

Fancy Gap: Additional Comments,
By Clerk Ken Bradstock:

Friends:

The letters sent out regarding division in North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends (FUM) seem to beg a response. Fancy Gap Friends Meeting has decided that it should express its concerns as well.

We believe that the doctrines stated by (list meetings) are acceptable and established through many years of work and conviction for many Christians. We also believe that the meetings who made clear their adherence to those doctrines are sincere and strongly believe what they stated. We as a Friends Meeting respect their right to state those beliefs and practice them to the best of their ability.

Fancy Gap Friends Meeting also understands that the meetings that wrote the letters were expressing a form of Christianity known as “Fundamentalism” that is often used pejoratively to express the 5 fundamentals of Christian belief as formulated by theologians at Princeton University and the Niagara Bible Conference around turn of the 20th century. We know that it was, and continues to be a response to Modernism and higher criticism of the Bible. We want it understood that we are not using the term “Fundamentalism” pejoratively but as a way to describe the system of belief expressed by the above-mentioned meetings.

With that said, we wish to express our concerns that have arisen out of that system of theology for us.

Fancy Gap Friends Meeting does not believe that a list of 5 fundamental doctrines describes anybody as a Christian. We cannot find those doctrines stated by Jesus as tests for true believers. The only statement we can find is Jesus simple statement that his followers can be identified by their fruits (Matthew 7:20). That statement alone is risky for us to use because Fundamentalists will point out that some of our standards are evil thus proving ourselves to be out of line with

scripture. However, when we begin looking for the definition of good fruit, we find that Paul stated clearly in Galatians that the fruits of the Spirit are “love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, and meekness. Herein, as we believe they, are not only theological standards but behavioral standards as well. It is not so much theology we dispute but behavior.

Over the last decade, we have seen members and meetings of NCYM (FUM) display cruelty and meanness in their behavior toward Friends with whom they disagree. We can document those behaviors including a Surry Quarterly meeting wherein our pastor and his wife were harangued for 2 hours with judgments of their character, faithfulness to Christ, and eternal destination to hell. The other incidents will not be described here because we are attempting to keep the tone of this letter positive and healthy. That incident is only meant to be representative of the numerous that we have experienced and have heard about. This kind of behavior feels like a direct violation of the only standard we know of that describes true followers of Jesus Christ.

The only judgment we feel is our place to make is whether this chronic behavior represents a sick institution with harmful behavior. We believe that North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends (FUM) is dysfunctional and very much in need of help. We know this by the behavior we observe not through the abstractions of theology. We see cruelty, meanness, manipulation, hostility and codependency. We are not just pointing a finger at those who attack us theologically but those who permit this behavior as well. As most readers know, the family of an alcoholic can be as responsible for the continuation of the disease as the victim himself. We believe that even those in NCYM with whom we align theologically have failed to confront the institution’s illness and are complicit as well. We apologize if this seems harsh but we believe we must speak truth to power and Fancy Gap is certainly small in numbers. In the current state of NCYM, being a numerical and theological minority is a disadvantage. One of the behaviors we observe is the trend toward a democratic model in business which bows to majority rule.

Our decision to withhold askings is not what we see in other meetings. We are not attempting to punish yearly meeting.

Our askings are too small to even consider that motive. We did, however wish to bring these problems to light. In the dysfunction of NCYM, we believed that one way to do that is to call attention to the behavioral problems. Also, we do not believe that it is healthy to focus primarily on money or membership as NCYM's indicator of strength. We strongly believe that the indicators are: love, joy peace, longsuffering, gentleness and meekness. Paul points out that there is no law against those things and we agree with his assessment. NCYM still holds some level of those fruits but they seem to be growing weak and falling off of the tree as they atrophy under the pressure to become Fundamentalist and democratic in theology and business procedure.

We believe that it is time for NCYM to let go of futile and endless debates about theology and Quaker procedure and look at behavior. We also believe that our theological and procedurally kindred meetings join us in addressing the dysfunction in YM directly and with strength.