



# Poplar Ridge Friends Meeting

3673 Hoover Hill Road | Trinity, NC 27370  
Office: 336.861.5026 | [prfriends.org](http://prfriends.org) |  
[poplarridge@prfriends.org](mailto:poplarridge@prfriends.org)

David R. Mercadante, Senior Pastor  
Brian Donley, Associate Pastor  
Mark Allen, Monthly Meeting Clerk

July 8, 2014

Dear North Carolina Yearly Meeting Executive Committee, Staff, Ministry & Counsel, and Monthly Meetings:

Poplar Ridge Friends Meeting is writing out of a deep sense of spiritual conviction over our participation within the North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends. As outlined below, we have a series of pressing concerns that have burdened our hearts for a long time. We believe that our Yearly Meeting can be unified, can enjoy God's blessings, and can grow in number and influence. However, we believe that we cannot move forward as a Yearly Meeting until the source of our division is addressed.

Through much prayer and discussion, we name the following issues to be the most troubling:

- 1) **A crucial disagreement about the Person and Work of Jesus Christ and the Authority of Scripture.** We believe in Jesus as the sole, exclusive atonement for sin as written in the Holy Scriptures. He is not equal with other gods, but superior and unique. We believe the scriptures are true in claiming that Jesus is the only way to the Father (words from our Savior Himself) and without Him we fall under condemnation. It is increasingly clear that all Friends do not share our convictions about Jesus Christ. This is not something we believe has occurred in one single event, but that it has grown in gravity and voice over the past three decades. We welcome diversity of belief and understand that there are several Christological appropriations, but we also realize that powerful ministry cannot happen without a basic agreement of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.
- 2) **A lack of integrity among member meetings of NC Yearly Meeting who no longer affirm the NCYM Faith and Practice.** While no theological writing fully expresses the entire scope of the Living God (nor attempts to), we realize that documents such as the Faith and Practice and the Richmond Declaration have a tremendous power to unify and empower Friends to minister on a broad scale. Meetings, just like any organization, are going to shift with each passing generation. No meeting is perfectly static. As a matter of integrity, a meeting should discern if it no longer shares the convictions of her original founding. If a meeting finds itself out of unity with the Faith and Practice which is originally affirmed, they should be honest in their assessment and seek other denominational affiliation. Further, some meetings enjoy a dual-affiliation with NCYM and other Quaker Organizations that do not share the core tenets of our faith (specifically Friends General Conference and Piedmont Friends Fellowship - soon to become its own Yearly Meeting in March 2015, see: [piedmontfriendsfellowship.org/pff-member-meetings/](http://piedmontfriendsfellowship.org/pff-member-meetings/)). The bulk of NC Yearly Meeting continues to proudly affirm the NCYM Faith and Practice while some of its meetings follow an entirely different Faith and Practice that is in alignment with beliefs of Friends General Conference. This creates

an obvious and irreconcilable conflict with those who no longer affirm our shared confession. No substantial ministry can flow from such division. The mere fact that some meetings have dually affiliated with other organizations confirms our belief that these meetings have drifted from the founding beliefs of NCYM (Faith and Practice) while the majority of NCYM still holds to the original founding tenets of our organization.

