

Living eldership

Jenny Routledge

Practical course guide



This is the downloadable practical course guide that accompanies the printed book by Jenny Routledge *Living eldership: a journey of Discovery*. The book is available to buy for £8 from the Quaker Centre bookshop: email quakercentre@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1030.

First published August 2014

Quaker Books, Friends House, 173 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ

www.quaker.org.uk

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Introduction

Living eldership is an exploration based on my experience of my own journey of discovery. The programme is designed to enable you to make your own exploration, go on your own journey of discovery and do it with a group of Friends.

Who is it for?

The programme is designed for anyone interested in deepening the spiritual life of their meeting, not simply for elders. It may be appropriate for a local meeting or for a group of those responsible for eldership, however they are appointed, and however they organise themselves. Much of the experience that I have drawn on is in Britain, but my exploration has been with Friends from North America, from Australasia and other parts of Europe. I believe it has something to say to Friends from beyond our shores.

Structure

The programme is divided into seven sessions and most of them have some flexibility about how long they take. You may choose to incorporate them into a course of evening meetings, a day's workshop or a full weekend. It is for you to decide what works best.

Underlying principles

The structure is flexible but it is the process here that is paramount. The programme is based on some clear guiding principles about how it is conducted:

- Participants are invited to come into worship, in a meeting for learning. However, this doesn't mean that they can't have a sense of play and a sense of discovery.
- An accompanying elder will uphold the programme, facilitate and participate. Both the facilitator and the accompanying elder will need the participants' prayerful support.
- The depth of the spiritual experience of the course depends on the willingness of all to share from personal experience. The invitation will be to share at a deep level, to go to the edge, the point of manageable discomfort.
- The invitation is also that all respect the tenderness of each other's sharing, recognising that when we draw closely together we are treading on holy ground.

Guidance for facilitators

How the course works

The seven sessions can be combined to meet the needs of your group.

With the exception of Session 2, each has a longer or shorter option.

Experience suggests that Session 2 cannot be shortened, and that the extended worship should be 90 minutes at least to make it meaningful.

There is a lot of handout-based activity. If you are running the course intensively, for instance over a weekend, you may choose not to read them all in session. Similarly it may help the rhythm and variety of the course to have some full group discussion in response to some of the queries. That decision must be a matter of judgement and be influenced by the experience and nature of the group.

Because the sessions are designed to be combined flexibly, possible places where silent worship might naturally occur are indicated, but no time is allocated except in the first session. You will need to decide where to have periods of silent worship. Most sessions end with a worshipful reflective activity.

If your course runs over lunchtime, an enlivening activity before the afternoon session helps to keep participants awake!

The seven sessions are:

1. Gathering together	45 or 60 minutes
2. Our experience of eldership	80 minutes
3. The swampy lowlands	65 or 90 minutes
4. Nurture	60 or 90 minutes
5. How we accompany each other	60 or 90 minutes
6. Moving out	30 or 40 minutes
7. Extended worship	90 to 120 minutes

Included in the material for each session:

- Facilitator's notes
- Session plan
- Handouts

Some suggested combinations

Four single units

A series of four single units could be run combining the short option for each session as follows:

Unit 1

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| 1. Gathering together | 45 minutes |
| 2. Our experience of eldership | 80 minutes |

Unit 2

- | | |
|------------------------|------------|
| 3. The swampy lowlands | 65 minutes |
| 4. Nurture | 60 minutes |

Unit 3

- | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| 5. How we accompany each other | 60 minutes |
| 6. Moving out | 30 minutes |

Unit 4

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------|
| 7. Extended worship | 90–120 minutes |
|---------------------|----------------|

Alternatively, the sessions could be run singly at a more leisurely pace.

A day course

This is best done without tea and coffee breaks. Friends can gather with coffee and follow with tea, taking comfort breaks when they need to (it helps if you remind them occasionally they can do this). As an extended period of worship is not possible, Session 6 can end with closing worship.

- | | | |
|-------|-----------------------------|------------|
| 10:00 | Gathering together | 40 minutes |
| 10:40 | Our experience of eldership | 80 minutes |
| 12:00 | Shuffle break | |
| 12:05 | The swampy lowlands | 65 minutes |
| 13.10 | Lunch | |
| 13:55 | Enlivening activity | |
| 14:00 | Nurture | 60 minutes |
| 15:05 | How we accompany each other | 60 minutes |
| 16:05 | Moving out | 40 minutes |

A weekend course

This gives opportunity for a more leisurely reflective programme. It can start on Friday evening, with free time on Saturday afternoon and finish after lunch on Sunday. Alternatively it can run Saturday to Sunday.

Friday to Sunday

Friday evening	Domestic arrangements and gathering together	60 minutes
Saturday	Our experience of eldership	80 minutes
	Coffee	
	The swampy lowlands	90 minutes
	Lunch	
	Free time	
	Tea	
	Nurture	90 minutes
Sunday	Supper	
	How we accompany each other	90 minutes
	Moving out	40 minutes
	Coffee	
	Extended worship	90–120 minutes
	Lunch	

Saturday and Sunday

Saturday	Gathering Together	60 minutes
	Our experience of eldership	80 minutes
	Lunch	
	The swampy lowlands	90 minutes
	Tea	
	Nurture	90 minutes
	Supper	
	How we accompany each other	60 or 90 minutes
Sunday	Moving out	40 minutes
	Coffee	
	Extended worship	120 minutes
	Lunch	

If Sunday afternoon is available there is opportunity to have extended worship after Sunday lunch and free time in place of one of the sessions on Saturday.

