



HOPEWELL FRIENDS MEETING

August 3, 2014

Dear NCYM Executive Committee, Stewardship/Finance Committee, Staff, and Monthly Meetings,

Hopewell Friends Monthly Meeting met on August 3, 2014 and considered a letter addressed to quarterly meeting clerks from the NCYM stewardship/finance committee soliciting feedback about the current askings formula, and an organizational assessment survey conducted by the NCYM executive committee soliciting feedback about the organizational and leadership models of the yearly meeting. Even though one was addressed to quarterly meeting clerks and the other to individuals, Hopewell Friends felt the need to address both of these as we express our concerns as a meeting.

Hopewell Friends Meeting is more aware than ever that there are significant problems that need to be addressed within North Carolina Yearly Meeting. Perhaps the most apparent indication of these problems is our financial dilemma which seems to be getting worse. We see three major components to our current financial dilemma: 1) a significant loss of membership in the last few decades; 2) a significant and lingering downturn in the economy; 3) a significant lack of unity within our Yearly Meeting in regards to elements of both our faith and our practice that has resulted in specific meetings not paying their askings as a protest. While we as a yearly meeting ought to be addressing all three components, Hopewell's current concentration is on the third.

Our frustration at Hopewell is multi-faceted. First, we are frustrated with the decision made by local meetings not to pay their askings. Secondly, we are frustrated that the yearly meeting has not been more assertive in responding to these meetings about their unpaid askings. These problems have existed for many years and are not getting better. In fact, they seem to be quickly getting worse.

We have several recommendations in handling our financial issues that may help us to better handle their underlying causes.

1. Meetings that do not pay their full askings should detail, in writing, their reason(s) for not doing so. If a meeting is financially unable to pay, they should state so. If a meeting is not paying all or a portion of their askings as a protest, they should state their reason or reasons for such an action. This should be sent to local meetings. Hopewell has had to pay more in askings every year because there are some who refuse to pay. We should know exactly why they have chosen to make us pay more than our share to cover the costs they are unwilling to cover. We feel this is a simple act of integrity.
2. Any meeting that is not paying all or a portion of their askings as a protest should detail, in writing, all of the changes they deem necessary to bring them back to a position where they would pay all of their askings. For example, would they want committees to act differently, do they see significant

policy changes, are they asking for changes to *Faith and Practice*, which sections of *Faith and Practice* would they change, etc.

3. Any meeting that is not paying all or a portion of their askings as a protest should lose some benefits of the membership in NCYM that they are not paying for. The first of these should be that they will not have any of their members serve on yearly meeting committees of any kind or as officers. This should result in immediate resignations from their members that are currently serving in those roles. Other benefits that are lost might be their ability to use Quaker Lake at discounted prices. Protesting meetings might not be able to sign up until after other meetings have had the chance, and they might be asked to pay full market value for the facilities they use. While we are cautious not to make pastors suffer for the decisions of their meeting, if they don't support those decisions, we feel that pastors who are in protest of the yearly meeting might voluntarily turn down their benefits, such as health insurance, as an act of integrity.
4. We feel strongly that meetings should not hold dual affiliations, especially when they might support the mission of one group financially while not fully supporting NCYM financially.

Our hope is that as we address the issues most specifically related to our current financial dilemma, we can do so in a matter that will enable us to more fully deal with its underlying cause that we would identify as our lack of unity. It becomes increasingly obvious that many within North Carolina Yearly Meeting do not share common ideals. Many are increasingly willing to disregard essential tenets of the Christian Faith, including the atonement of Jesus Christ, and are increasingly willing to disregard the authority of Scripture. We believe that it is as a result of these diversions from unity that some of the members of NCYM are withholding their askings because their views are not being accepted and affirmed by the rest of the yearly meeting. They are refusing to pay their fair share of denominational expenses and forcing others to pay more than their share at the expense of the ministry of our own local meeting.

These four issues of unity are the most important that we have to deal with:

1. Being in unity about the person and work of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God and the Savior sent to save us from our sin.

