, including Quaker homes;
- q. together with elders, to respond to the needs of the bereaved at time of loss; to provide comfort and sympathetic listening, however grief may be expressed.

It is advised that overseers keep minutes of their meetings.

*On the participation of overseers in meetings for clearness concerning intentions of marriage see 16.21.b, and in other meetings for clearness see 12.22-12.25. See also 12.10.*

### **Sharing responsibility for pastoral care**

- 12.14 However pastoral care is organised, it is essential that the responsibilities for spiritual, intellectual, emotional, material and physical care for each member of the Quaker community, as listed above, should be given prayerful consideration. As the responsibilities of eldership and oversight overlap in many instances, there should be close co-operation between elders and overseers at all times.

## 12: Caring for one another

- 12.15 Some of our meetings are undertaking to care for one another without specially appointed elders and overseers. These meetings need to give careful consideration to the best way of attending to pastoral care without neglecting any of the responsibilities of eldership or oversight outlined above. Thought must be given, for example, to those who attend the meeting only rarely or are housebound.

If a local meeting wishes to adopt an alternative method of providing pastoral care, it should take time to work out how the responsibilities would be shared and who would represent the group in meetings for eldership and oversight within the area meeting. It should undertake a periodic review of the effectiveness of any procedure adopted.

In some cases Friends may decide that shared oversight works well for them but that they still see advantages in appointing elders to attend to the spiritual nurture of the group. Traditional practices are tried and tested. For some meetings, however, there will be advantages in exploring newer and possibly more appropriate ways of meeting their particular needs.

Any proposals for changes in the way pastoral care is exercised in a meeting or meetings should be taken to the area meeting for guidance, support and decision. Area meetings should have a particular care for those meetings involved in novel ways of exercising eldership and oversight, both to offer guidance if difficulties or deficiencies arise and to ensure that the benefits of new practices can be shared with other meetings. (See also 4.35.)

- 12.16 Whether elders and overseers are appointed or not, local meetings should regularly review their spiritual life and its expression in caring. A meeting might like to compile and use a series of queries for this purpose. Such a review could take place every two or three years and might in itself be a form of pastoral care. The process might start in small groups, in which unmet needs could be revealed and confidentiality respected, then move on to an occasion drawing all together. Special attention might need to be given to involving those associated with the meeting who take little part in its regular life because of youth, age, disability or disaffection. (See 4.07.d & 12.06.)

*Eldership and oversight*

- 12.17 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

- 12.18 Nor would we limit the performance of these duties to those who occupy such stations; we are all to watch over one another for good and to be mutually interested one for another, being united together as lively stones in the spiritual building of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the chief corner-stone.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1851

- 12.19 [Let not] Friends in the station of overseer ... take a limited view of their duties... To them is committed the oversight of the flock, in the love of Christ. [Let them] give themselves to this ... duty in faith and prayer, seeking, in the wisdom of God, to encourage all in the right way of the Lord; to bind up that which is broken; to bring home the wanderers; to visit the sick and the afflicted; and to extend loving care over the young and inexperienced. Desirable as it is that some should be specially entrusted with these duties, an earnest concern has prevailed that all may take their right share in the privilege of watching over one another for good.

Yearly Meeting in London, 1871

### SMALL GROUPS

#### **Meeting together in small groups**

- 12.20 As Friends, we know that the quality of our unprogrammed worship is enhanced, and our care of one another is more effective, the better we come to know and understand one another.

We grow closer to one another as a worshipping community develops through regular attendance at meeting for worship, through working together physically or mentally, and in meeting with one another informally. Meeting together in small groups may have its part to play in this process, and may be valuable in helping us to explore and share our spiritual experience. Study and discussion groups provide well-tried opportunities, as do more informal social gatherings.

From time to time it may be helpful for a meeting to look at itself and try to identify specific areas that need attention, such as how to improve pastoral care, how to include attenders and newcomers, or how to improve communication and outreach. While these matters may well be raised in a local or area meeting, valuable suggestions and solutions may come from individuals who do not always find it easy to voice them in a more formal business meeting. The time given to preparation of heart and mind may also contribute very usefully to the right ordering of our meetings for church affairs. (See also 3.26.)

Elders and overseers may consider it part of their role to review the needs and workings of small groups in their meetings.

#### **Worship sharing and creative listening groups**

- 12.21 Some Quaker meetings have discovered the value of small groups in developing the art of listening to God, to others, and to oneself. Such 'worship sharing' or 'creative listening' groups can provide a

### *Small groups*

setting where all who take part are involved in the process of learning about themselves as well as about others. Here silence, too, can heal and restore. For Quakers this approach fits in naturally with our experience of worship.