General guidelines for facilitators

My experience of travelling in the ministry with a concern for eldership is set out in *Living eldership: a journey of discovery*. This is not essential reading for participants, but as the programme is based on it, I'd recommend that facilitators and accompanying elders read it.

Accompanying elder

Identify and meet with your accompanying elder as soon as you can. It is really important that you are comfortable and have confidence in each other. All the rest will flow. It is ultimately for you to choose your accompanying elder, and not for others to impose one on you.

Make time for worshipful preparation and ensure that you are clear about how your elder will support you. There are guidelines for accompanying elders in this pack, and also in Handout 5.3 from Session 5. My account comes in *Living eldership* sections 3 'Encountering accompanying eldership' and 21 'My experience of being accompanied'.

Recording

It may be useful to ask someone in advance to take responsibility for collating and writing up the notes from sessions, such as hopes and expectations or flip chart summaries. Waiting until the event often means that you end up doing it yourself.

Readings

Be watchful for those who find reading and writing difficult. Even more of us have difficulty in reading aloud. It is helpful to have different voices reading lengthy input, and there are quite a few occasions when handouts need to be read out loud. You could ask for volunteers to read short sections in rotation, or go round – making sure that everyone present understands they can pass if they would prefer not to read.

Some definitions

Go-round

Everyone has the opportunity to make a short contribution. You can go round in a circle, but make sure that the group know that they can pass if they have nothing to say. It helps to tell everyone approximately how long each person would have if each contributed equally.

Worship sharing

A reflective, spirit-led way of sharing thoughts. One person at a time speaks as led, with spaces in between and without commenting on what others have said. Make sure that everyone has had the opportunity to speak before anyone speaks for a second time.

Thought shower

This encourages a free flow of lots of ideas. Participants are invited to respond to the question spontaneously and briefly with one or two words, and without justification. They may need a prompt or two at the beginning or if they get stuck. If there's time and contributions have slowed, then grouping ideas may be useful.

Posing Questions

These may be put up on a flip chart sheet, on focus sheets or given out as handouts. The more complex instructions need to be distributed to everyone. Read out the instructions so that everyone understands what

is being asked of them. This will take time: you may be familiar with the material but they probably aren't, so they may need clarification.

More detailed descriptions may be found in the programme guides produced by Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre:

Hearts and Minds Prepared, 2003 and *Becoming Friends*, 2013

Guidelines for accompanying elders

You may be new to the role, or you may have done it before. You may have been approached by the facilitator, or your name might have been suggested to them. Although it is ultimately the facilitator's choice as to who accompanies them, you too have to be comfortable about serving.

An accompanying elder upholds the meeting for learning in the Light. She/he prayerfully upholds the sense of worship of the group as they explore the topic together.

They support and uphold the facilitator in preparation for the event, and travel with them metaphorically and physically. They will hold the sense of worship, providing a prayerful presence, not participating but holding the space.

In *Living eldership*, my account of the role comes in sections 3 'Encountering accompanying eldership' and 21 'My experience of being accompanied'. See also Handout 5.3 from Session 5.

Every accompanying elder will approach the role differently but there are some aspects to the role that you and the facilitator might like to consider.

- Can you make time for worshipful preparation together, and ensure that you are clear about how you can support the facilitator's preparation, delivery and reflection?
- How can you uphold participants as they prepare to gather together? If they are taking part in a series of sessions spaced out over time, how can you uphold them between sessions?
- How are you going to get the spiritual nurture that you need to do this?
- Everyone involved in this event has a responsibility towards the worship and experience. How are you going to uphold the event itself?
- How are you going to ensure that Friends understand your role? How might you introduce yourself and your role in Session 1?
- Can you consider how you might give feedback to the group in Session 6?
- How can you support the facilitator and the group in reflection and evaluation of the programme?

Session 1

In this session the tone is set for the whole programme. It is worth spending time over the guiding principles. Inviting participants to take part in activities, rather than asking them to, is more encouraging, less instructive and more in the spirit of worship. It will set the tone of the group. This is particularly important when tackling confidentiality: emphasising the spiritual basis of the principle without using the word has worked well – for example, suggesting that when we share from our own personal experience we come closer to each other and we are treading on holy ground, and also by asking that we respect the tenderness of our sharing.

You may choose to circulate Handout 1 and your programme plan to participants in advance.

This session enables you to introduce the whole programme with the guiding principles, and answer any questions. Practical notices that help Friends settle are important.

If you have time to include “What have I left behind” it helps participants to set aside preoccupations and gather together.

It is worth explaining that the “Hopes and expectations” will remain visible (if that is possible) for the whole programme. There will be an opportunity for individual reflection at the end. It may be that some questions remain unanswered. They may need to sit with them a little longer.

Session 1: Gathering together

45 or 60 minutes

Resources

Introductory notes

Handout 1 and plan for day course on handout or flip chart

Sticky notes and somewhere to display them

Welcome and Worship

10 minutes

Purpose of this session

To bring the group together into a sense of worship and a shared understanding and commitment to the process of the workshop.

Introduction to each other simply by name and meeting

Activity 1: Moving in (*Longer version only*) *10 minutes*

- Work in pairs with someone you know less well – no report back.
- 5 minutes each way, listen to each other’s response: “What have I left behind in order to be here today?”

