

Minute 1 (Engaging Across Differences)

We are the children of God's new covenant. Abraham was promised that he would be the father of many peoples. Differences in culture and identity are to be celebrated. Diversity of culture actually increases our ability to understand God. Approach people outside your culture or faith group with the attitude that you will learn from them. Respond to the call of God as it appears in a diversity of cultures. Cultural competence is about respecting the dignity of all people. Respect the wisdom and insight of interpreters.

If we grow up different from our neighbors, we may assume that God approves of us more than them, so adults must explicitly teach otherwise. We care for each other regardless of ethnic or cultural differences, but this is not necessarily easy to do. Cultivate good will, mutual understanding, and equal opportunities for all people. To speak against equality is to speak against God.

Seek relationships with a diversity of people. We see God in our relationships with the community. This is one way God speaks. Diversity includes ideological diversity. If you know the truth and are correct, exposure to people with different ideas is no threat to you. You can hide from change by isolating yourself from all who are different. But if you are not open to change, you are sowing the seeds of war. To isolate yourself from others is to cut off your ability to learn from God.

We tend to be afraid of people who are different. Differences serve a useful purpose. Look kindly at your differences and love across all differences. To love each other is to love Christ. Appreciate differences among your friends and associates.

We are challenged by our different individual and group experiences of God and sometimes even enraged. It's human nature to feel jealous and angry when God loves people who aren't like us (and accepts and rewards them), but that's God's decision that we must accept. Even if it is extremely difficult, we must interact with people that our society says we shouldn't. To refuse to engage with people you disagree with is to refuse to influence history. If you think an idea is wrong, criticize the idea and not the person who said it. You cannot truly love God without also loving your sisters and brothers.

We can have the kingdom of God on earth and are called to pursue it. We cannot practice real spiritual life in isolation from others. To act upon a person is to act upon Christ. We can be in unity anywhere with any group of people listening deeply to the divine. We are quite different in how we approach faith, and that is because

differences enrich mutually dependent community. When more people participate in discernment, we all benefit.

When differences are seen as superiority, the result is hatred and fear. When we focus on which of several perspectives is correct, we become fractured. Instead, we need to focus on what unity we can sense. When our eyes are on God, our differences cannot get in the way.

Sometimes diversity is insurmountable in terms of understanding each other.

Sources	
1 John Australia Yearly Meeting Baltimore Yearly Meeting Britain Yearly Meeting Canadian Yearly Meeting Central and Southern Africa Yearly Meeting Evangelical Friends Church Eastern Region Evangelical Friends Church Southwest Region Friends Church North Carolina Fox's Epistles Indiana Yearly Meeting Intermountain Yearly Meeting Ireland Yearly Meeting	John New England Yearly Meeting New York Yearly Meeting No Cross, No Crown North Pacific Yearly Meeting Ohio Yearly Meeting (Conservative) Pacific Yearly Meeting Penington Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Romans South Central Yearly Meeting Switzerland Yearly Meeting Testament of Devotion Trail of Life Woolman's Journal

from The 2025 Swarthmore Lecture: A Testimony of Community
Emily Provance

<https://www.woodbrooke.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/A-Testimony-of-Community-Swarthmore-Lecture-2025-Letter-v.4-FINAL.pdf>