

## Response from High Point Friends

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Fellow Friends of North Carolina Yearly Meeting,

Representatives from High Point Friends Meeting came away from the 317th Annual Session of North Carolina Yearly Meeting saddened and alarmed. The subtitle for these sessions was: "Claiming the Future God Has for Us." We are Orthodox Friends, who love Scripture and claim Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, but we cannot unite with the kind of future being claimed by some members of our Yearly Meeting.

We acknowledge long lasting differences that have led to divisions within our Yearly Meeting. We respect deeply held convictions expressed by Friends in letters and addresses to the Yearly Meeting body. We appreciate the civil approach of Friends as they communicated these concerns. However, we are disturbed by the judgmental and domineering approach taken by some Friends. While Friends call for theological unity, we fear the strategic aims are to marginalize some members of the Yearly Meeting and form a kind of "unity" through divisions or expulsions. It is our concern that this forceful and divisive approach will threaten vital ministries of our

Yearly Meeting, splintersome local meetings,  
and alienate some members from their meetings.

As we read the letters and listened to our  
representatives' reports we are led to share  
these concerns and ask these questions:

**Concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ:**

We join Friends in the desire for a unified  
witness of the person and work of Jesus Christ.  
We caution Friends to guard against: hardening  
of one's heart, making statements in anger,  
conveying of harmful rumors, and demanding  
Yearly Meeting reforms based on perceptions  
and unverified truths. Friends, what do we gain if  
we attain a unified Christology but lose Christ-  
like love, gentleness and forbearance? We are  
confused by non-specific assertions that the  
Yearly Meeting or its members are denying Jesus  
Christ. Yearly Meeting sponsored programs,  
camping activities, mission endeavors, and  
publicity are clearly Jesus Christ centered. No  
proposals have come to the Yearly Meeting body  
to change or challenge historic faith statements  
about Christ.

From the floor of the Yearly Meeting body, our  
representatives heard notions that some Friends  
focus on Christ's work of atonement and  
evangelism while other Friends focus on  
Christ's work for justice and peace. Are these  
aspects of Christ's ministry incompatible? Are  
not both needed for a unified witness of the  
person and work of Jesus Christ?

**Concerning Faith & Practice:** A question the "new  
committee" is asked to address is "should our  
Faith and Practice be the ultimate authority in  
our beliefs and practice and be affirmed by all  
member meetings?" As we see it, the role of

Faith and Practice in a non-creedal society is unique. It is our best effort ("though we see through the glass darkly" } to give a sense of who we are and what we believe. It advises Friends on how to function as Christ's community. However, it is not authoritative or final. While it informs our corporate identity and public witness, Friends have often declared that no statements or doctrines can substitute for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. To require Friends to "affirm" a Faith and Practice as the criteria for membership, in our estimation, makes it creed and the "letter of the law." What happens to Friends who cannot "affirm" or do not follow certain aspects of the document (i.e. statements on alcohol consumption, tobacco use, joining secret societies, gambling, baptism, or peace)? Will they and their meetings be barred from membership and leadership in the yearly meeting?

We urge Friends to reflect on the advice given to early Friends, found in the opening paragraphs of our Faith and Practice:

*Dearly beloved friends, these things we do not lay on you as rule or form to walk by, but that all with the measure of light which is pure and holy may be guided, and so in the light walking and abiding these may be fulfilled in the spirit, not from letter; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. (Faith & Practice: North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends, page 10)*

We believe this advice is the proper application of Faith and Practice.

Indeed, it is good for Friends or Meetings to examine themselves in the "measure of light" and determine if they are abiding in the "spirit" of Faith and Practice. If Friends or Meetings persistently live outside the "spirit" of Faith and Practice or become obstructionists to those who strive

to do so, it is incumbent upon concerned members of the Yearly Meeting to caringly exercise "gospel order" (Matthew 18:15-17). We are advised to make an attempt to reconcile Friends to the community before other extreme actions are taken. "Gospel order" is the Biblical inspiration for the Quaker tradition of eldering. The current Faith and Practice urges Friends to follow the "gospel order" when dealing with conflicts between members and meetings (*Faith & Practice: North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends, page 84*). Should this not also apply when dealing with conflicts among Yearly Meeting entities? Have we in North Carolina Yearly Meeting practiced gospel order? How have we sought to reconcile the community?