Session introductions

15 minutes

From facilitator:

- to the structure, referring to plan
- to the style of the course

Accompanying elder:

- to their role

Activity 2: Hopes and expectations

20 minutes

Distribute sticky notes

- Work in pairs with someone you know less well (if you did Activity 1 then do this with the same person)
 - 10 minutes each way, listen to each other's response:
"What are my hopes and expectations of the course?"
 - Record on sticky notes and display – they will remain with us for the whole programme
-

Possible time to view everyone's contributions

5 minutes

Session 1: Handout 1

Living eldership

Living eldership is an exploration based on my experience of my own journey of discovery. The programme is designed to enable you to make your own exploration, go on your own journey of discovery and do it with a group of Ffriends.

The programme is designed for anyone interested in deepening the spiritual life of their meeting, not simply for elders.

The structure is flexible, but the programme is based on some clear guiding principles about how it is conducted. It is the process which is paramount here.

- You are invited to come into worship, and the expectation is that you will be continuously in worship: that it will be a meeting for learning. However, this doesn't mean that you can't have a sense of play and have some fun. I hope too that you can embrace a sense of discovery.
- Everyone has responsibility for creating the space in which you can all experience that worship. An accompanying elder will uphold you, your worship and your learning. Both the facilitator and the accompanying elder will need your prayerful support.
- The depth of the spiritual experience of the course depends on your willingness to share from personal experience. You will be invited to share at a deep level, to go to the edge, the point of manageable discomfort.
- The invitation is also that you will embrace this experience and all respect the tenderness of your sharing, recognising that when we draw closely together we are treading on holy ground.
- There is no pre-course reading: the preparation that you are invited to do is to come with an open heart and a willingness to go where you are led. If you wish to read more before, during or after the programme the book *Living eldership: a journey of discovery* is a useful start.

Session 2

The programme is based on the importance of sharing our own experience. In this session participants are asked to share deeply, to go to the edge of manageable discomfort. It helps if participants can experience someone else doing this first. Ideally the facilitator should share her/his response to the same question “How has eldership touched my life?” The more open you can be the more profound the learning. If you are not comfortable in doing this, invite someone in advance to do it. This could be the accompanying elder, but they may feel that a spoken contribution conflicts with their still grounding of the session. It could be a course participant but whoever does it will need time to prepare. Their input should not be less than the ten minutes that participants will have when they do their sharing.

If it is not possible to do this then use Handout 2.1, with reading by the group.

Activity 2 is very powerful: it needs all of the time allotted and a lot of careful instructions. It's worth trying this out a couple of times with your accompanying elder beforehand. Experience has taught me that a bell enables you to remind Friends at every step what they should be doing.

A “bookmark” is something that you notice when you are speaking or listening or upholding. It's an “Aha” moment. You want to hold onto the thought and not lose it. Ensuring that these flashes of insight are recorded after each speaker helps to create a space between contributions.

Use the reminders from Handout 2.1 to remind the group about true listening.

If you can keep everyone in the same space it helps to hold the worship and it is easier to control with the bell. For those who have difficulty hearing each other, find a space nearby which you can visit easily with the bell.

Session 2: Our experience of eldership

80 minutes

Resources

Facilitator's session notes
Handout 2.1 on Listening
Handout 2.2 Guidelines for the exercise
Rough paper and pens
A bell

Possible opening worship

Set a time if including this

Purpose of this session

For everyone to share from the depth of their personal experience

Activity 1: How eldership has touched my life

15 minutes

From facilitator or invited speaker
or using the material in Handout 2.1

Introduce Activity 2

5 minutes

- Distribute handouts
 - Divide into threes
 - Go through the steps
 - Remind us of the characteristics of true listening (handout 2.1)
 - Disperse to sit in places which won't inhibit sharing deeply
-

Activity 2: How eldership has touched our lives

45 minutes

Each person has 10 minutes to speak, and then 5 minutes to draw breath and check "bookmarks".

Activity 3: Worship sharing

15 minutes

Reflecting on the experience

Session 2: Handout 2.1

Listening to our experience of eldership

To “listen” another soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being can perform for another.

In what listener is there constant abundance of charity that springs from the depth of his own unconscious ... that is able to reach through the words and even the conscious meanings to the unconscious meaning of the friends who is speaking, and to answer it?

In what listener are there not vast stretches of bored inattention when the listener rests, or tries to rest, or wonder when, if ever, the speaker will subside?

In what listener are there not temptations early in the conversation to classify what is being said, to label it and file it...?

In what listener is there not some adverse judgement on what is being revealed ... a judgement which places the speaker on a scale and neatly seals him off from the listener?

A listener extends openness when he accepts the person who is speaking, when he relinquishes all buffing and finishing operations and takes the man as he comes. Such acceptance is no toleration born of indifference, but is rather a positive interest in this person, an interest that is so alive that judgement is withheld.

What really matters is what the listener is in what he does.

Excerpts from Douglas Steere’s 1955 Swarthmore lecture,
Where words come from

Some reminders to help us listen to each other:

- We listen receptively to the truth of others
- At most we ask honest open questions
- We need to make sure that the speaker is seen and heard
- This takes time, energy and patience
- As time goes by the listener may become anxious, feel useless and foolish but that puts the focus on the listener not the speaker
- We need to keep the space between us for the speaker to hear her/his soul or inner teacher
- When we truly listen to one another we should pay attention to the movement of the Spirit within ourselves
- When we draw closely together we are treading on holy ground.

Session 2: Handout 2.2

How has eldership touched your life?

Work in threes, with two people that you know less well.

