Meeting minutes for February 26, 2017

Attendees: Cleone J., Sandi & Matt W., Phyllis B., Don & Ruth P., Gretchen R., Tom & Brenda P., Cathy & Rob K., Toni & Rob W., Sharon & Ken A., Bob & Ida H., Dianne B., Jan & Dan H., Doug M., Linda A., Ollie & Karen B., Arden K., Johann & Theresa S., Camille R., Margie H., Garridan R., Trey D., Bonnie K., Dave S.

Meeting opened with prayer

Christian Ed – The committee brought up concerns in how we can meet our education needs into the future, especially with respect to children. Two people are taking care of about half our Children Church sessions, but filling the remainder is a struggle – a couple of calls for assistance has not brought out many volunteers. There is consideration to narrow the age of children served, or only occasionally providing Children’s Church. VBS is looking for assistance in leadership. It would be great to supplement our adult offerings as well, but the current focus is determining the best way to serve our children.

Yearly Meeting Update – The Administrative Council of the Northwest Yearly Meeting has announced the start of a process of dividing NWYM into two separate Yearly Meetings. The written announcement from NWYM was included in the minutes packet for review. The division will be along the lines of how scriptural authority is understood and its implications and influence on Faith and Practice. Local churches being “welcoming and affirming” of same sex individuals was the starting crack that brought this division to light several years ago. NWYM estimates that the division will be completed in 18 months.

A history was given of what led NWYM to this point, as well as a review of Cherry Grove’s discernment and input to NWYM over the years. It was also stated that we would not be deciding Cherry Grove’s path forward regarding the division during this meeting, due to the great uncertainty of the final results of this process – it is premature to make a decision when the specifics of the decision are unknown. The floor was then opened to questions regarding process, as well as encouraging people to speak regarding the concerns, grief, and heartbreak of this situation.

Clarity was requested regarding the understanding of scriptural authority, as many understood the question before us to just be regarding acceptance of same-sex relationships. Arden explained that the struggle is 3-fold, one leading to the other.

* First, there is a difference in approach to Scripture – How is it inspired, how it’s interpreted, and its place in defining the faith. He gave an image of a three-legged stool representing the supports of faith, where the legs represented the inspiration of the Spirit, the Scripture as the Word of God, and the historical interpretation of the Church regarding faith. Missing one, and the supports will become wobbly and fall. Arden gave a specific example (separate from the same-sex issue) from within NWYM where pastors have expressed understandings of faith not in agreement with scripture or church history, using inspiration as the sole support for the position. The scale of the true issue facing NWYM thus described surprised many in attendance.
* Second, there is a difference in how Scripture influences the Faith and Practice of the denomination. For some, Faith and Practice will be seen as prescribing specific regulations in accordance with Scripture. For others, Faith and Practice will be seen as descriptive of general concepts but be less binding, in accordance with their understanding of Scripture.
* Third, there is the difference in understanding and interpreting Scripture, and Faith and Practice, around the subject of Human Sexuality, specifically the subject of same-sex relationships.

A question was asked regarding the process NWYM is taking over the next 18 months. A group of individuals, including individuals known to be on both sides of the division, are beginning to meet to discuss and define the process going forward. It is assumed that separate Faith and Practices will be written for each group – who is to do this and when is not currently known. There are many options going forward, as there are independent Quaker meetings/churches within the area on both sides of the division, as well as nearby Yearly Meetings local churches/meetings could join with. Additionally, there is the option of meetings/churches remaining independent. In short, there are a lot of possible paths. The current NWYM Superintendent, Retha McCutcheon, is taking the lead in setting up this process and is taking great care to be fair to those throughout the current Yearly Meeting. It was noted that throughout the years-long process that has led to the decision to split there has been representation from both sides of the divide. Every decision made has had representation and has been made in Unity from both sides, with sadness and despair being the frequent emotion with the decisions – not happiness or gloating.

A question arose regarding where there might be fear within the congregation over this decision and the possible future of Cherry Grove through this process. People spoke from their hearts about how the same-sex relationships issue has affected them personally, and where it might affect them going forward. Some examples were concern of being coerced to support something they don’t believe, concern of bringing gay or lesbian friends to Cherry Grove who may differ with our Faith and Practice (or how we express it), and concern for one who grew up in and is loved by our congregation who now understands themselves to be a lesbian and may register Cherry Grove as rejecting her. Many spoke of where this issue may create division within their families and groups of friends, not just within the Cherry Grove congregation.

Meeting closed with a prayer for love among us, and peace throughout the process before us at Cherry Grove and NWYM.

Closed in prayer – Rob W.

Next meeting will be April 9, 2017