

New Garden Friends Meeting's Response to "the Plan" offered by NC Yearly Meeting, FUM

New Garden Friends Meeting, established in 1754, has been a member of NC Yearly Meeting, FUM for over 250 years. We offer this response in the spirit of cooperation and in hopes of clear communication with NC Yearly Meeting, FUM.

1. Affirm NC Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, including the Richmond Declaration of Faith

We are a diverse community of seekers, searching together in the Quaker way and finding that it reveals the Light of God, leading us forward on our spiritual journeys both individually and together. Together, we seek to find and affirm that of God in everyone and to live in the power of the Light which takes away the occasion of wars and strife, which inspired the scriptures, and which still speaks to us experientially every day.

Because of our faith in the continuing revelation available to us through our Inward Teacher, we do not require statements of belief or "affirmations" such as those laid out by the NCYM Task Force in "the Plan." While we value the scriptures, like George Fox, we do not wish to confuse the words with "the Word" which is above and beyond them (see the attachment of quotations reflecting Fox's teachings on the place of scripture), nor do we hold such tests of orthodoxy as the Richmond Declaration to be necessary. We use several versions of Faith and Practice as guides and find their use of queries to be more in keeping with a Quaker understanding of faith and more helpful than "affirmations." Instead, we trust the Holy Spirit to work within each individual and in our community as we labor to discern a way forward. We believe that if we follow our leadings, we can find the will of God individually and together. We meet together for encouragement and by sharing our experiences build one another up in faith, trusting that when we meet in expectant waiting, the Holy Spirit will reveal the next step we need to take in order to move forward in faith. As Fox suggests, the Holy Spirit works within us by "convincement," making it unnecessary for us to insist that each person have a common understanding at each moment. We believe that if we "take others to God and leave them there," the Light will shine and reveal the Truth to them and to us. For this reason, we reject an unnecessary reliance on doctrine. A creed is a creed, no matter what you call it, and we find such things to be a distraction and the very antithesis of Fox's focus on trust in the Holy Spirit's guidance in the here and now.

2. Dual Affiliation

For us, the Monthly Meeting is central, but we do not wish to be insular. While some New Gardeners have found meaningful relationships and connections to service opportunities through NCYM-FUM, for others, Friends General Conference is a better fit. In affiliating with Friends General Conference through Piedmont Friends Fellowship and Yearly Meeting, New Garden Friends were recognizing that fact. We did not seek to part ways with NCYM-FUM. New Garden was well aware that NCYM Faith and Practice did not prohibit dual affiliations and that a number of meetings and yearly

meetings are dually or even triply aligned with FUM, EFI and FGC before our decision to join PFYM was made. Instead of creating barriers, we sought to open more doors and windows to the wider Quaker world.

3. Integrity

While it is likely true that there are those among us who might affirm a) through d) as laid out by “the Plan,” it is undeniable that most among us would not. For example, our community includes people who are divorced and lesbian and gay folk. In no way do we find affirming them and their love for one another contrary to the testimony of integrity. As discussed before, we find queries regarding right relationship, responsible use of alcohol, stewardship of the earth, honesty in word and deed and seeking peace in all things to be more useful for purposes of self-examination in the light of God’s love than are statements of belief on these topics.

4. Askings

This is an area New Gardeners have recently been encouraged to reexamine. Because NCYM has been perceived as excluding some of our members and pursuing projects which did not fit with our sense of right priorities, New Garden has not paid some portion of our askings in recent years, only funding projects we felt clear to support. Painful, hurtful interactions with others in NCYM-FUM have contributed to a perception of estrangement. Because we have contributed to specific projects and not to the general budget, some have had the misimpression that we have been giving nothing at all. This has never been the case. This year, we were persuaded that perhaps it was unfair for us to benefit from our connection to NCYM-FUM in some ways without contributing to the general budget, and we knew the Yearly Meeting was facing financial difficulties. For this reason, we did contribute some of our funds towards askings this year, and our clerk has encouraged us to reevaluate our approach toward askings in a more thorough-going manner in the year ahead.

5. Our Vision

Our wish and vision for NCYM-FUM is to dream of a yearly meeting where the variety of meetings represented under its umbrella might come together for fellowship and service, honoring that of God in each of us. Rather than requiring an affirmation of beliefs, such a yearly meeting would affirm the gifts of each meeting and trust the Holy Spirit to work in each community to find ways that each community’s diverse gifts might complement the whole. For example, those with a concern for evangelism through church-planting would be supported and encouraged in this, while those who sought to address racism in their communities or peace in the Middle East would also be appreciated and encouraged to follow their leadings to work on these concerns. In our ideal yearly meeting, there would be enough love and trust to celebrate different callings,

with no expectation, and certainly no effort, to force all meetings to be the same. “For there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord, and there are varieties of activities, but the same God, who activates all of them in everyone.”(I.Cor. 12: 4-6)

In this spirit and in this hope, we offer our response to NCYM-FUM.