You will be reminded of what to do at each stage.

Spend a few minutes thinking about the question and your response to it.

When the bell rings the first person has 10 minutes to:

- Respond to this question. It is important to talk from your own experience and you are the person who is the focus of this activity.
- Another listens creatively, giving their full attention, holding pen and paper to note any 'bookmarks' that any of you asks to be noted. A bookmark is a reminder of something that seems very important to you, something that reminds you of an insight or new understanding.
- The third person holds the group in the light.

When the bell rings a second time the second person becomes the focus person, and at the third ring the third person becomes the focus person.

After each speaker you have 5 minutes to recap/record your 'bookmarks'. You do not need to report back on these but may wish to share them in the following worship sharing.

Session 3

This session enables Friends to acknowledge what eldership is like in their own meeting. Questions are framed in the spirit of appreciative enquiry, and Friends will need to be reminded to keep positive in the group discussions. The instructions suggest that they remind each other if they slip into the slough of despond and invite each other to reframe more positively what they have said.

It will be helpful, particularly if you are doing the shortened version, for the flip charts to be written up and circulated.

The session works well at 65 or 90 minutes. If you do the shorter version, coming together in a few moments of quiet might be needed before you move on.

Session 3: The swampy lowlands

65 or 90 minutes

Resources

Facilitator's notes
Handout 3.1
Handout 3.2
Flip chart sheets and pens
Wall space for display
Rough paper and pens

Possible opening worship

Set a time if including this

Purpose of this session

To reflect on the experience of eldership in our meetings and envision how that might be enhanced.

Activity 1: What is it like?

5 minutes

Handout 3.1, read by the group

Introduction to Activity 2

5 minutes

- Distribute Handout 3.2
 - Divide into groups of 6–8 by number
 - Introduce the activity
 - Reminders to stay positive and agree a convener and scribe
 - Disperse to gather in places that won't inhibit sharing
 - Reminder to focus on the positive
-

Activity 2: Eldership in our meetings

45 minutes

5 minutes personal reflection:

- How eldership contributes to the life of your meeting

20 minutes group discussion for each of two questions:

- What is eldership like when it works well?
 - What can the meeting do to enhance the role of elder?
-

Activity 3: Sharing of insights

10 minutes

Each group brings back two flip chart sheets and displays them around the room
Time for circulation and reading flip charts, and sharing experience

Possible time together for worship sharing on insights, and for
individual reflection on what to take back to meetings

25 minutes

Session 3: Handout 3.1

The swampy lowlands

There is great complexity and diversity within our worshipping communities and I was reminded of my professional life, when I was educating health care professionals. We were very influenced by the work of Donald Schön, whose background was in educating architects. He recognised the complexity of the context of architecture and the multiplicity of influences on design, and talked of traditional educational practice that prepares professionals as coming from the “technical rational high-ground”.

My exploration of eldership might well have been criticised for coming from a spiritual high-ground. Schön describes the reality of professional practice as being in the ‘swampy lowlands’, a place where situations are complex, messy, emotional and human. He argues for an education that prepares those professionals to develop their ability to work instinctively and reflectively. In my experience, the reality of our worshipping communities may be far more recognisable as the swampy lowlands of Quakerism. This is the way that Spirit-led elders work, instinctively and reflectively in our swampy lowlands.

Living eldership, Section 12

In one area meeting, when nominations committee asked Friends if they were willing for their names to go forward as elder or overseer, and the Friend approached asked what would be involved, they were told: “It’s all in Quaker faith & practice.” Indeed, the list of responsibilities is there but there is no help as to how they are to do these tasks. At the end of six years as an elder, one Friend said that he still did not understand what he should have been doing except shaking hands at the end of meeting.

Living eldership, Section 7

As I explored the topic of eldership with Friends, I came across many, many examples of inspiring, Spirit-led eldership. I am very conscious of the quiet work that goes on day in and day out in our meetings.

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 may define true community which is the place where the person you least want to live always lives.

Parker J Palmer, 1979. *Quaker faith & practice* 10.19

Session 3: Handout 3.2

Eldership in meetings

Agree a coordinator and a scribe.

Throughout this exercise try to focus on the positive.

You might agree to remind each other if you slip into the negative.

If that happens you could invite each other to re-frame the observation.

- Spend 5 minutes in personal reflection on
How eldership contributes to the life of your meeting
- For 20 minutes as a group you are invited to respond to the question:
What is eldership like when it works well?
Record your response on one flip chart sheet
- For a further 20 minutes you are invited to respond to the question:
What can the meeting do to enhance the role of elder?
Record your response on another flip chart sheet
- Put your group number on the sheet

Session 4

There are quite a few handouts for this session.

4.1 for shared reading out loud in the group.

4.2 is set out on a sheet with 4.4; they need to be cut up and distributed.

4.3 is long: if time is tight, select which incidents are most meaningful to you and your group. For Activities 4 and 5 you may need to remind the group to view ministry in its widest sense.

For Activity 5, put the question “How do we nurture the tender shoots of ministry within our meeting?” on the flip chart.

The time taken for Activities 2–5 can be extended or shortened, to fit a 60 minute or 90 minute slot.

You may like to end the session with a few minutes of silent reflection.

Session 4: Nurture

60 to 90 minutes

Resources

Facilitator's notes
Handout 4.1 Nurture – our responsibility to ourselves
Handout 4.2 (on sheet with Handout 4.4 to copy and cut up)
Handout 4.3 Nurturing spoken ministry
Handout 4.4 (on sheet with Handout 4.2 to copy and cut up)
Rough paper and pens
Flip chart and pens

Possible opening worship

Set a time if including this

Purpose of this session

To explore our responsibility for our own nurture and how we can nurture ministry in its widest sense.

