

A Call for an inclusive and diverse Society of Friends

Orange County Friends Meeting belongs to the Religious Society of Friends, a historically Protestant denomination commonly called Quakers. We have always been “mostly white.” We recognize that we have not clearly seen the implications of this fact. We call upon ourselves to change.

We are heirs to a long history of opposition to slavery and oppression. We profess a testimony of Equality that calls us to answer that of God in everyone, including persons from different stations, life experiences, sexual orientations, religious persuasions and ethnic origin and skin color. We bear witness against injustice and inequality wherever it exists.

Nevertheless, unprogrammed Quaker meetings in the United States, like ours, have always been “mostly white.” Our attitudes and actions towards racial and ethnic minorities have not always been consistent with our testimonies. Some Quakers owned slaves from their earliest days until at least 1807¹. In the 17th century leaders of our Society urged Friends to give religious instruction to their slaves but did not say anything about freeing them.² In the 18th century, meeting houses would “allot some suitable places for [Negroes] to sit.”³ Black attenders to our meetings then did not feel welcome, and perhaps they still don’t feel welcome. Quaker schools were not necessarily integrated before the middle of the 20th century⁴. Meanwhile, in spite of our historical opposition to slavery and racial oppression, Quakers have enjoyed the benefits of white privilege and white prosperity.

We therefore call upon ourselves as Friends to recognize the biases that many of us still hold and to accept the fact that we benefit from membership in a white society. We call on Quakers to uproot and dismantle systems that support white privilege, white dominance, and white wealth. We charge ourselves with the task of identifying and removing all that perpetuates our identification as a “mostly white” religious body. We call for an inclusive and diverse Society of Friends that encourages individual and collective striving towards lives of peace, integrity, community, and equality for every person on the planet.

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Orange County Friends Meeting
Lynn Gazis-Sax, Clerk of the Meeting

¹ For example, Johns Hopkins’ Quaker father freed his slaves in 1807, *Wikipedia* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johns_Hopkins seen 3 July 2020, which quotes Helen Hopkins Thom, *Johns Hopkins: A Silhouette*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1929).

² Henry Cadbury, *Negro Membership in the Society of Friends*, (Journal of Negro History).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ In 1844, Sarah Douglass, a Black Quaker educator, said that many blacks would attend Quaker meeting if they were not asked to sit on the segregated back bench, and treated with coldness. A 1947 article in *Friends Journal* by Henry J. Cadbury listed 10 Quaker Schools in the United State that had desegregated between 1927 and 1947. See Margaret Hope Bacon, *Sarah Douglass and Racial Prejudice within the Society of Friends*, A Pendle Hill Lecture given 18 June 2012, available at <https://fgcqualers.org/resources/sarah-douglas-and-racial-prejudice-within-religious-society-friends>, seen on 3 July 2020.