

# *Committee on Conflict Transformation*

## of New York Yearly Meeting

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### **Introduction to a Conflict Transformation Procedure**

Conflict is a natural part of life. And conflict contains equally the seeds of destruction and seeds of new growth, of transformation. The Committee on Conflict Transformation offers support to this potential for new growth when conflicts arise within our Yearly Meeting. The Committee works to carry out this charge by offering workshops and materials on conflict resolution and transformation, and by serving as a catalyst for transformative rather than destructive outcomes for conflict.

This pamphlet offers a brief introduction to the process the Committee suggests for achieving this goal.

Conflicts within the Yearly Meeting may be of many different kinds. They may involve two or three individuals, or they may involve the whole of a meeting, or even arise between meetings. They may be of a personal nature – “How could you say that in Meeting for Worship and call it a message?” – or they may be based on strongly held principles: “Shall we use our assets for relief of the poor? . . . for supporting our children in Quaker schools? . . . to build a new meetinghouse?”

#### **First Step: Prompt Acknowledgment**

Whatever the basis of the conflict, and however it may arise, it is important to act promptly. Do not let the conflict fester. Speak or write to the other person, if only to acknowledge their concern. Similarly, if you are approached, acknowledge the concerns of the person who comes to you, even if you may not feel ready to respond.

#### **Next Steps: Help from the Meeting**

Friends are called to address conflict applying Gospel Order and established Quaker process. For conflict between individuals, this is most often found in the precept of Matthew 18:15-17:

*And if thy brother should trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; and if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church.*

In a Quaker context, this could involve assistance from a ministry and counsel or pastoral care committee, or from a clearness committee. For broader conflicts where many are involved, or there are many points of view, a threshing session may be helpful. A ministry and counsel committee of a regional or quarterly meeting may be able to assist when a single meeting cannot resolve the matter, or more than one meeting is involved.

### Requesting Outside Assistance

When resolution becomes difficult or impossible for those directly or indirectly involved, the Committee on Conflict Transformation may also be called upon to assist. Our intention is not at all to enter other Friends' conflicts and "fix" them. We offer a facilitating presence, to witness and encourage a process with Divine assistance, so those involved in the conflict may find healing, reconciliation and restoration of relationship. The Committee may be called upon either by direct request of those involved or by referral from the Coordinating Committee for Ministry and Counsel of the New York Yearly Meeting.

### How Will the Committee Respond?

When the Committee or a member receives an inquiry or request for assistance, it will be acknowledged promptly and reviewed with the Committee. Generally, a single Committee member will be selected as the primary contact person while the Committee discerns what might be its most helpful role in the presenting situation. That person will contact the participants to obtain a clearer understanding of the issues, review what has been done thus far and bring this to the Committee as it considers how best to proceed.

The next step in most situations will be the Committee's appointment of "visiting listeners," generally two Friends selected from a roster maintained by the Committee. Visiting listeners are discerned to have gifts and training that have prepared them for the role of centered enquirers in the presence of conflict. The selection of particular visiting listeners will be based on appropriateness of their nature, skills and individual gifts for the particular circumstance, personalities or other aspects of the conflict, their ability to assist on a timely basis, their ability to travel to the conflict location and other factors relevant in a given situation.

These visiting listeners will arrange to meet with those directly involved. They will hear what these Friends have to say, so as to understand all of the issues and feelings involved. Through a process of centered and Spirit-led listening, they will seek to assist in clarifying the conflicting matters, including when appropriate, discernment of the underlying issues. In many cases, this process itself may lead to the resolution of the conflict and transformation of the relationships.

The visiting listeners, regardless of the outcome, report back to the Committee through the contact person. The whole Committee will then review the report and any other relevant information.

## Further Assistance from the Committee

If the matter is not resolved, or if it appears that additional assistance could help in reconciliation and restoring relationships, the Committee will appoint one or more Friends with appropriate skills and experience to facilitate this. They could be the same Friends who served as the visiting listeners, others from the roster, a Committee member, or another with the appropriate understanding, skill and experience. Some conflicts may seem irresolvable. Yet even in the most intractable of situations, way may open to transformation, if we remain hopeful and engage in a positive and Spirit-centered process.

When the entire process is concluded, the Committee will communicate with all involved, acknowledging the completion of the process and the results achieved.

**We assure Friends that the Committee on Conflict Transformation maintains confidentiality of all records and communications relating to any conflict.**

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