Activity 1: Our responsibility to ourselves

5 minutes

Handout 4.1, read by the group

Activity 2: How do we receive nurture?

*15 minutes**

Personal reflection on two queries:

What do you value about the nurture that you give and receive in your Quaker Community?

What do you yearn for?

Distribute Handout 4.2. NB: no requirement to report back. Participants disperse to wherever they can best respond.

**25 minutes longer version*

Activity 3: Spoken ministry

*10 minutes**

Handout 4.3, read by the group

If time is tight then selected readings from this handout may be better

**20 minutes longer version*

Activity 4: Ministry in its widest sense

10 minutes

Distribute Handout 4.4

Participants go back to original threes from Session 2

Share responses to the questions

Have you had positive feedback on your ministry?

What made it positive rather than negative? (5 minutes each)

Activity 5

*20 minutes**

In the whole group. Thought shower: “How do we nurture the tender shoots of ministry within our meetings?” written up on flip chart

**30 minutes longer version*

Session 4: Handout 4.1

Nurture – our responsibility to ourselves

From *Living eldership* Section 13:

It is crucial that we recognise that our first responsibility is to nurture ourselves. Only by loving ourselves can we be true to the commandment “Love thy neighbour as thyself”.

Eldership is all about love, but it is tough love. It carries with it responsibility and it can be hard. It takes time and spiritual energy, which is why care of ourselves is so important.

A Friend told me of her experience of being an elder. She had joined the Society in her early twenties, and was asked to be an elder at 29. She served long and faithfully. She saw that her experience had taught her that one is only just getting the hang of it after two triennia, and that the work of nominations committees is crucial in seeing the gifts within us. After twenty years of experience of being an elder she felt the life sucked out of her. She had experienced it as hard work. Finally taking time out to be at Woodbrooke enabled her to see how vital spiritual nurture is to elders.

We need to do our homework:

- To get rest and play as well as undertake the work that is required of us. It is our responsibility to ensure that we are as physically fit as possible to undertake our calling.
- To ensure that we are familiar with the history and theology of the Quaker way, and with initiatives which require our witness in the world.
- To ensure that we are psychologically prepared, and that we have done the work necessary to ensure that we do not bring our own distress to our interactions with others, so that we understand our own emotional landscape sufficiently to know what is ours and what belongs to another.
- Above all to be spiritually nourished. Being an elder is in itself a rich experience, and to hear of the intimate spiritual experiences of others is a privilege and a joy. The feedback that we receive from our communities is another rich source of support. We spend time listening and upholding the Spirit within our worship, and this too nourishes us. However, elders also need elders, they need spiritual nurture.

Our spiritual nurture is our primary need if we are to do our job effectively, and we are irresponsible if we do not care for ourselves in this way.

Session 4: Handout 4.2

How do we receive nurture?

- What do you value about the nurture that you give and receive within your Quaker community?
- What do you yearn for?

These queries are for personal reflection. You will not be required to report back.

Session 4: Handout 4.4

How can we nurture ministry?

- Have you had positive feedback on your ministry?
- What made it positive rather than negative?

Session 4: Handout 4.3

Nurturing spoken ministry

These are examples of Spirit-led eldership, illustrating discipline offered with love, tenderness, compassion and sensitivity. They show how Friends can be moved to another place, to a new understanding, by the gentle nudges of elders. They were part of a loving and nurturing ministry.

- The prominent location of this city centre meeting, the use of its garden by rough-sleepers, and perhaps the kindly reputation of Quakers, tend to attract a steady trickle of troubled people to its Sunday meetings for worship. It came as no surprise, therefore, when a dishevelled elderly man who sometimes pinned military medals to his jacket began attending meeting for worship each week, taking the opportunity of a captive audience to speak at length every Sunday about his wartime experiences. Naturally elders were reluctant to deny the man admission, but their initial approach of explaining to him the Quaker understanding of ministry fell on deaf ears. So they hatched a plan which worked perfectly.

One of the elders volunteered to speak to the man at the conclusion of the next Sunday's meeting for worship, inviting him to return earlier than usual the following Sunday to allow him more time to share his experiences. The man, doubtless gladdened at the prospect of a personal audience, willingly returned the following Sunday to be warmly welcomed by the elder, who took him to a small quiet room where two armchairs and a tray of tea and sandwiches awaited the pair of them. The elder invited the man to share his experiences, freely and without interruption, for as long as he liked, and this encounter lasted for some hours – long after the meeting for worship, in an adjacent room, had concluded. And when the man had told his whole story the elder expressed delight in it, thanking the man for sharing it so trustingly.

The elder then explained how and why Quakers speak in meeting for worship, emphasising the importance of silence and reassuring the man that – with his whole story now told – he was heartily welcome to return to meeting for worship every week and to find solace in the silence and in the spoken contributions of others. The man continued to attend meeting each Sunday for several months, and never spoke in meeting again.

