

Personnel Policy from Friends United Meeting (FUM), and Some Resultant Correspondence with Baltimore Yearly Meeting

In 1988, Friends United Meeting's General Board adopted a policy that has brought forth much reflection and discussion. In 2002, Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) wrote a minute in response to that policy, and there has been more discussion. Some of it follows; a more complete record is found at: <http://www.tni.net/~solomon/WFM/WFM.FUM.personnel.policy.html>.



October 1988; Policy, Friends United Meeting, General Board, Minute 88-GB-52: (a) We affirm the civil rights of all people to secular employment, housing, education and health care without regard to their sexual orientation. In particular, we condemn violence, whether verbal or physical, against homosexuals, and call for their full protection under the civil rights laws.

(b) We reaffirm our traditional testimonies of peace, simplicity, truth speaking, gender and racial equality, personal integrity, fidelity, chastity and community. We recognize that there is diversity among us on issues of sexuality. For the purpose of our corporate life together, we affirm our traditional testimony that sexual intercourse should be confined to the bonds of marriage, which we understand to be between one man and one woman.

(c) The lifestyle of volunteers under appointment to Quaker Volunteer Witness, regardless of sexual orientation, should be in accordance with these testimonies.



Baltimore Yearly Meeting 2002; Minute from the BYM Delegates to the FUM Triennial: We are distressed that FUM staff denied the Clerk of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, Lamar Matthew, the opportunity to serve as a 2002 Triennial worship-sharing leader because he is a gay man in a same-sex union. We regret that Friends United Meeting members were thereby denied the opportunity to experience, as

we have, Lamar's spiritual gifts of love, patience, and humor, his commitment to Christ, and his knowledge of Quaker history and practice. Our reflections on this matter in annual session have allowed us to understand the depths of our collective hurt and anger. Baltimore Yearly Meeting affirms with the Gospel of John that the Light of Christ is the true light that enlightens everyone. We understand FUM's Purpose Statement to be similarly inclusive: "Friends United Meeting commits itself to energize and equip Friends through the power of the Holy Spirit to gather people into fellowships where Jesus Christ is known, loved and obeyed as Teacher and Lord." We ask FUM to honor the discernment of constituent yearly meetings in their choice of leaders and representatives. From the Advices of Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice, we offer these statements of Truth that have been given to us through continuing revelation of the Christ Within: Every Friend is called to be a servant of God. Each of us has God-given talents, which we are obliged to develop and use to the glory of God ... From its earliest days, the Society of Friends has supported the equal right of all individuals to be treated with dignity and respect ... We oppose all forms of prejudice. Prejudice should never be allowed to keep any person from a chance to develop or use their abilities. ... In accord with these advices, we affirm that gay and lesbian Friends within Baltimore Yearly Meeting make valuable contributions to the yearly meeting. These Friends have truly exercised their gifts for the building up of our spiritual communities, according to Paul's advice to the Corinthians. Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Search and Nominating Committees seek Friends for leadership roles by discerning whether they possess the spiritual depth, clerking skills, and loving and caring natures to enhance the life of the Yearly Meeting, regardless of sexual orientation or whether Friends may be in same-gender relationships. "We urge Friends to put new energy into the struggle to end the oppression, often unconscious, that is imposed on people because of their sexual orientation. The myths about homosexuality that perpetuate deep-rooted discrimination need to be dispelled through educational efforts." These statements,

taken from Baltimore Yearly Meeting 1973 Minute 87, are worth re-affirming in 2002. Truth requires us to acknowledge that we have not come to this position quickly or easily. In writing this minute, we are being obedient to the Light as we have discerned it over many years; and in faith and hope, we feel called to share our concerns about prejudice and inclusiveness with the General Board of Friends United Meeting. Baltimore Yearly Meeting asks the FUM General Board: (1) To confirm that FUM policy governing the selection of worship-sharing and workshop leaders and other leadership roles within FUM is inclusive and not discriminatory. That is, to confirm that leaders are chosen based on spiritual gifts without regard to sexual orientation or whether Friends are in same gender relationships. (2) To review and clarify the respective roles, responsibilities, and authority of FUM staff and committees. We pray for healing, guidance, and reconciliation to lead us all forward.



On October 17, 2003, the following letter was sent from FUM to BYM.

Dear Michael Cronin:

Greetings in the name of Jesus who brings us together. I hope this time finds you well and prosperous.

I am writing to provide responses from the Friends United Meeting General Board to the two requests submitted in a minute from the Baltimore Yearly Meeting 2002 Annual Session regarding the policy for the selection of worship-sharing leaders. (For ease of reference, the above requests were repeated here.)

At the FUM General Board Meeting held earlier this month at Quaker Lake, North Carolina, the policy statements pertaining to the issue of sexual orientation adopted in 1988 and 1991 were reviewed again in the context of applicability to the BYM requests. (The policy as stated in Minute 88-GB-52 was inserted here.)

The 1988 minute placed the personnel policy within the framework of traditional Friends testimonies and said that the policy applied to the corporate activities of FUM. The wording of the 1991 Personnel Manual explicitly applies the policy to all staff and volunteer appointees of FUM.

Therefore, in response to the first request, we do confirm that leaders are chosen based on spiritual gifts

without regard to sexual orientation; however, we do not confirm that leaders are chosen without regard to whether they are in same gender relationships.

In response to the second request, we expect the FUM General Secretary and the FUM staff to follow the wishes of the General Board and its committees as directed. We expect that the General Secretary and FUM staff make decisions in a timely manner where and when it is necessary. It is the responsibility of the FUM staff, the General Board and its committees to communicate with each other.

In addition to submitting the above response to the BYM requests, the General Board also approved of the statement "that Friends United Meeting is a reflection of the diversity of its constituent yearly meetings." It should be noted that the Baltimore Yearly Meeting representatives, Howard Fullerton and Rich Liversidge, stood aside on the approval of the General Board response.

In closing, I fully understood the range of viewpoints on this troubling issue for the worldwide Christian community. As we continue our struggles to be obedient servants, may we let His love and light be our guide.

Sincerely,

Brent McKinney, Clerk, Friends United Meeting



FUM General Board also sent this response on 12 June 2004, to Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM).

To the members of BYM:

We the members of the General Board of FUM, gathered on June 12, 2004, labored long to hear and take to our hearts your concerns and your sufferings. We affirm our commitment to be in and to stay in true relationship with you around this concern of gender diversity. We could not reach clarity at this time about how to proceed, but we do affirm that God's spirit works through every individual. And we affirm our faith that God can and will lead us forward in the Light. We are committed to listening deeply together, to sharing openly together, and waiting together until such time as way opens to move us forward in community. Until that time, we trust that God will continue to lead us in ministry together. ☺