The Radical Inclusiveness of North Pacific Yearly Meeting: Discussion Among Friends
(for Annual Session 2009 and beyond)

What does it mean that North Pacific Yearly Meeting characterizes itself as part of a "religious society" rather than a "church?"

How do Friends with diverse beliefs live out their spirituality together here?

What does this mean for us as individuals?

As meetings?

What are the benefits of this inclusiveness?

The drawbacks?

Are there boundaries to this inclusiveness?

How would these be drawn?

Some Background
(while you are welcome to consider these as part of today’s interest group that is not necessary. The discussion of radical inclusiveness will be ongoing and these quotations may help to inform it)

“The independent College Park Association of Friends created the opportunity for dual membership in separate religious organizations. This was the “unified” Quakerism that Joel Bean stubbornly maintained despite the separations in Iowa and the disownments in California. To be a unified meeting of all brands of Quakerism the CPAF had to be an independent or unaffiliated organization. Hicksite, Conservative or Orthodox, pastoral, un-programmed or non-member—they were all welcome. And unaffiliated as a unified association the CPAF was to remain until it was replaced by the Pacific Yearly Meeting in 1947.

"The San Jose Quakers: Evolution from 1866 to 1894" (p. 16)
Thomas M. King Paper for the Conference of Quaker Historians and Archivists June 21-22, 2002 Haverford College

"In a true community we will not choose our companions, for our choices are so often limited by self-serving motives. Instead, our companions will be given to us by grace. Often they will be persons who will upset our settled view of self and world. In fact, we might define true community as the place where the person you least want to live with always lives."

Parker Palmer
Faith and Practice, Britain Yearly Meeting

“Friends achieved a high degree of success in preserving their church in these years because they asserted the solidarity of the fellowship as a supreme value…As early as 1758 leading Friends began to believe that membership in their religious Society should be all but permanent, that the mutual love which held the church together should do so irrespective of differing opinions among the members, and that no one should be expected to abide by the Quaker testimonies more completely than his inner conviction required. This position, now held by most Friends, meant an end to disownment except for conduct universally condemned
as immoral, and the abandonment of the goal of uniformity in the collective demonstration of distinguishing Quaker beliefs before the world."

Sydney V. James
A People Among People p. 326
Harvard University Press, 1963

“If the Society of Friends has so sunk from its true position that it puts theological definitions and medieval thought above ‘the demonstration of the Spirit,’ I am as much without a home as thou art. I would never answer questions such as were put to thee, though I were a hundred times deprived of my membership.”

Rufus Jones
Letter to Joel Bean
October 18, 1898

“The independent meetings of Friends and the subject of membership were discussed from different angles by several members present. One of the leaders of our group suggested that the independent meetings might constitute themselves a united Society of Friends with a representative of each group carrying on correspondence. It would not be a new branch of the Society but rather a means through which various groups and branches could come closer together.”

Minutes
College Park Association of Friends
Fifth Month 4th, 1929

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS. At the start of the 18th century Friends began to speak of “our religious society” when corresponding with non-Quakers, such as in formal petitions to civil government. With the increased availability and use of printing, the name became formalized as the Religious Society of Friends so that by the 19th Century this was the normal title used by Quakers. While this is still the name used by many Friends, by the start of the 20th Century, evangelical Friends began to use Friends Church instead. [Margery Post Abbot]

Historical Dictionary of Friends (Quakers)
Margery Post Abbot, Mary Ellen Chjoike, Pink Dandelion, John William Oliver, Jr.
P 241

If you feel so led please send comments on the queries or quotations above to the Committee on the Discipline at qspiritt@gmail.com