

CLEARNESS COMMITTEE

Purpose of the Clearness Committee

A clearness committee is to help you listen to what the Holy Spirit may be telling you about a certain situation or problem. Through answering vulnerably to open and honest questions, hopefully you arrive at what the Holy Spirit is speaking or has already spoken to you.

Why a Clearness Committee?

A Clearness Committee is a powerful way to rally the strength of community around an individual, and to draw deeply from the wisdom given to all of us. It teaches us to abandon the pretense that we know what is best for another person and instead to ask honest and open questions that can help that person find his or her own answers. It teaches us to give up the arrogant assumption that we can “save” each other and learn, through simple listening to each other and the Spirit, to create the conditions that allow a person to find his or her wholeness given by God. If the spiritual discipline behind the Clearness Committee is understood and practiced, the process can become a way to renew community in our individualistic times; a way to free people from their isolation without threatening their integrity; a way to counteract the unhelpful excesses to which we sometimes take “caring,” and a way to create space for the Spirit to move among us with healing and with power.

Setting up the Clearness Committee

Recruit three to five trusted, mature, and strong Christians to assist you, the focus person, in this process of discernment.

Exercise discernment in choosing a spouse or family member and avoid having more than one family member as part of the group.

Close personal familiarity is not a requirement for participation in the group and sometimes having someone who is not very close to you can be helpful.

Ask one group member to serve the role of facilitator. This person must be willing to review the process outlined in this sheet in advance of the meeting and should be prepared to gently lead the rest of the group through the process.

Make sure that all members have this document in advance of the Clearness Committee session and that they have read it and understood it prior to the session.

Preparing for the Clearness Committee

Write out a one-page synopsis reflecting on the following three areas:

- a concise statement of your problem or situation, even if it isn't clear—this process can work as well with murky issues as with clear ones;

- a recounting of relevant background factors that may bear on the problem;
- an exploration of any hunches you may have about what's on the horizon regarding the problem.

Format of the Clearness Committee

The clearness committee lasts for two hours. Do not end the meeting early because you've "run out of questions". Sometimes, when it feels like there are no more questions to answer is when the deepest, most obscure, most meaningful question gets asked.

0:00-0:15

Within the first 15 minutes (or less) of the meeting, you should be able to read your one-page synopsis and give the details of the situation, problem, or issue that will be the topic of the clearness committee.

0:15-1:45

The group members will ask open and honest questions to get you to answer vulnerably and think deeply about what your thoughts are on this situation, your feelings and desires in this situation, and what the Holy Spirit may be putting on your heart about this situation.

Group members are forbidden from saying anything other than open, honest questions. Advice and psychoanalysis are not allowed. The best way to determine if a question is open and honest is if you can't anticipate what the answer is. Don't lead the focus person with questions either. There is no "destination", no place we want them to arrive at, we just want to help them clarify in their own mind and their own life what God might be wanting them to do. It is difficult enough to determine what one wants and what God wants for an individual without also including the wants and expectations of others. Let this time be set aside for them to wrestle with their own desires and discern God's desires.

The focus person should answer these questions honestly and vulnerably. This should generate more questions and deeper questions. You don't need to tell your life story in every answer, give a full answer, but not an unnecessarily long one. The next question might be the one that you need to be asked about. You are not required to answer every question, you set the limits on your vulnerability, but be willing to push your own boundaries a bit and step out of your comfort zone. Your discomfort towards answering a question may be exactly why you need to be thinking and talking about it.

Be ok with silence. This isn't a cross-examination. Allow the focus person to reflect and answer well, silence is often a sign that they are thinking deeply about the question. Silence from group members can also be a sign that they are thinking through what good question should be asked next.

1:45-1:55

When 15 minutes remain, a group member should ask if the focus person would like the group to mirror their answers back to them. This means questions like, “This is what I hear you saying . . . , is that correct?”, “When you say this, this is what I hear, is that what you’re communicating?” This is to clarify the previous answers and allow everyone to get on the same page in terms of what the focus person is thinking.

1:55-2:00

In the final five minutes, the facilitator should lead the group in celebrating and affirming the focus person and their strengths. He/she has just spent a long time being open and vulnerable, it’s important for them to feel affirmed about this time.

Tips for the Clearness Committee

This time is for all of us to be attentive to the situation at hand. Don’t chitchat, don’t joke around, don’t respond to others’ questions or to the focus person’s answers, and no nervous laughter. We don’t want to diminish the seriousness of the situation or act as if this was just another meeting to talk about our lives.

Resist the temptation to comfort, reassure, or encourage the focus person. Make this space a loving space through your demeanor, your attention, and your open, honest questions.

Everyone has the right to call fouls if a member begins to offer advice, asks a leading question, or rapid-fire asks questions. The offender is not allowed to mount a defense or argue the point. This committee is for the sake of the focus person, and everyone else needs to let their egos recede.

The Clearness Committee is not intended to fix the focus person. Don’t be let down if the situation is not “solved” at the end of two hours. A good clearness process does not end—it keeps working within the focus person long after the meeting is over. The rest of us need simply to keep holding that person in the light, trusting the wisdom of the Holy Spirit to continue working in all of us.