

THE SPIRITUAL BASIS FOR UNITY

The Committees appointed by the two Baltimore Yearly Meetings to study together the question of what in our religious experience would justify the union of the Yearly Meetings see that much spiritual basis for unity now exists among us. This is evident in the uniting of a number of local Meetings, so that at present almost half the membership of the two Yearly Meetings is in united Meetings; in our [adult] Young Friends movement; in the joint work of our committees; in our cooperative efforts of many kinds; and in many shared experiences of worship. All these joint activities obviously would exist without some measure of unity of spirit.

Our Yearly Meeting has a wide, rich, and diverse heritage, chiefly from historic Christianity interpreted by Quakerism. We not only tolerate diversity, we encourage and cherish it. In every local Meeting we struggle, usually patiently, with the problems that arise from our divergent convictions; and we usually find ourselves richer for our differences. In most if not all of our Monthly Meetings will be found, successfully co-existing, persons as far apart in religious vocabulary and practice as there are anywhere in the Yearly Meeting. Yet these Friends worship together every Sunday, and share nourishment for their spiritual life. Such association is beneficial and even necessary.

Friends in our Yearly Meeting are clear on certain principles which are so basic and essential that we tend to take them for granted and forget that they are essential, and probably the only essentials. We all are clear that religion is a matter of inward, immediate experience. We all acknowledge the guidance of the Inner Light—the Christ within—God's direct, continuing revelation. All our insights are subject to testing by the insight of the group, by history and tradition, and by the Bible and the whole literature of religion. All the Meetings for Worship of our Monthly Meetings aspire to openness to God's communication directly with every person. Worship is primarily on the basis of expectant waiting upon the Spirit, a communion with God in which mediators or symbols are not necessary. We are all clear that faith is directly expressed in our daily living. We all seek to move towards goals of human welfare, equality, and peace.

We have a profound, often-tested, durable respect for each individual's affirmation of his own religious experience, which must be judged not only by his words but also by his life. From the stimulus of dissimilarity new insights often arise. Each Friend must, as always, work out for himself his own understanding of religion; and each Monthly Meeting must, as always, fit its practice to its own situation and the needs of its members.

(Our Yearly Meeting now uses language more inclusive than this final paragraph.)

Prepared by the “Committee of Ten,” Robert C. Clark, Edmund D. Cronon, W. Herbert Brown, Bliss Forbush, Mary E. Hopkins, Elizabeth E. Haviland, Sherwood W. Doughman, Eleanor B. Webb, John M. Sexton, and Theodate W. Souder.