- 3) **Meetings that refuse to pay Askings out of protest.** Our Yearly Meeting does not have a problem with the way we collect or calculate Askings. Our problems are much deeper than budgets. There are some meetings that cannot pay their Askings due to financial constraints and/or decreasing attendance and we certainly sympathize with those meetings. However, it is unacceptable that some meetings (specifically New Garden, Winston-Salem and possibly more) have not been paying and continue to withhold their Askings. Although no specific reasons have been publicly stated for these refusals to support the entire expenses of NCYM, it is presumed to be out of an ongoing protest to the convictions of the larger body. We do know that some of these protesting meetings have been specifically supporting certain programs (Friends Disaster Service, MOWA, Quaker Lake), but have chosen to not support the organization in general. The result of this long remonstrance has been an increased financial burden on the meetings that do meet their obligation. This has also led to an inability to adequately staff positions within our Yearly Meeting office, a growing divide between liberal and evangelical meetings and a constant tension that hinders worship, fellowship and outreach among the wider Body of Friends. This has placed an extra burden on meetings that faithfully pay their Askings and created a relentless cloud of discord hanging over the Yearly Meeting. Furthermore, it has been impossible to truly discuss these important issues because these meetings have either neglected or refused to communicate why they are not paying.
- 4) **Some Yearly Meeting leadership (clerks and committee members) come from meetings that do not affirm NC Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice.** How can any organization thrive (or even survive!) while the leadership disagrees with the core convictions and principles of their own organization? As a matter of integrity and fairness, Friends who affirm the Faith and Practice should be the only ones who are able to serve in leadership. We feel that any member of our Yearly Meeting who will not affirm the basic elements of the Christian faith as outlined by Faith and Practice should not serve on committees or in leadership.

Our concerns are not just limited to these theological, financial and administrative elements. Our greatest concern is that it is impossible to do substantial, God-ordained ministry together. We are proud of the projects that all meetings can do together, regardless of theological leanings. Friends Disaster Service is a good example of project coordination for a common good. However, we believe our ministry together should be more than projects; it should be about discipleship under Jesus Christ. If we believe drastically different things about the gospel (i.e. the nature of humanity, the atonement of Jesus, necessity of salvation in Christ, etc...) then our aim of discipleship will not be the same. We simply cannot be in unity regarding our desire for our membership and for the world. How can we make disciples together as a Yearly Meeting if we have such differing beliefs? How can we plant churches? How can we have integrity in our recording process? Our main responsibility is to make disciples and we cannot do that if we endure fundamental disagreements on the One to whom we seek to emulate,

worship and serve. We are wise to heed our Lord's counsel, "*If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.*" (Mark 3:25).

**Therefore, with great caution and much discernment, Poplar Ridge Friends Meeting has decided that it will not continue to financially support the Yearly Meeting until there is a basic sense of unity among Friends within NCYM.** We will meet our financial commitment through March 2015. From that point forward, any monies we would normally pay into Askings will be placed into an escrow account we designate and control. These monies will be released to the Yearly Meeting at such a time as we sense unity and a clear path forward has been achieved.

We realize the audacity and irony of our refusal to pay Askings partly because we are not in unity with meetings that do not pay Askings. However, this step is necessary because:

- ▶ *We will continue to support the Yearly Meeting once there is unity. We have not seen evidence that those meetings who are currently protesting NCYM by withholding their Askings have any plans to express their concerns or to return to financial integrity.*
- ▶ *We are clearly communicating our convictions in hopes of an ongoing period of discernment and subsequent action. There have been plenty of strongly worded letters written over the years, evaluations, vision groups, and a plethora of minutes that have been approved; none of which has brought resolution to our core issues. Unfortunately, we feel that our concerns are not going to be heard or addressed unless this step is taken. Hopefully, attaching our concerns to our Askings will spur a serious and more urgent conversation.*

We hope that local meetings, the Yearly Meeting Body, Executive Committee, Ministry & Counsel and any governing bodies in our Yearly Meeting will take meaningful steps towards creating unity. Again, we are eager to pay our Askings to a Body that has a clear and meaningful mission. Until then, we cannot continue to support a Yearly Meeting wrought with division.

At Poplar Ridge, we are excited about the possibility of a unified Yearly Meeting. We desire for the entire world to know Jesus Christ as Savior and enjoy discipleship under our Great Shepherd. We have the best intentions for NC Yearly Meeting and hope that our action is understood and addressed.

*Read and approved by Poplar Ridge Meeting on Ministry & Counsel - July 1, 2014.*

  
Bobby Beane, Ministry & Counsel Clerk

*Read and approved by Poplar Ridge Friends Monthly Meeting - July 8, 2014.*

  
Mark Allen, Monthly Meeting Clerk