- An ex-clergyman spoke in meeting for the first time. When he heard ministry from a Friend who in his opinion was wrong in his interpretation of the Bible, he rose and spoke to put the meeting right. Afterwards a Friend spoke to him lovingly and directly, telling him this was not the way of Friends. The elder's approach was kind and welcoming, and he invited him to visit his home. The new attender was not offended but felt heard and acknowledged. The elder died recently and at his memorial meeting the new attender, now a weighty Friend, spoke movingly of the significance of this 'eldering'.
- Another meeting was very disturbed by an elderly Friend, who took notes during ministry and then read them aloud to the meeting. For some time the meeting took no action. Eventually an elder stood silently with him until he stopped speaking and resumed his seat. When she spoke to him afterwards, she asked lovingly why he made notes and read them aloud. He replied that this was his way of dealing with his failing memory. She told him that his presence in meeting was greatly valued by Friends. He ceased the practice and he seemed to find a peace. It appeared that his behaviour had in part also been an attempt to contribute to and be acknowledged by his own meeting.
- On an occasion a Friend reported: "I remember a meeting I was at when someone with advanced Parkinson's became stuck in a terrible groove and started going round and round in his talk and I remember the sweetness with which a man got up and put his arm round his shoulders and gently led him to his seat."
- At a meeting in America: George was an eloquent academic, used to justifying all that he asserted by reference to the writings of others. In his ministry, which was regular and lengthy, he frequently quoted the Bible and other texts at length and by heart, his ministry more akin to a prepared sermon than to the spirit speaking through him. Many Friends were uncomfortable with his ministry and this disquiet was expressed informally but not overtly. Carol, a member of the meeting who was not on the ministry and

counsel committee, was concerned that the ministry was disturbing the equilibrium of the meeting.

When it became apparent that no action was going to be taken, she invited George for a meal and talked to him at some length, getting to know him and exploring the nature of ministry. She then took a risk: she wondered if in his ministry he was hiding behind the words of others. Perhaps by doing so he was not open to the spirit revealing a direct message through him.

I was fortunate to meet George a few weeks later and he reaffirmed his gratitude for her words. He described his initial ministry as coming from his head rather than his heart. He said his wife could always tell immediately where his words came from, his heart or his head, as soon as he started to speak. Much has come of this piece of eldering. George's ministry reduced in length and frequency, and for a time he did not feel moved to speak at all. He became a close spiritual friend and accompanying elder for Carol. He is currently a gifted spiritual nurturer.

- Another example from my American Friend Carol. An attender, Susan, was at meeting for worship for the very first time. Susan spoke movingly and at length of a profound spiritual experience that she had had that week. Subsequently a Friend rose and quoted a poem, Susan rose again and also quoted a poem. At the end of meeting in afterword Susan spoke of her gratitude in coming to the profound experience of her first Quaker meeting. During the social time that followed Carol noticed that no one was speaking to Susan about her ministry.

Conscious of the need to 'elder' her, and of the danger that this tender experience could be shattered by a clumsy approach, Carol spoke to Susan. She spent some time getting to know her and exploring her moving account of her experience. Taking another huge risk she said "You know one of our rules about spoken ministry, and we have very few rules, is that we don't speak more than once. I think that the first time you spoke the spirit was truly speaking directly through you, the second time it was simply reaction. You could have responded to that ministry by speaking to the Friend after meeting telling her of the poem that you were reminded of or you could have given it in afterword." Susan expressed her gratitude and immediately recognised the difference between the two.

Session 5

Activity 1 is a thought shower. The advantage of having this before the handout is that Friends are not limited to the examples given. However, they may need some prompting to identify the ways in which we accompany each other in our day to day life in our meetings.

There are some suggestions on Handout 5.2. You may be able to identify which your participants might be familiar with, and offer them as prompts.

If you think the difficulty will be too great then swap Activity 1 for Activity 2.

Handout 5.2 gives four scenarios. Group size will probably be best with six to eight, and you will know whether it will be best to change the group composition from that in Session 4.

If you have time for a longer session, then groups may like to do more than one scenario. You may like to include selected readings from Handout 5.3.

Session 5: How do we accompany each other?

60 to 90 minutes

Resources

Facilitator's notes

Sticky notes

Pens

Accessible central surface for displaying sticky notes

Handouts 5.1, 5.2 (in four parts, to cut up), 5.3

Possible opening worship

Set a time if including this

Purpose of this session

To explore the concept of spiritual accompaniment.

Activity 1:

Flip chart

How do we as Friends accompany each other?

10 minutes

Thought shower exploration of how we accompany each other

Distribute Handout 5.1

Activity 2

10 minutes

Handout 5.1, read within the group.

Activity 3: How do we accompany each other?

20 minutes

- Distribute Handout 5.2
 - Divide into groups. Allocate one scenario to each group
 - Discuss one of the scenarios
 - Record on flip chart
-

Feedback to full group from each group, with discussion on similarities and differences.

20 minutes

Activity 3 could be extended to each group discussing more than one scenario and/or time included to go round with readings from Handout 5.3.

30 minutes

Possible closing worship

Set a time if including this

Session 5: Handout 5.1

How do we accompany each other?

There are many examples of how we accompany and support each other in our spiritual lives.

Here are a few:

Supporting an attender to find out more about Quakerism.

Encouraging someone into membership.

Regularly visiting an elderly Friend who is becoming increasingly frail, suggesting worship at their house.

Being there for someone bereaved.

Being part of a support group in your meeting for a Friend who, for example,

- has mental health problems
- is a prison chaplain
- is a hospital chaplain
- has been imprisoned for peace witness.

Being a member of a Light group.

Being a member of an accountability group

Being a member of a group of elders asked to support area meeting clerks.

Being a member of a support group for a national committee, or having responsibility for worship and care of the needs of individual members.

