

Equality¹

"God does not show favoritism."²

"And God hath put no such difference between the Male and Female as men would make."³

"To consider mankind otherwise than brethren, to think favors are peculiar to one nation and exclude others, plainly supposes a darkness in the understanding. For as God's love is universal, so where the mind is sufficiently influenced by it, it begets a likeness of itself and the heart is enlarged towards all men."⁴

"The roots of racial prejudice lie deep within us, and in seeking a solution to the evil results of racial tensions we need to search our own hearts. Our belief in the significance of every individual in the sight of God and his need for an abundant life can guide us even when we shrink before the vastness of the problem."⁵

Early Friends based their treatment of others on scripture and continuing revelation. In the Bible, they saw that God created and cares for all humans equally. Continuing revelation led Quakers to see that believing in spiritual equality carries implications for how we live our outward lives.

There is that of God in all people, and we believe each person has equal access to the divine. This fundamental belief led Friends to appreciate women's spiritual gifts and to reject practices designed to maintain distinctions among social classes. Friends came to recognize that no one could justly hold another in slavery. We are also coming to realize how such unjust inequities are maintained by an unequal distribution of wealth and resources – an inequality that many Friends benefit from. Living out the testimonies requires re-examination in each era. We believe humble, faithful discernment in community will reveal what love requires of us.

In recent decades Friends have also come to reject other forms of inequality. In particular, many straight Friends stood with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer Friends in calling for full equality for people of all gender identities and sexual orientations, and for the elimination of legal barriers to full equality.

Most Friends in OVYM have benefited from unearned, often unacknowledged and unrecognized privileges. It is easy to be lulled into believing racism and unearned privilege have been overcome. This can render Friends oblivious to the ways such attitudes influence behavior. Facing these uncomfortable realities and assumptions can reveal hidden, unfair, and harmful biases.

To be faithful, Friends must be willing to confront anything in our lives, in our religious society, and in the surrounding culture that unjustly holds one person up and holds another back. We need to live up to our understanding that all are equally children of God. Our calling as Friends is to seek more Light in ourselves and others and let that guide us in testifying to equality by our lives.

¹ Approved in OVYM Sessions, Jul 31, 2016

² Romans 2:11

³ Margaret Fell, Women's Speaking Justified, 1666

⁴ John Woolman, Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes, 1754

⁵ 1952 Proceedings of London Yearly Meeting