The terms 'creative listening' and 'worship sharing' are often used interchangeably, the difference between them being perhaps that the latter comes closer to a meeting for worship with a more pronounced emphasis on the worshipping atmosphere.

Careful preparation is needed to establish the basis of such groups, and there are several publications and sources which may give help. Advice may also be had from Quaker Life.

Good practice would normally include: the limitation of the size of the group to a maximum of twelve; beginning and ending the meeting in silence; the requirement of absolute confidentiality; allowing space between contributions; speaking from personal experience; not commenting directly on what another has said; listening with attention; not lapsing into discussion.

It may be that some do not contribute in spoken words. There is a need to respect the possibility that members of the group may not wish to discuss further what they have begun to share in the group. These groups can be particularly useful in allowing us to explore deep and personal thoughts and experiences in a supportive and safe environment.

### **Meetings for clearness**

- 12.22 In earlier times Friends saw the need for 'clearness' as part of the necessary preparation for marriage. Only after a group of Friends, appointed by the area meeting, had established that there was clearness from other conflicting obligations could they recommend the solemnisation of a marriage. In some North American yearly meetings this practice has been maintained and the concept has broadened. It has become a loving and caring exercise on behalf of the meeting. The couple are helped to explore their commitment to God, to one another and to the meeting, to look in depth at the

## 12: Caring for one another

outcome of previous relationships or marriages, to consider their attitudes towards the care of existing or future children and at how the couple can make decisions about their life together. (See also 16.19-16.21 & 12.10.)

- 12.23 A number of meetings within Britain Yearly Meeting are making use of clearness groups for a variety of purposes. They may be called to prepare a couple for marriage, to test a concern, to make decisions about membership, to consider new forms of service or to seek guidance at times of change or difficulty. Such meetings may sometimes be of help and comfort to the dying.

Sometimes individuals or a family will need help when confronted by difficult choices at turning points in their lives. There may be interpersonal differences that sour relationships, or a meeting may have identified a particularly fraught area of divergence of opinion or belief in its membership. Any of these and similar situations, if they are faced openly and with love, may be tested in an atmosphere of worship. So those concerned may find a way forward.

- 12.24 By focusing on a particular issue, a meeting for clearness enables everyone present to become 'clear' about possible options and ways forward. Such a meeting may be a matter of private arrangement but if a local meeting is to be involved, elders or overseers will normally be consulted. The suggestion for a meeting may come from them or from those seeking clearness. In the case of clearness for marriage the registering officer will in most cases be a member of the clearness group, so that he or she will be in a position to give guidance to the meeting on whether a Quaker marriage should be allowed (see 16.19-16.21).

An elder or an overseer may need to explain the nature and conduct of the meeting to those asking for one. Four or five trusted Friends, not necessarily those closely involved with the matter under consideration, should be invited to participate. Their main qualification will be that they are likely to be able to contribute constructively in the process of discernment.

### *Small groups*

- 12.25 Meetings for clearness should be held in a relaxed atmosphere of trust yet a certain degree of formality is helpful. A facilitator should be chosen to assist in clarifying the question or questions being asked. Some groups may decide that notes should be taken. It will have to be made explicit that confidentiality is to be maintained within the group. There is need for listening with undivided attention, for tact, affirmation and love for those seeking clearness.

Each member of the group should have opportunities to question and explore the background to the matter that is to be clarified. It is important not to be diverted by side-issues but to concentrate on exploring options and understanding underlying difficulties. It will take time to reach clearness and periods of gathered worship will be helpful.

The meeting should have an unambiguous ending and should not continue once tiredness sets in. A further meeting or meetings may be needed if the original issue, or practical details, would benefit from further thought. When clearness is reached the group should be laid down.

### **Threshing meetings**

- 12.26 This term currently denotes a meeting at which a variety of different, and sometimes controversial, opinions can be openly, and sometimes forcefully, expressed, often in order to defuse a situation before a later meeting for worship for business. Originally the term was used to describe large and noisy meetings for conviction of 'the world's people' in order to 'thresh' them away from the world.

### **Support groups**

- 12.27 Friends sometimes undertake, or are asked to undertake, tasks which they find challenging, either on a single occasion or as a continuing commitment. Under these circumstances they may value the support of a small group of Friends. This could be offered by the body requesting the service or it may be requested by the Friend concerned. Membership of the group should reflect the preferences

## **12: Caring for one another**

of the Friend to be supported. The group may need to remind itself that its job is not so much to judge the task as to support the Friend carrying it out.