Accompanying a Friend who is travelling from place to place to give talks or run workshops, for example a QPSW peace worker, or an Ecumenical Accompanier.

Here are a few examples of Friends' personal experiences of accompanying each other:

Mentorship

Mentor: Being a *Becoming Friends* 'mentor' was a privilege; a deep, continuous and delightful thing to do. The person I accompanied taught me through his own discoveries and thought, much more than I could ever have given to him by just having conversations. It offers a framework to think, discover and explore in a way that many other books and pamphlets don't. The most important thing is that trust builds up from the very beginning and somehow gives permission – that it's then okay to delve into the mystery and really discover what feels right for you.

Mentee: Our chats led to some very in-depth discussions, not only about Quakerism and its practices, but my view of God and the Christian beliefs I held. Over the year of study my views and life were transformed. The world of Quakerism was opened up to me, showing me new possibilities, new ways of thinking and discovering 'that of God' within me, something I had not found in my normal Christian life prior to this.

As my companion and I worked through the *Becoming Friends* programme, new ideas flowed into me, replacing old dogmatic Christian ways that held me. I felt a release, the ropes which bound me snapped by the sharp knife of Quakerism. A new energy flowed through me as the programme led me to read other Quaker literature, which I continue to do to this day.

Appointing a mentor: In one meeting, elders decided that it was a good idea for new members to have a mentor. They got off to good start by asking a new member if they might like one. However, they didn't ask her if they could suggest the names of a few Friends with whom she would be comfortable. They asked a weighty Friend to fulfil the role who intimidated her – not a success.

Spiritual friendships

We have had a couple of attempts at spiritual friendships in my local meeting. We put people together by drawing lots. I understood the reasoning, but for me I felt at the end of it I knew a couple of Friends better in the things which were not eternal, but not necessarily in the things which are. Which I fully realise is as much my responsibility as theirs. There didn't seem a way into anything deeper and I had the feeling the two people I was paired with didn't want to go deeper. Equally I don't think they ended up knowing me in any deeper way. I think there has to be a spark to start off the process of getting to know others more deeply, and I am not sure you can plan it. Both sides of the conversation have to sense that moment Douglas Steere describes and go with it.

Spiritual direction

I have been seeing a spiritual director (Susanna) for the last 10 years, and I have found this to be an overwhelmingly positive experience. Often we have bordered on the thin line between (psychological) counselling and spiritual direction as I have been living through a prolonged period of difficult family troubles, and that has been interesting. It has highlighted for me the subtle difference between the counselling and spiritual direction, but I would be hard put to find words for this.

It was Susanna who suggested that I apply for Equipping for Ministry, for which I am profoundly grateful. It has been a great blessing to be able to talk freely about spiritual concerns outside of meeting and she has been a great support. Often her insights have given me moments that have made me stop short and see things in a new light and that have taken me forward.

There are more examples of accompaniment for courses and workshops to be found in Handout 5.3.

Session 5: Handout 5.2 (1)

How do we accompany each other?

Decide who will scribe and who will report back

You have 20 minutes to discuss the following scenario

At the end you will be feeding back to the group, and it would be useful to summarise your discussion on a flip chart sheet

Scenario 1

Your meeting has three attenders whose applications for membership are being considered at area meeting next month. You think it would be a good idea for them to have some support. How could you go about this? What would be involved?

Session 5: Handout 5.2 (2)

How do we accompany each other?

Decide who will scribe and who will report back

You have 20 minutes to discuss the following scenario

At the end you will be feeding back to the group, and it would be useful to summarise your discussion on a flip chart sheet

Scenario 2

A member of your meeting has just returned from being an Ecumenical Accompanier in Palestine. They are planning a series of visits to meetings to talk about their work and have asked you to be their accompanying elder. You are very pleased to accept the invitation. How could you go about this? What would be involved?

Session 5: Handout 5.2 (3)

How do we accompany each other?

Decide who will scribe and who will report back

You have 20 minutes to discuss the following scenario

At the end you will be feeding back to the group, and it would be useful to summarise your discussion on a flip chart sheet

Scenario 3

Your area meeting has united with a concern brought to them by two Friends from your meeting. The concern is for the abolition of the exploitation and slavery which is evident in the cotton industry. You are asked to be a member of the support group for these two Friends. How could you and the rest of your group go about this? What would be involved?

Session 5: Handout 5.2 (4)

How do we accompany each other?

Decide who will scribe and who will report back

You have 20 minutes to discuss the following scenario

At the end you will be feeding back to the group, and it would be useful to summarise your discussion on a flip chart sheet

Scenario 4

You are a member of a group of elders who have been asked by the local meeting clerk to help her and the meeting with the discipline of the business meeting. How could you and the group go about this?

Handout 5.3

Accompanying eldership

Friend 1

One is in a different mindset. I am intrigued when people seem to be able to act as accompanying elder and then suddenly change roles and participate, and I couldn't do it. Accompanying has its own intensity with that sense of being apart and at the same time being connected. You are upholding but not engaged with the process, at least not in the same way as everyone else.

Friend 2

I began to wonder how I could uphold so many people all at once – there were over a hundred! As I sat quietly I received an image of a large rock with a shallow bowl shape worn into it, and everyone was held quite easily within the rock-bowl. There was no problem at all. That was an answer to prayer.

I enjoyed the job. Being an accompanying elder certainly deepens the whole experience and you see things from many different perspectives. One thing, though, is that I did get tired. So the next thing to remember is for the accompanying elder to find ways to look after themselves as well.

