

July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012

TO: IYM Reconfiguration Task Force

RE: IYM Reconfiguration Feedback from Whitewater Monthly Meeting (First Friends Richmond)

Whitewater Monthly Meeting, facilitated by our Ministry and Oversight Commission, has met and discussed the Indiana Yearly Meeting Reconfiguration numerous times over the past year. We have read the correspondence from the Taskforce with great interest and care. We have also read and considered many of the approved minutes and letters from various monthly meetings across Indiana Yearly Meeting on this matter. Members from our meeting have attended the called Representative Councils and we note with gratitude the work of the Taskforce, which includes a member from our meeting, over these past two years. At the conclusion of this lengthy and time consuming process, Whitewater Monthly Meeting has become clear and approved the following minute during our meeting for business on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

As members of the Religious Society of Friends, we are called, first and foremost, to follow the leadings of God. There is a long history among Friends demonstrating the importance of clearness in matters of corporate decision-making. On issues of great significance, Friends have always been led by “God’s time” rather than by the often rushed and shortsighted clock of our world. We note that the founding of our meeting (First Friends) pre-dates Indiana statehood. We are also the parent Meeting for Indiana Yearly Meeting and accordingly we sense the great historical weight of this matter for First Friends, for Indiana Yearly Meeting, and for the wider Religious Society of Friends.

We believe that we are not being led to a reconfiguration of Indiana Yearly Meeting. This is not God’s will nor does it appear to be the will of at least several other monthly Meetings. We feel no pull, no Spirit-led calling, no way opening that leads us to the conclusion that God wishes for the Yearly Meeting to split in this way.

Further, we believe strongly that there is much confusion, lack of clarity, and discomfort amongst monthly meetings and within the Yearly Meeting itself around the matter of homosexuality and religious authority. In fact, we have experienced this in painful and challenging ways in our own Meeting. This leads us to the clear conclusion that the Yearly Meeting needs to sit with these issues with more patience and prayer and wait for God’s leading and a broader and deeper sense of clearness from the membership as to a way forward.

The Society of Friends is not the first such body to wrestle with these difficult issues and we are certain we will not be the last. We believe God calls on us to sit at the table together—regardless of our disagreements. We believe that what unites us is much stronger than what divides us. Quakers have long been the model of peaceful

resolution to conflict and have displayed a patient and steadfast ability to work through difficulties with prayerful consultation and deep listening. To split now, during this challenging time, would de-value and dishonor this historical legacy.

You have asked us to declare what kind of Meeting we self-identify with ("Yearly Meeting A" or "Yearly Meeting B") as it relates to matters of authority and scripture. We have members at First Friends who believe that "Yearly Meeting A" is fully in conformity with our current Faith and Practice and other members who believe that "Yearly Meeting B" is fully in conformity with our current Faith and Practice. This may be confusing and call for prayerful attention in the future, but it is truthful and we should recognize that fact.

While many in our Meeting readily identify with the characteristics and attributes listed under "Yearly Meeting A," others identify readily with elements of "Yearly Meeting B." We are by no means a homogenous and single-minded faith community. This diversity, we believe, has been a great and longstanding strength at First Friends. We see the proposed division as a false choice and fear it may even force an internal split within our own Meeting. It is as if you are asking a parent to choose one child over another. These are not Spirit-led choices. We are all God's children.

We note with gratitude the hard work of the Taskforce but we faithfully and resolutely reject the suggested path forward. Instead, we ask that the Yearly Meeting do what Quakers have done since the time of George Fox when matters of great importance are not clear. Wait. Pray. Talk. Listen. As Way opens, as God leads, we will come to the Righteous path by walking it patiently together.