

A Statement of Conscience

Ithaca Meeting

New York Yearly Meeting

March 2015

We write on behalf of the Ithaca Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). What follows draws from a statement from the New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. We stand with those who speak out against injustice and are working to bring change to a broken criminal justice system.

We recognize that policing is sometimes difficult and dangerous work and are grateful for those who undertake it in service to our communities. We all suffer with any loss of life in law enforcement encounters. It is perhaps understandable that the stress of the work together with fear of the unknown can cause any of us to overreact. But fear is not the only factor at work here.

Our faith and shared human history lead us to believe that violence—whether arising out of fear, an imbalance of power, racism or vengeance—will never take us to a path of justice and healing. Furthermore, we believe that when we do violence to others we also do violence to ourselves. We seek to work for a civil society that affirms the presence of God within each and all of us without exception.

Whether we are poor, homeless, a police officer, lawyer, doctor, gas station attendant, waitress, or unemployed, our lives matter. We know this truth through the practice of our faith, in which we experience the spark of the Divine present in each of us. We know all persons to be equally worthy of love, respect, and justice. Tragically, fifty years after they were spoken, the words of famed civil rights organizer Ella Baker still apply: "Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons, becomes as important to the rest of the country as the killing of a white mother's son, we who believe in freedom cannot rest until this happens." When we do not live out this truth, each of us is harmed, all of us are damaged.

But our civil society is constructed in such a way that the lives of people of color matter less than white lives. This condition extends beyond policing into education, the media, the system of mass incarceration, housing patterns, employment, and virtually every aspect of life in the United States, including its faith communities. Therefore, we call for both recognition and remedy of this condition and we call upon civil authorities to take leadership in bringing this about. We call upon all people of faith, ourselves included, to understand how we may be complicit in a system that extends privileges to people identified as white while denying the same to those identified as people of color.

It is clearly in the interest of our shared humanity and our common spiritual condition to change these circumstances. It is in our material, economic, and social interests to do so as well. This is not easy work. But we pray the burden of this work may be easier to bear

than the moral burden of settling back, once the furor subsides, into complacent acceptance of a system and a society that fail to affirm our most fundamental relationship to God and to one another.

This is first and foremost a call to individual action to join the groundswell of community response happening right here and now in Ithaca. We call for each of us to reach across the illusions of racial differences in each of our personal encounters – at work, in stores, and on the street - and respond in some personal and individual way to simply help someone else meet our common human needs. We call for each of us to participate in some form of the community discussions now underway, bringing open minds and hearts to listen and learn from others. We call for each of us to persist in holding our elected and appointed civil authorities accountable for their actions by helping vet policies and action plans and exercising the power of our votes. We call for each of us to challenge resistance to change found in all organizations and faith communities. There is no greater power for change than a growing number of individuals committed to helping each other to realize and act from Truth.

Karen Friedeborn; Elizabeth Koekosky; Marilyn Ray, Assistance Clerk; Tom Ruscitti; Antonia Saxon, Clerk; Shirley Way.

Approved at the March 2015 Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business.