Friend 3

I have come away from these experiences (of accompanying eldership) knowing that my ability to fulfil this role is not dependent on my spiritual depth, rather that it depends on my trust in God's support and openness to letting this flow through me, and my belief that we will be given what we need as a group.

Friend 4

I have found there are four fundamental elements required of me when I am involved as an elder in a workshop. These are 'holding', 'listening', 'awareness/observation' and 'being open to the spirit'.

I have found it to be very important to emphasise my role as the facilitator's elder to the group, and to do this during the introductions at the start of a workshop. By so doing, it helps the participants to recognise their own needs, and that it should be safe for them to focus on their own self, because someone else is looking after, or taking responsibility for what is happening.

Friend 5

As this was still very new to me I had to feel my way into it. I had a very clear leading that my first task was to set aside a daily time of prayer to support the course leaders and those who would be attending by holding them in the Light. I probably maintained that daily routine for one or two weeks before it began to be disrupted by events in my own life and general busyness, but I did bring the course and those who would be there, including myself, into my thoughts frequently in the weeks leading up to the course.

Before the course started I spent time with the course leaders discussing their preparation and planning and how they saw my role as an accompanying elder. Between us we worked out a way of working and arranged to have times of regular feedback, however brief. I kept a journal as a reference tool and to help me to clarify my own role. I felt the most important thing was to trust the process, and to maintain the intention to succeed, although I still had no clear idea of what success might look like. As I got to know the other participants of the course it became easier to hold them in the Light and I was surprised that I truly felt a sense of connection with each one there after only a short time.

At the end of the course I felt I had truly come a long way in my understanding of what it means to be an elder. During my time as an elder in my local meeting I had struggled to understand what an elder does. The external demands are relatively easy to understand, although they can be very demanding. I have done my fair share of weddings, funerals, meetings for clearness and so on, but I have struggled to understand the 'inside stuff', the

upholding of the meeting. During that weekend I learnt about upholding.

Friend 6

A couple of days prior to the event I sat down quietly at home and read through the programme, commencing to bring it into the Light. Having never been an accompanying elder before I decided to treat the process as I would for a meeting for business. It is my practice for meeting for business to sit quietly at home a few days preceding the actual meeting and bring the agenda contents into the Light and sit there with it. I find this method beneficial spiritually in preparing me for the meeting and used it to help me focus for this particular evening. This preparation helped me greatly on the night.

Despite the workshop lasting two hours I had no difficulty in holding my focus at all times, in fact it felt quite natural. I did find it tiring by the end because of the mental concentration needed in upholding the meeting in the Light. At the end I had mixed feelings, not only of spiritual upliftment and joyfulness by the experience, but I also felt privileged and humbled.

Later, at home, I continued to hold the meeting in the Light, giving thanks for the guidance given to all during the evening, a sort of winding down if you like.

I believe the experience of being an accompanying elder has strengthened me spiritually.

Sessions 6 and 7

The way you conduct Session 6 will depend on whether you are going to end with extended worship (Session 7) or not.

If at all possible include the experience of extended worship. It is profound. Even given the careful introduction set out in Activity 4, many Friends have expressed anxiety about being able to sit for two hours. In the event they find the experience very meaningful and moving. Rarely do they leave before the end.

It is good to get all of the closing Activity 3 done, and do Activity 4 (preparation for the worship) before a break. Then Friends can come directly into worship. An elder at the door and an elder holding the space help everyone to move into the silence.

At this point you become a participant in the worship. You have named elders to ensure that the meeting keeps the discipline and all present are themselves elders.

At the end of meeting for worship it takes Friends a while to surface. In my experience it is best to let them do this in their own time and informally take their leave of each other. It takes time to process the experience.

Session 6: Moving out

30–40 minutes

Resources

Facilitator's notes
Flip chart, or plainly visible sheets with questions
Pens
Rough paper

Possible opening worship

Set a time if including this

Purpose of this session

To begin the process of disengagement, to explore what we are committed to change, and to prepare for extended closing worship

Activity 1: Individual reflections

10 minutes

Display questions:

- What is bubbling up for me?
- What am I called to do?
- What am I committed to?

Personal reflection, remembering original hopes and expectations.

Activity 2

10–15 minutes

Return to original partner from Session 1, and share

Activity 3: Reflections from us all

5 minutes

Feedback from accompanying elder
Reflection on the experience for all
Evaluation

Possible closing worship

Set a time if including this

(if not including extended meeting for worship)

Activity 4: Preparation for extended meeting for worship

5 minutes

It is important to let Friends know well in advance that this is planned.

The things that are important to know:

- They are free to come and go
- They can move around if they are concerned about getting stiff
- They can leave at any time they wish
- They may wish to bring aids to comfortable seating
- An extended meeting for worship may follow the same pattern as usual for the first hour, taking time to gather and deepen, and with a gradual surfacing towards the end of the hour; but then it goes much deeper, a more profound depth
- We need to be vigilant with ourselves in testing our ministry and particularly towards the end be wary of responding rather than giving ministry
- At the end of meeting for worship it takes a while to surface. Do this in your own time and gently take your leave of each other. It takes time to process the experience. Be tender with yourselves
- Ask one or two Friends to act as elders for the meeting alongside the accompanying elder.

This preparation should take place before Friends gather for the meeting for worship.

Session 7: Extended meeting for worship

90–120 minutes

Elders welcome Friends into worship, one at the door, one holding the space.

Meeting for Worship