Even though the *Faith and Practice* of our yearly meeting has clear statements about the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and includes an extract from George Fox's Letter to the Governor of Barbados and the Richmond Declaration of Faith which speak to those beliefs, and has recently reaffirmed those statements of faith, they are not being lived out by some in our midst.

2. Being in unity about the authority of the Bible.

Again, even though the *Faith and Practice* of our yearly meeting has clear statements about the ultimate worth and authority of the Bible, and includes an extract from George Fox's Letter to the Governor of Barbados and the Richmond Declaration of Faith which speak to those beliefs, and has recently reaffirmed those statements of faith, they are not being lived out by some in our midst.

While some might argue that Quakers are non-creedal and should not have to have agreement on belief statements, Quakers in our yearly meeting still feel the need to "make some declaration of the fundamentals of our faith." (*Faith and Practice*, 2004, p. 27) It is very obvious that everyone has beliefs, even those who claim they are non-creedal. The question is not whether we have beliefs but whether they are clearly defined and whether we are in unity about them. The truth of the matter is that at some point all meetings affirmed our Faith and Practice. If some do not still hold to that affirmation, they should realize that they have moved.

3. Proper sharing of financial responsibilities.

In order for there to be any integrity and equality among our community of meetings, all meetings must pay their fair share of our shared financial responsibilities if they are able. Not paying those askings places unfair and undue strain on other meetings and seems to be a lazy way to engage in profitable discussion about issues we disagree on.

4. Integrity in our committee structures.

In order for our committees, especially our executive committee, to operate with the trust and integrity they need, we feel that they should take specific steps to avoid any appearance of impropriety. Therefore, we feel that: 1) No person should ever serve on the nominating committees of both the yearly meeting and ministry and counsel at the same time. 2) No person on nominating committee should ever be nominated to fill a position on a committee under the purview of that nominating committee, especially to the executive committee. If this has happened, it should be rectified immediately. 3) No person who is a representative in any way to another yearly meeting should serve on the executive committee of our yearly meeting. Once again, if this has happened, it should be rectified immediately. Because any appearance of impropriety could greatly damage the credibility that the executive committee has with local meetings, we believe that any and all occasions of impropriety should be brought to the light and handled in the light. 4) Again, no person who is a member of a meeting not fully paying their askings should serve on any yearly meeting committee, with the exception of those who are financially unable. If this has happened, it should be rectified immediately.

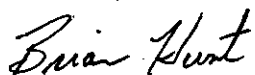
As a result of these problems in NCYM, Hopewell Friends is prayerfully considering our support of NCYM. Please hear us clearly, we still want to be a part of the yearly meeting and want to fully support it financially. However, we urgently want for the yearly meeting to be unified in its foundational beliefs in the person and work of Jesus Christ and the authority of the Bible. We also want the yearly meeting to be unified in its commitment to financial and structural integrity.

To that end, we sincerely ask for the leadership of our yearly meeting to quickly institute a process whereby the yearly meeting might address the issues and concerns brought forward by our letter and others like it. We feel that time is of the essence and that the yearly meeting can no longer afford to avoid this conversation.

Hopewell Friends feels the need to make it known that if quick progress is not being made, the yearly meeting should not budget for 2015 expecting to receive our full financial support. We have currently made no decision to withdraw our support and we don't intend for this statement to be taken as an ultimatum. However, we do not want the yearly meeting to plan for 2015 counting on funds that may not be there.

Hopewell Friends Meeting is excited about the possibility of a unified yearly meeting and we hope to contribute positively to a process where that might be achieved. We are also praying for our yearly meeting, its leadership and its future role in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ!

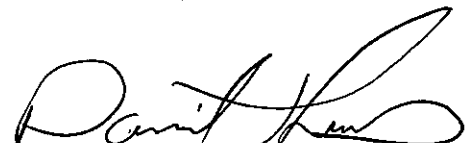
Sincerely,


Brian Hunt,

Clerk, Monthly Meeting


Myra Brady

Clerk, Ministry & Counsel


Daniel Thames

Pastor