

# ELDERING: Shepherding Alignment with The Spirit

*Susan Davies and Kathleen Wooten*

*Hosted by Burlington Friends Meeting, October 26, 2019, 10 AM to 4 PM*

The hallmark of wise, Spirit-led eldering, whether in nurturing ministry, or in unifying and redirecting spiritual community, is clear-sighted perception of Truth, stated directly and simply, in a spirit of love that outshines opinions and personalities. The practice of eldering has been variously described as:

- *“the process of gentle redirection of a person, back onto the path of right ordering, often by a short chat”<sup>1</sup>;*
- *“opening a window to the Spirit of Truth so that It may be more readily perceived by others”;*
- *“heightening the ability to listen for that source of Wisdom that is greater than our own”.*
- *“encouraging the right spiritual state of a minister”<sup>2</sup>*

As described by Susan Smith of Ohio Yearly Meeting Conservative, an elder is viewed by OYMC as a carrier of a Gift of the Spirit- a Gift that has been bestowed on the meeting community as a whole, rather than seeing an ability to elder as a “possession” of an individual personality. Seen in this light, much of the favor, and the responsibility for stewardship, reside with the monthly meeting itself, as much as with the individual who carries the Gift.

The effect of sensitive and loving eldering is to remind individuals and communities how to re-align with the Inward Teacher. Elders are attuned to character and motives, and are clear-sighted in distinguishing between “what heals, builds up, and promotes truth” and “what injures, tears down and leads astray”. Communities that, out of a misguided sense of polite tolerance, are over-accommodating of ungrounded behaviors of individuals, usually find the unintended consequence is disruption of the bonds of community as a whole. And paradoxically, at times it is the community itself that needs the elders urging to hear an uncomfortable truth crying out from an individual the group had tuned out. Margery Larrabee (PHP 392) reminds us that the ultimate authority for eldering, as for ministry, is the Inward Light: the Light in one person answering to the Light in another. Prompt, encouraging eldering, tenderly administered, provides an essential bulwark against our human elements that can all too easily give in to the temptations of ego, fear, and pride, leading us astray from the path of the Inward Guide. We need to have teachable spirits to learn from each other how to grow in the Spirit.

This day-long, interactive workshop will examine the practice of eldering as exercised in different settings and circumstances. The afternoon session will be devoted to small group and full group engagement with various scenarios where skillful eldering might turn a “problem” into an “opportunity” to build up and strengthen the Beloved Community.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ealingquakers.org.uk/jargon\\_buster](http://www.ealingquakers.org.uk/jargon_buster)

<sup>2</sup> Susan Smith, Ohio Yearly Meeting Conservative