

To carry such an agenda would only frustrate us, and everyone else in the organization. The personnel policy is not changing anytime soon—not with the level of divisiveness that this issue currently carries in U.S. Yearly Meetings, nor with long-overdue efforts to more fully include African Friends in FUM’s governance structures. But I believe that it will change, sooner or later. Sooner, if the Friends serving on the general board are given opportunities for loving, non-confrontational fellowship and service with LGBTQ Friends and their allies; later, if we all leave. Hearts and minds change through relationship, not rhetoric. No one will re-evaluate the personnel policy because we withdraw. They might re-evaluate the personnel policy because we stay, and appoint brave and faithful people to the general board who can be open about their identity as LGBTQ, or allied while focusing their attention and energy on FUM’s powerful service work (instead of pushing, or being perceived as pushing, an agenda that detracts from that work). There are already people doing this work of transformation-- serving openly on the board or in leadership positions in constituent Yearly Meetings, sometimes without ever mentioning the personnel policy directly.

And the work of FUM is worth being involved in. Having heard from those who are serving as staff and volunteers of its various initiatives, I have come to believe that FUM is doing important, transformative, and faithful work in culturally sensitive ways, and that work needs to continue as long as we are clear that God is leading us to it, and it has relevance for those served. From educational and medical initiatives like Kaimosi Hospital and Ramallah Friends’ School, to support for Kenyan Friends’ peace initiatives over the past year, the work that I see FUM engaged in is, I believe, part of what Friends are called to in the world. Unlike Friends General Conference, which understands its purpose as service to North American Quakerism, FUM is committed to manifesting Quaker faith through an embodied, outward-focused commitment to a transformed world. The work is powerful and precious.

Finally, I hope you will forgive me if I pull a card (to use a rather un-Quakerly metaphor). It is the card of youth. There is a broad, and

I think growing, movement of Friends who are drawn to, and deeply invested in, cross-branch relationship building. Much of this energy is centred in young adult Quaker communities. My generation - or at least, a large and energized subset of it - is not interested or invested in the kind of isolationism at best, spiritual one-upmanship at worst, that has characterized inter-faith Quaker relationships since we started splitting into factions in the first half of the nineteenth century. We have been holding conferences and gatherings that reach across theological, cultural, and organizational lines. We are also holding a question in our hearts: How is God going to use the Religious Society of Friends, the whole Religious Society of Friends? Is there some vision, some wholeness, to live into? Friends carrying a piece of the original message of the Quaker movement - and a piece of Quakerism’s potential for a spiritually vibrant future? I believe that everything we do to create and maintain authentic, deep relationships among the different branches of Friends is a step toward a more vital Quakerism. Because I carry this conviction, I am proud to be from a dually affiliated yearly meeting-- and sad and scared that we may cease to be one, and others may follow in our wake. I wouldn’t be so invested - or experiencing such anxious insomnia - if I didn’t think this is a critical historical moment for Friends. What one Yearly Meeting does for unity or disunity in a single Meeting for worship with attention to business can affect Quakerism for centuries to come - just pick up a Quaker history book and trace the impact of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting annual sessions in 1827, the year of the Hicksite-Orthodox split.

I want to live out the next 60-70 (God willing) years of my life in a Quakerism that is committed to deep seeking, to dialogue, and to relationships that challenge the people who are in them. I want to give that to my children and grandchildren. Long after the personnel policy is a dead issue, the fruit of our commitment to dynamic engagement, fellowship, and spiritual bridge building (or the absence of that commitment) will be manifesting in the quality and vibrancy of religious life in Quakerism. It is to that ultimate goal that I hope we will turn our attention and focused discernment.

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