**Conversations that can help us understand each other and**

**maintain Unity among Friends**

Wanda Coffin Baker reminded us in Baltimore Yearly Meeting that Quakerism is an experiential faith. This is why, she told us, that Friends can get in a broil when we try to talk to each other theologically. Friends have spread our message across different cultures for over four centuries. In order to understand and accept Quaker Christianity, each culture and time had to adopt expressions of faith and practice that resonated with its own life-giving experiences and God-centered aspirations. In order for Quaker Christianity to remain a living faith and practice, this process must continue is each unique time and space. But it must be expressed in a way that can be heard by other Friends.

Now that communication is relatively easy and quick, misunderstandings and polarization follow almost as quickly. As global Friends, we have a vast treasure of faith experiences—times when God has intervened in our individual and community lives and brought us to a holy place beyond our imagination. But we hold these treasure troves in clay jars. A decade or so ago, our Young Adult Friends recognized this and called for “theological hospitality” among our different factions. In remembering what Friend Wanda told us, I think the term is too narrow. Perhaps “spiritual hospitality” or “Friendly Spiritual Hospitality.

My doctorate is in the social use of language and cultural anthropology. I am good at spotting the cracks in a group’s foundation and seeing the problems that can arise. I’m skilled in diagnosing, but not in prescribing preventative care. Actually, I don’t even try very hard because I think for the group to agree to preventive care, it needs to take an active role in creating it. I have become convinced we need to find a way to share and receive our spiritual experiences and Divine encounters. I believe it is important to start now, rather than wait until we have a crisis. We could allow an hour at every meeting for listening and sharing. A start could be as simple as what kind of toothpaste do you use and why. Below is a suggested list, not a comprehensive list, of differences that can lead to conflict.

Georgia Fuller, Baltimore Yearly Meeting

Representative to the FUM General Board

Faith- mostly theological differences

**Trinity**

Western and Eastern Christianity still have been different understandings

Does a focus on the Trinity diminish the divinity of Jesus Christ?

**Physical baptism and communion**

Heresy or Heritage?

**What is salvation?**

What is the nature of sin and evil? Of perfection?

**The Light**

The Inward Light (the Light **in** us but **of God**. God’s gift to us)

Personal Conscience or Enlightenment

**Interpreting the Bible**

**Incarnation**

**Richmond Declaration**

**Faith and Science**

Practice

**Conduct of worship**

Programmed, not programmed; Quiet or Lively

**Financial stewardship**

Transparency and accountability

Are some donations “tainted” and therefore not acceptable?

**Education/Catechism/Service**

What must a person do to become a member?

What are the privileges and obligations of membership?

**Male circumcision**

Is it a medical/health procedure, a sacred ritual, or a rite of passage for boys?

If it is a rite of passage for boys, is there be a rite of passage for girls?

**Ministry**

How is it recognized?

How is it supported?

**Praying**

In tongues?

Vocally, to whom? In Whose name?

**Authority**

**Evangelism**

Doctrinal, Incarnational, or Friendship evangelism?

**Peace**

Individual practice, community expectations, community service?

Responses to personal violence; responses to governmental violence

**Equality**

Repairing injustice; Restorative justice

Ethics

**Responsibilities**

To each other; to God’s Creation

**Domestic Violence**

Wife beating; child beating

**Alcohol and other** **addictions**

**Sexual ethics**

Is human sexuality a gift or a temptation/test?

What to do when a sexual predator comes to worship?

**Reproductive Health**