

A Short Workshop on Holding a Meeting for Clearness

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Whether we are writers, pastors, carers, activists engaged in the world, or in many other vocations, we may often feel divided over the path we might feel called to walk. And that, not just between ourselves, but within ourselves. A Meeting for Clearness (MfC) is a process to help a *focus person* to clarify their thinking and their calling around a demanding personal question. It is especially helpful for those who might be *working under concern*, that is, who might feel a particular calling in their lives. It might be a career move, a relationship, a conflict, a path of activism, their inner psychological and/or spiritual journey; or, in the case of writers, issues such as direction, blockages or vision.

This workshop exercise is a very short version of what would usually be given more time, perhaps over two or three sessions and each perhaps for a couple of hours. The purpose is to learn about seeking *clearness*. To experience how group *discernment* can help to face a challenging question from a place of spiritual depth. You will be divided into small groups, and these are your instructions.

1. If not already appointed, somebody in the group offer to be the *facilitator*. The facilitator's role is to mind the clock and, if necessary, keep folks holding to the process.
2. Next, choose a volunteer *focus person*. Each of you may have matters that you might like to discern. Hopefully, one from amongst you will suggest an issue that can be framed into a *focus question*. Some examples are given overleaf. Keep them personal, not general.
3. The facilitator might check if a second person might have a focus question. If so, they will invite the group quickly to decide whose question might best serve the learning process. Choose the one that might speak most widely to most of you, and if unsure, toss a coin.
4. The facilitator then invites the chosen focus person to repeat their question as a single sentence. Write it down and use it to hold the focus. Don't wander off down rabbit holes.
5. The group then enters a few minutes of silence, or stillness (Psalms 46:10), to reflect upon the focus question. When the focus person feels ready, they should repeat their question and more widely introduce their issue. As this is a short exercise, try to keep this part brief.
6. Allow some silent time for stillness to let the focus person's introduction settle. That said, what you've done so far should be moved along fairly quickly so that you can get into the main stage of discernment within about 15 minutes. This is when the other participants ask questions of the focus person – but only questions that they feel inwardly moved to ask.
7. Questions should be open and not rambling, judgemental or leading (i.e. suggesting an answer). Allow space for reflection between questions and responses. This is not about having a discussion. In a small way, it is about helping another soul to address Christ's foundational question: "What seek ye?" (John 1:38 KJV). It is to seek "openings of the way" (cf. Jeremiah 6:16), a "holding in the light" of a life or professional issue, the clear light that illuminates each of us from within (John 1:9). Work as a group "gathered" or "covered" by the Spirit that gives life; a collective discernment of God's calling, and not just as individuals.
8. If need be, the facilitator (or other participants) may gently call matters back to focus. Try and make sure that everyone who is moved to speak has the chance. Those who might not speak are just as vital in the holding of a *gathered* space through their prayerful *presence*; and prayer, a holding of a person or an issue in God, and asking to be so held ourselves.
9. About 5 minutes before the end, the facilitator should invite any last question, and then, *the ministry of laying down* the process by inviting the focus person to share how it was for them.
10. What was discussed in the meeting stays within the meeting. In plenary discussion or otherwise afterwards, you may share what you learned about discerning clearness, but not what the focus person spoke about or who they were, unless they themselves offer to share it.

Examples of Focus Questions

1. I seek clearness as to whether writing is a gift that I can offer, or whether I am better to focus on other skills.
2. I seek clearness on the balance between the inner demands of my writing, and the demands of my job/family/exams/recovery.
3. I seek clearness as to whether first to sort out my money worries, or ju`st push on with what it is that I feel called to.
4. I seek clearness as to why my writing is blocked, and what might free the flow.
5. I seek clearness as to whether to keep my writing secular, or to let the spiritual show.
6. I seek clearness as to whether to persevere, even though I have almost lost faith in what it is about.
7. I seek clearness on how to take and respond to criticism of my writing.
8. I seek clearness as to how to deal with somebody who is undermining my creativity.
9. I seek clearness over conflict between my faith group and what I am writing about.
10. I seek clearness as to where to find beauty/community/friendship in my life and work.

Examples of Clearness Questions

- a) What are you seeking in this situation?
- b) Where have you come from to have got here?
- c) Where do you feel called to go?
- d) Where might lie an opening of the way?
- e) What might make you more confident that your path is true?
- f) How honest do you feel you have to be, and why?
- g) Why does it hurt?
- h) What parts most give you joy?
- i) In a perfect world, what outcome would you most desire?
- j) Who or what are your allies, and who or what hinders you in this journey?
- k) If you do/don't do this, what difference would it make?
- l) What spiritual support do you need in this?
- m) How can or might you ask for support – whether material or spiritual?
- n) What parts of this give life, and what drains life within you?
- o) What do you feel is the deep calling of life/spirit/God/dharma/righteousness in this?
- p) What decisions/outcomes might you most look back on, with satisfaction?

Some Suggested Reading

Tova Green, Peter Woodrow & Fran Peavey, *Insight and Action: How to Discover and Support a Life of Integrity and Commitment to Change*, New Society, Gabriola Island, 1994 (out of print, but 2nd hand, and I have scanned the most relevant pages here): <https://tinyurl.com/3uf24x7k>

Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, Jossey-Bass, SF, 2004: <https://tinyurl.com/2ahcyfb9>

Michael J. Sheeran, *Beyond Majority Rule: Voteless Decisions in the Religious Society of Friends*, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Philadelphia, 1983: <https://tinyurl.com/36wr9aw4>

Alastair McIntosh & Matt Carmichael, *Spiritual Activism: Leadership as Service*, Green Books / Bloomsbury, Cambridge, 2016: <https://tinyurl.com/4c6kthsp>