Dear Friends of Baltimore Yearly Meeting,

At the 2013 Annual Session, BYM concluded a 10-year process of revision of our Faith and Practice by discerning that we were not in unity with the 2013 draft revision that had been presented to us. Apparently, that situation arose in part from a lack of clarity and agreement about the revision process, which led, unfortunately, to disunity. Homewood Friends are concerned that BYM is again embarking on revision of our Faith and Practice with lack of clarity and agreement. Good process is essential to creating a document that expresses a unified understanding of our faith and practice.

Our concern has two principal aspects.

First, the new BYM Faith and Practice Revision Committee has announced that it “intends to work from the 2013 [draft] as a base and solicit new insights from the Local Meetings” (I2014-54). That announced plan is inconsistent with the explicit direction of the minute, Y2013-56, which created the committee and expressed the careful discernment of the BYM community gathered in the 2013 Annual Sessions: “That Committee will bring forward revisions to our existing [1988] Faith and Practice in segments small enough for meaningful discussion and discernment.” It is not in good order to begin the revision process with a step that contradicts the unified understanding of the Yearly Meeting; it diverts us from the path to unity.

Following is an excerpt from BYM minute Y2013-56:

We have a current Faith and Practice. It is the 1988 version, as revised in 2001. This stands as our Faith and Practice until we reach unity to revise or replace it. A proposed new Faith and Practice (…the “2013 draft”) has been brought before us. …We do not have unity to adopt this 2013 Faith and Practice as it stands now.

This lack of unity has two parts:

1. Substance: While some Friends whole-heartedly endorse the contents of the 2013 Faith and Practice, others cannot unite with many parts of it.

2. Process: Many Friends feel overwhelmed by the task before us, finding it impossible to have meaningful discernment on so large a document all at once. Especially with regard to matters at the core of our Faith, these Friends suggest the best process would be for discernment involving meaningful discussions on manageable amounts of material over the course of years.

Thus we cannot adopt the 2013 draft Faith and Practice as presented, and our 1988 Faith and Practice (as revised in 2001) stands as our current Faith and Practice …. We do not want to discard the 2013 draft. We would like to make it available to Friends as a resource, as long as it is clear to all that is has not been adopted as our Faith and Practice.

We ask Nominating Committee to bring forward to us by next Annual Session a new Faith and Practice Revision Committee according to our Manual of Procedure. That Committee will bring forward revisions to our existing Faith and Practice in segments small enough for meaningful discussion and discernment. The 2013 draft will be a resource for this Committee.
Second, it is our sense that the defined process to revise our Faith and Practice, as outlined in our Manual of Procedure, is not sufficient to meet the needs of the current situation and to serve as guidance to the BYM Faith and Practice Revision Committee. Our Manual of Procedure states the following:

The Faith and Practice Revision Committee consists of at least three persons nominated by the Nominating Committee and appointed by the Yearly Meeting. These persons are appointed only when proposed revisions have been presented in writing to the Yearly Meeting. The same provisions regarding rotation of members and term limits apply as for other standing committees. When no revisions are before the Committee and the Committee has completed all its responsibilities, the Yearly Meeting releases these persons from their appointment to this Committee.

The Committee receives proposed changes and circulates proposed revisions to all the Monthly and Quarterly Meetings in Baltimore Yearly Meeting with sufficient time that Monthly Meetings may prepare comments for a Quarterly Meeting session before Yearly Meeting. The Committee may help prepare proposed changes to ensure clarity and consistency with other sections of Faith and Practice. It is responsible for ensuring that changes approved by the Yearly Meeting are incorporated into Faith and Practice. Printing and distribution of Faith and Practice or of its revised sections are to be coordinated with the Supervisory Committee.

The Manual addresses what to do when proposed revisions have been brought to the Yearly Meeting; it does not describe a process to generate revisions for the existing Faith and Practice. Minute Y2013-56 from Annual Session calls for institution of a Faith and Practice Revision Committee to bring forward proposed revisions to our existing (1988) Faith and Practice, without guidance on how to generate those revisions. The question of reconciling those two documents has not been considered or resolved by the BYM community as a body.

Friends of Homewood Meeting believe that the BYM community's Spirit-led discernment as documented in the Y2013-56 minute should be honored, and that any proposed changes to that decision as minuted should be explicitly presented for discernment by the gathered BYM community in Annual Session. We also believe that the question of how initial draft revisions will be generated should be resolved by that gathered community, and that the Manual of Procedure should be amended to allow for the proper implementation of the Yearly Meeting's decision. We request that these matters be put on the business agenda for the 2015 Annual Sessions. We suggest that this situation may also be a call to clarify how committees should proceed when faced with apparently contradictory directives or insufficient guidance from the Yearly Meeting.

We bring forward this concern in a spirit of love for our BYM community.

Approved in Monthly Meeting for Business, 5/3/2015.
Baltimore Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, Homewood
George Amoss and Louise Hopkins, co-clerks