

Reflections on Piedmont Friends Fellowship becoming a Yearly Meeting and Association

Friends met together in worship to seek guidance concerning the future of Piedmont Friends Fellowship considering the concern expressed by some Friends that PFF become a Yearly Meeting and Association. During the time spent together, several themes and continuing questions arose as Friends shared worship.

1. Unifying force – Leading toward unity

Friends recalled the beginnings of PFF in the early 1970s as a uniting force bringing together meetings across a variety of Yearly Meetings. Many Friends spoke of their hopes that our searching together would continue in the same spirit bringing new opportunities for inclusion and service. Caution was advised by some Friends sharing that if a new structure somehow led us to more exclusive relationships that the changes might be divisive leading to fragmentation. Other Friends spoke of their yearning for a direct connection to a broader community of Friends. It was suggested that such structure might build bridges among Yearly Meetings allowing them to meet in tandem and address some concerns together. Some suggested such an expansion of the organization would grow another layer of relationship. Friends agreed that there is virtue in our fellowship as it stands but do we on the other hand seek more than fellowship.

Questions:

What is Piedmont Friends Fellowship (PFF)? What if PFF were not here? What is God calling us to that is not already in place? What structure? How much structure?

2. Longing for discipline and structure

Some Friends shared their longing for discipline and structure. Suggesting that the organization not be prescriptive but rather allow meetings to do what they believe, Friends hoped to develop a helpful process for threshing with sensitivity to thoughts and ideas. Some Friends suggested that these changes in structure might offer an opening for more opportunities rather than a closing of possibilities. Maybe the unity we now find in our social gathering would be promoted by becoming a Yearly Meeting. While members of some meetings spoke of their longing for affiliation to a Yearly Meeting directly linked to Friends General Conference (FGC), other Friends shared that their meetings were not clear as to their calling in this matter. Others shared that their meeting feels no need for affiliation with a Yearly Meeting but rather cherish the relationships in PFF. Some felt that with a Yearly Meeting and Association model nothing need change for those who wish to remain part of the group as a fellowship (association). Friends suggested that what we are seeking is not form over substance but rather how we can best draw from our faith community.

Questions:

What tasks would be required of the Yearly meeting – development of Faith and Practice, Queries, recording of ministers? Who will make decisions - Yearly Meeting, Association, and/or individual members of the Association as they participate in Yearly Meeting business? Would the structure be based on a representative meeting or committees? What canst thou say?

3. Protecting our energies

Friends felt a concern for the best use of our energies. Several spoke of the work necessary to build a new structure for our community. Friends felt intention, planning, energy, and time will all be required. Flexibility will certainly be needed throughout the process. What we do must not be driven by fear but rather in the joy of new possibility.

Questions:

If dual membership, would it require doing tasks twice – answering queries, spiritual condition reports? Do we

have the energy to create something new? Or is PFF now what we have the energy for at this time?

4. Concern for Young Friends

Many Friends spoke of their concern that our children and young Friends are not being served. At this time, it is difficult to meet their needs. We need to find ways to listen to their ideas and provide opportunities for like-minded young Friends to be together. Such opportunities now require traveling great distances limiting the participation by some young Friends. Friends offered their thanks to Durham Friends Meeting for organizing and providing leadership for the young Friends program at the last several retreats.

Questions:

Are we going to create something for our Young Friends (teens) that will give them access to other Young Friends without having to travel great distances? How will we listen to their concerns?