

A Short History of BYM

How did Baltimore Yearly Meeting originate?

In 1672, prior to leaving the colonies for his home in England, John Burnyeat called for a “General Meeting” to be held at West River, Maryland. George Fox was able to reach Maryland (from the West Indies) in time to attend this meeting. In 1673 the name was changed to Maryland Yearly Meeting (this meeting was called by George Fox, who was still in the Colonies). In 1790, its name changed once more to “The Yearly Meeting of Friends held in Baltimore for the Western-shore of Maryland and the Adjacent Parts of Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Bliss Forbush, *A History of Baltimore Yearly Meeting of Friends* (Sandy Spring: Baltimore Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1972), 1-13.

A brief, brief synopsis of “the split.”

In BYM, the Hicksites were the overwhelming majority. At the annual sessions held in 1828, the presiding clerk, Philip E. Thomas, read epistles from liberal meetings up North, and George Jones, an English Friend left the facing bench, inviting others to leave the Meeting with him. A few did. But fifty-one of the fifty-three representatives stayed.

The clerk of the annual sessions (Hicksite) read the following statement before the end of the schismatic Yearly Meeting sessions, in effect, stating that the Hicksites were holding to the historic Quaker testimonies:

Believing, as we do, that each Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends, constitutes of itself a body possessing not less of right than, from necessity, all the powers of self-government, we neither claim the right to control the judgment, nor to animadvert upon the proceedings of others...nor can we...recognize the right, or the power, in them, to control, or prescribe rules for our conduct. This meeting has not considered itself called upon to advance any new principles of faith...to explain, or expound those principles which have constituted the bond of union among its members, since the first Establishment of the Society; under a belief that these principles are well known, not only to our members, but to the well informed portion of all Christian denominations.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting (Orthodox) met in an old schoolhouse and called themselves “The Yearly Meeting of Friends Held in Baltimore for the Western Shore of Maryland and the Adjacent Parts of Pennsylvania and Virginia *in Unity with the Ancient Yearly Meetings of Friends* (italics added). They, too, felt they were worshiping in the manner of Friends, and that they were faithful in inviting Christ into their midst in a way the Hicksites did not. In keeping to what they saw as faithfulness to Friends’ Testimonies, BYM (Orthodox) meetings never became pastoral as was found in the Midwest.

Forbush, *History of BYM*, 66.

The Monthly Meetings of Each Yearly Meeting (Forbush, 80, 94)

Orthodox Meetings

Ashton
Baltimore (Homewood)
[Bethel] (transferred to North
Carolina Yearly Mtg {NCYM},
1967)
[Black Creek]
[Corinth] (xferred to NCYM, 1967)
[Somerton]

Deer Creek, Md.

Dunnings Creek

Menallen

Bellefonte
Curwensville
Goose Creek
Hopewell
Montgomery County
Patuxent
Richmond
Washington (Irving St.)

Hicksite Meetings

Baltimore Quarter (Md.)

Baltimore (Park St., later Stony Run)
Gunpowder
Little Falls
Sandy Spring

Nottingham (Pa.)

Deer Creek, Md.
Little Britain
Nottingham

Centre Quarter (Pa.)

Dunnings Creek
Centre
West Branch

Warrington Quarter (Va.)

Warrington
Pipe Creek
Menallen

Fairfax Quarter (Va.)

Alexandria
Fairfax
Goose Creek
Hopewell
Prairie Grove, Iowa

When did the two Meetings re-unite?

Joint sessions of the Baltimore Yearly Meetings were first conducted in 1951 in the Hicksite's new building on Charles St. (Stony Run). J. Harold Passmore, Stony Run, and Edward F. Raifor, Homewood, would alternate clerking, each often repeating the exact same business. But the history of healing goes back probably to the 1930s, as the Young Friends from both Yearly Meetings of the day began interacting. Young Friends from both YMs camped together at Camp Kewadin; they began participating jointly in a worship group. In 1946, a new Meetinghouse was built on the property of Friends School of Baltimore, very close to the Homewood (Orthodox) meetinghouse. By 1949, when the building was completed, the two meetings were friendly neighbors. The two YMs began consolidating some committees, such as the Social Order Committee (Homewood) and the Social

Service Committee (Stony Run). Both YMs began holding their sessions at Western Maryland College (later renamed McDaniel College). Eating together, having some sessions together, some apart, gave the emerging community a chance to build.

In 1963, a “Committee of Ten” (five members from each YM) was appointed. Meeting in Sandy Spring at the home of the Farquhars, their first task was to merge two very distinct *Faith & Practices*. Sam Legg (Hicksite) recalls that at the 1st meeting, someone asked what was their committee’s goal. “Union,” Sam replied. Edna Goodwin (Orthodox) said, “It is not.” When it appeared that an impasse had been reached before the committee had even begun their work, someone (Sam could not recall who) came up with the idea that the two meetings did not need to unite, but could consolidate. Each could keep its own *Faith & Practice*. The two yearly meetings finally consolidated in 1968. In 1988, twenty years later, they were finally able to approve a united *Faith & Practice*.

The Society of Friends has no formal creed. Over the years Friends have made many attempts to set down the nature of their faith. Some of these statements, like the letter of George Fox to the Governor of Barbados in the 17th century or the Richmond Declaration drawn up by one group of Friends in the late 19th, have been grounded in Christian orthodoxy. Others, like the writings of Isaac Penington in the 17th century or of Thomas Kelly in the 20th, have a close kinship with the insights of mystics of many ages and many religious traditions. None speaks for all Friends or for all times. We are a religious fellowship based on common religious ideals and experiences rather than on creed or liturgy.

Each person must prayerfully seek individual guidance and must follow the Light found within. Each will be helped by studying the developing interpretations of God in the Bible and the ideas of the great spiritual leaders of all faiths. Especially will help be found as one ponders the life and teaching of Jesus.

All seekers who in spirit and in truth try to find and follow the will of God and who are in sympathy with the principles and practices of Friends, we welcome to our fellowship.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting, *Faith & Practice*, vi.

When and why did Baltimore Yearly Meeting join FUM?

Membership in the two umbrella organizations, FUM and FGC, became the next sticking point in the consolidation. It was ultimately decided that each Monthly Meeting could choose how they wished to fund the two organizations. Some chose 50/50%, some would only fund one, at 100%. And some Meetings, in true ecumenical spirit, decided to fund each equally at 100%. From the 1990s until the controversy over the personnel policy in 2003, BYM funded each group fully.