

We Friends of Spring Meeting, offer this statement in support of the solemn belief that actions do, of necessity, speak louder than any words, and illuminate the true character of ourselves and of others. Let thus our actions be that by which we are judged.

Unity within North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends United Meeting (NCYM-FUM): We believe that unity is best achieved by embracing of our diversity and, not through the cleavage of our association from others over doctrinal matters. We care not what an individual or congregation claims to profess, placing our highest regard on what they practice. For words, as we have witnessed, often mean little and are callously cast about by some. As George Fox stated, it is not what one professes that is of importance, but what one practices. We shall judge, and ask to be judged ourselves, by the actions of an individual or congregation. It is curious to hear others within our yearly meeting speak of unifying the meeting by use of exclusion and division, by attempting to cast out those with which they perceive do not agree with their absolutist interpretation of Scripture, their world view of social issues of the Day. Within the history of the Society of Friends, as with other faiths, this strategy has repeatedly been applied, only to lead to more division, more misunderstanding, and a distraction away from the true charge of our Faith. That true charge is to demonstrate by our *ACTIONS*, the love for our fellow persons after the example of Jesus Christ. As William Penn stated in 1693,

The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the divers liveries they wear here makes them strangers.

We believe that each past schism has weakened our society and inhibited that cause of practicing the example of Jesus Christ. Each current branch of our Society has carried away some strength from the original Society, but has also abandoned some valuable attribute, to its detriment, to another branch. So it will be again if those professing unity through division carry the day. We embrace all branches of the Religious Society of Friends, that diversity begets strength and vitality as we strive to learn from and appreciate one another.

Askings by North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends United Meeting: What are "askings"? If the word is true to itself, it is something that is asked, not demanded. Our meeting strives to pay the amount of the "askings" requested by the Yearly Meeting which is consistent with our degree of use of the services derived from the Yearly Meeting. Over the past several years, approximately 30%-40% of the Yearly Meeting budget has been devoted to the funding of "Pastors' Benefits". Spring Meeting employs no pastor and has not done so for over a decade, choosing to adopt a tradition of Friends' worship that more closely resembles the historical manner of Friends. Our meeting has faithfully and consistently paid the 60%-70% portion of the Yearly Meeting "askings" that are not associated with the pastoral system, and apply the remaining balance to needs within the Yearly Meeting (such as Quaker Lake) and the greater Religious Society of Friends (such as the American Friends Service Committee, Quaker House, Friends Committee on National Legislation, etc.), and other needy causes. There have been expressions of concern by other individuals and congregations within our yearly meeting that funds are diverted to other organizations, such as Piedmont Friends Fellowship or Friends General Conference. These other organizations have no dues, no financial requirements for association, no "askings". Funds are not diverted from the yearly meeting "askings" to them.

Association with other Friends' organizations: Our meeting is a member of Piedmont Friends Fellowship (PFF) though we are not members of the Piedmont Friends Yearly Meeting that is being formed, choosing only to remain a member of the fellowship. As a grassroots, bottom-up organization, PFF does not have askings, dues or other financial requirements. It has no staff to support. There are no funds from our meeting being diverted from NCYM to PFF. Our meeting does not consider PFF to be a competitor or rival to NCYM. Our reason for having affiliations with both organizations is to bridge the chasm that unnecessarily exists between these two branches of the Society of Friends, each of which lacks a beneficial aspect of the other. While some members of each organization, particularly within NCYM, seek to widen this chasm and hold no association with the other, we seek a meaningful unity among all Friends that such an affiliation can foster.

The "Founding Beliefs" of North Carolina Yearly Meeting: A common theme and quote in many of the recent letters from meetings has been their expectation of adherence to the "founding beliefs" of NCYM. This is a most interesting statement. For the record, North Carolina Yearly Meeting was first organized in the late 17th century, with the first formal gathering deemed a yearly meeting being held in 1697. The Religious Society of Friends and NCYM were founded during

that century on the principles that each and every person could have a direct and personal relationship with God, that there was no need for what Fox and other early Friends termed “hireling priests”, our charge being to “walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone”. The increased emphasis on Biblical supremacy as compared to the leading of the Holy Spirit was not a founding principle. Robert Barclay, in his widely respected “Apology” (1676) on the foundations of the Society, went to great lengths to explain:

From the revelations of the Spirit of God to the faithful have come the scriptures of Truth, which contain: (1) a faithful historical account of the behavior of God's people in various ages and of the many unusual and remarkable acts of God which they experienced, (2) a prophetic account of some things already past, and of others yet to come, (3) a full and adequate account of all of the chief principles of the doctrine of Christ which were spoken, or which were written, by the motions of God's Spirit at various times in treasured declarations, exhortations, and maxims which were given to certain churches and their pastors.

Nevertheless, because the scriptures are only a declaration of the source, and not the source itself, they are not to be considered the principal foundation of all truth and knowledge. They are not even to be considered as the adequate primary rule of all faith and practice. Yet, because they give a true and faithful testimony of the source itself, they are and may be regarded as a secondary rule that is subordinate to the Spirit, from which they obtain all their excellence and certainty. We truly know them only by the inward testimony of the Spirit or, as the scriptures themselves say, the Spirit is the guide by which the faithful are led into all Truth (John 16:13). Therefore, according to the scriptures, the Spirit is the first and principal leader (Rom 8:14). Because we are receptive to the scriptures, as the product of the Spirit, it is for that very reason that the Spirit is the primary and principal rule of faith.

It is our hope that NCYM-FUM does return to its “founding beliefs” and seeks a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation of the whole history of the Religious Society of Friends. Such an understanding might lead to the realization that the Richmond Declaration is a fairly recent document (1887) within that history which was produced by one faction within the Society with the intent to enforce conformity by that faction, with the result of creating more disunity within the Society that remains to this day.

Regardless of the efforts by some to enforce either strict conformity or separation--which only serves to divide, to ostracize, to cast out--our meeting chooses instead to continue to remain a member of this yearly meeting, to seek harmony, not division. We do not consider differences of beliefs among us as threats, but as opportunities for spiritual growth in a world full of God-created diversity. We shall remain. We seek to speak Truth to Power, and to act by the Golden Rule, after the example of Jesus Christ. We do not demand conformity of others, nor do we seek to be bound by expectations of conformity by others. We place little significance in professions of faith. We ask only to be judged by our actions. For as recorded in 2 Corinthians:

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you, or *letters* of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: *Forasmuch as ye are* manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

and reaffirmed by the Quaker elders at Balby in 1656:

Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by; but that all, with a measure of the light, which is pure and holy, may be guided: and so in the light walking and abiding, these things may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not in the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.

Our statement should be disregarded if our practices fail to support it. The words herein contained are only as valid as the actions that consecrate or violate them. It is our endeavor to hold ourselves to such a standard.

Approved by Spring Friends Meeting 9/21/2014

Elizabeth Osborne, clerk of meeting