Concerning Biblical Authority - Again, we are Friends who love the Bible. It is the written Word of God which contains the story of salvation, the gospels of Christ, which offers devotional hope and prophetic guidance. Robert Barclay writes that the Scriptures are "a full and ample account of all the chief principles of the doctrine of Christ" (*Barclay's Apology, page 46*). We also contend that the Word of God is dynamic. The Spirit of God who inspired the words of Scripture also dwell within us. It is the word written upon our hearts, active in our conscience, and living through the one, Christ Jesus ("The Word made flesh") who speaks to our condition today. This is why we speak of "a listening spirituality" (*Christian Faith of Friends, page 3*).

We join Friends who hold the Scriptures in high regard, yet we are uncertain by what Friends mean by "Biblical authority." The Bible is subject to human translation, interpretation, and application. For centuries, "Biblical authority" has been used by political leaders to justify wars, slavery, genocide, colonization, and other ungodly enterprise. Most pertinent to our concern for North Carolina Yearly Meeting is the way people use the language of "Biblical authority" to pass judgment and condemnation on others, deny individuals of God-given dignity and grace, silence the voices of women, and implement a spiritual legalism of fear versus love. We

also observe that some Christians who insist on "Biblical authority" practice it in selective ways. Many uphold parts of Scripture that support their positions, while ignoring other parts. What do Friends mean by "Biblical authority?" How will Friends determine what is authoritative? Who will make this determination?

**Concerning Participation with Others** -- We are confused by strong objections Friends have about members of North Carolina Yearly Meeting participating with others. The "new committee" is asked to consider the general question, "Why do meetings feel compelled to participate with organizations outside of NCYM?" Quakers are not isolationists. Our ministries are enriched when we participate with other Quaker, ecumenical, service, and mission organizations for numerous reasons. It may be wise for our Yearly Meeting leadership to learn why our members are participating with the organizations that are now in question. It would be helpful to determine any threats these affiliations have upon the Yearly Meeting and discover if these affiliations prevent our members from fulfilling their responsibilities to our Yearly Meeting.

**Concerning the Timeline** -- We are disturbed by the insistence that "unity" must be achieved now or by March 15, 2015. We remind Friends that the "unity" we seek is not agreement with each other, but it is "unity" with the Spirit of God. This is a prayerful process of discernment and reflection, which requires time and diligence. The "new committee" must have enough time to do this "worshipful work" well. We fear that the insistence and impatience of Friends may hinder us from bearing the fruits of the Holy Spirit as we work through the concerns. It seems to us that a Yearly Meeting which has just held its 317<sup>th</sup> annual session can grant the "new committee" and each other time to discern God's leadings in God's timing.

We remind Friends that North Carolina Yearly Meeting and its work belong to God; we are simply His stewards.

God is the one who joined this body together, although imperfect and diverse, to reflect His glory and achieve His purposes. The opportunity is now before us to reflect God's power of love and spirit of reconciliation by how we tend to the differences and conflicts among us. Therefore, we encourage Friends to: resist the spirit of aggression, ask forgiveness of those we may have verbally harmed or judged, and humbly yield ourselves to God and to one another. We ask meetings to stop making ultimatums of withholding support and threatening to leave our Yearly Meeting. We urge Friends to seek out opportunities to deeply listen and learn from one another, thus strengthening bonds of love and trust among us. We invite Friends to a season of prayer for our Yearly Meeting, each Meeting, our leaders, and those being called to serve on the "new committee." May we live in the virtue and power of Christ Jesus, who is our peace:

*For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility." Ephesians 2:14 -16*

In the Peace of Jesus,

Greg Sheets, Presiding Clerk  
Pastoral Minister

Kelly R. Kellum,

Approved by High Point Monthly Meeting of Friends on  
September 28, 2014