

Thoughts on Healing and Diversity

By Margaret Clayton Chapman

1955, the year when Canadian Yearly Meeting was formed, was not an easy one for some Friends.

I was ten years old and a member of Norwich Monthly Meeting in Ontario. My parents had taken me to meeting at Newmarket, Ontario, since 1946.

On the anniversary of the formation of Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) I am thinking not only of the brave and loving folk who felt led to unite but also of some meetings that did not see their way clear to join. When an organisation is formed in spite of the protests of some potential participants, it is well to observe that something has been lost because of their withdrawal.

Two names I still recall are Stan and Claire VanEvery. They were from a meeting in the area of Niagara Falls with the name of Pelham Monthly Meeting. From what I overheard the adults saying, I can imagine them urging, objecting and voicing the conviction that Friends were not ready to be reunited. In the end, CYM became a reality and their meeting decided not to be part of it. Another pastoral (what would be Friends United Meeting now) meeting near Norwich called Beaconsfield also did not join. Beaconsfield Meeting has since been laid down.

In 1955 there were three Canadian meetings in the Conservative branch: Norwich, Yonge Street and Halcyonia. The latter did not join CYM. Halcyonia was — and is — a rural meeting near Borden, Saskatchewan. Across the miles, ties of deep friendship have existed between Norwich and Borden Friends. In fact, one Norwich woman, Hannah Pollard, married Joshua Wake and moved to his farm near Borden. Hannah and Joshua attended the sessions of Yearly Meeting in 1955.

Later on, Hannah wrote to dear ones in Norwich: “... I tend to feel sorry for [my parents’] generation under the painful memories of the Quaker separation

and as a result not so free to have fun and joy. Our efforts at union, which supposedly would discover (fun and joy) [*sic*] were not so successful since organisation will not take the place of Christ’s healing spirit.”

Another fragment of her letter contains reference to her own disappointment in her efforts: “... to help Canadian Friends to unite and then my distress when I found in 1952 [*sic*] that I, having become one of Borden, would no longer be in the same camp as Norwich.”

Norwich Meeting’s decision to join CYM might have been something like what my father said to me in a different context. He voiced the hope that I would be able to influence my friend toward faith in Jesus by my example. In other words my thought is that they hoped to have this kind of influence in the new yearly meeting in Canada.

Yonge Street Meeting at Newmarket was in a position to guide and assist in various ways. Elmer and Elma Starr lived close to the site of Yearly Meeting. It was still held at Pickering College every year until 1970. I recall Elmer speaking in a Meeting for Worship. Elma was affectionate and willing to serve in many ways.

In this article I have used the term “Conservative” to refer to one branch of Friends in North America. Here is a quotation from the Faith and Practice of North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative:

Conservative Friends feel it is right “to maintain the doctrines of the immediate and perceptible guidance of the Holy Spirit, of the leadership of Christ over all things to His Church, and the waiting worship and inspirational ministry which are, and must ever be, the outgrowth of these doctrines.” 🌹

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ADVICES AND QUERIES #16: Do you welcome the diversity of culture, language and expressions of faith in our yearly meeting and in the world community of Friends? Seek to increase your understanding and to gain from this rich heritage and wide range of spiritual insights. Uphold your own and other yearly meetings in your prayers.