

FUM Board Representatives

To begin, we direct your attention to FUM's Annual Report from General Secretary Sylvia Graves, which is available on our New York Yearly Meeting FUM Web page under the Nurture section. We encourage Friends to read it to learn about the ongoing work and programs of FUM. We lift up one excerpt from that Annual Report about what FUM has been doing in Kenya since the post-election violence broke out in January. That violence

spurred the Kenyan Quakers to positive action and has resulted in over \$125,000 worth of aid from caring Friends everywhere being channeled for relief efforts there. In mid January, Friends organized the Friends Church Peace Team to take supplies and counseling to camps of displaced people. The FCPT has earned such respect that in May, government officials asked that the FCPT go to communities where people had been chased away or had run in fear and prepare those communities to receive them back. The process of reconciliation will be long-term and it is hoped that contributions for peace-making will continue to come forth.

At the February board meeting we learned that individuals and monthly meetings in New York Yearly Meeting had contributed the largest percentage of the money sent to Kenya up to February 8.

We encourage you to read Sylvia Graves's annual report while we devote the rest of our Advance Report to what we (your representatives) have been doing about FUM's personnel policy and about the tensions surrounding the place of gay and lesbian ministry and discrimination.

Individual Friends and monthly meetings have been expressing grave concerns about the sexual-ethics portion of FUM's personnel policy, about hurtful statements made at the General Board meeting a year ago in Kenya, and about the affirmation of the Richmond Declaration as the faith basis for FUM, which also happened at that meeting. Behind these concerns we have often sensed the assumption that we are not doing anything to address the causes of these concerns or are somehow not adequately "speaking Truth to power" otherwise, there would surely be some change and movement in these areas that are so painful and challenging to many Friends in this Yearly Meeting.

We seek to assure Friends that for the past six years, your representatives have been speaking about the pain that the discrimination inherent in the policy causes many individuals and monthly meetings in New York Yearly Meeting. But the issue appears intransigent for now.

As we reported in last year's Advance Report (available on the Web at <http://nyym.org/pubs/FUMRepsReport0704.pdf>):

FUM's personnel policy, which requires covenanting that for the duration of employment by FUM sexual activity will be confined to heterosexual monogamous marriage, has been a flash point for many of the differences that have been in varying degrees of dynamic tension and at times unproductive dissension in the organization. While this issue is of great concern to many NYYM Friends, we see it as the visible symptom of a tangle of complex, multifaceted issues. It is not "business as usual" at FUM.

The tensions on the FUM board reflect the tensions within many of the North American yearly meetings affiliated only with FUM. For years FUM Board meetings have been what Johan Maurer, former FUM general secretary, calls a "proxy battleground" for those yearly meetings in

which diversity of theology and culture has been growing. Rather than laboring with the increasing diversity among themselves, these yearly meetings have turned to FUM to labor, instead, with the dually affiliated yearly meetings. Consequently, the dually affiliated yearly meetings have become identified as “the problem” within the organization by some Friends who hope to revive FUM through instituting theological purification of a sort.

Over the past three to six years, several board members from those tension-riven FUM-only yearly meetings have come up to us privately, thanking us for continuing to raise the hard issues, saying, “We don’t dare speak out.”

Friends will recall that four years ago, the FUM General Board reached an impasse in finding unity on its understanding of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and queer personhood and ministry when it was unable to change the policy. Given the impasse, our practice as Friends is to stop and wait. As we reported to NYYM Sessions in 2006:

In June 2004, the General Board (with between 30 and 40 North American members present), responding to the concern of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, minuted, after a searching session in which a wide range of views were expressed, that there was no unity on changing the personnel policy and that board members were called to sit in tension together until God opened Way to a clear direction forward. So we on the General Board wait. We wait in tension, in ambiguity, and in humility, but we also wait in faith that God is in it.

This does not mean that we have been inactive. Within the context of that impasse, we have sought to be faithful and effective.

We have been working to do what we can to break down the divisions on the board that make our laboring together problematic. We have been working to build relationships of friendship and trust with all parties, not muting our concerns, but at the same time looking for places of common ground and trust. It was this behind-the-scenes relationship-building and communication that helped passage of the General Board minute in October 2007 denying hatred and violence toward all persons. That minute was a direct response to the homophobic remarks made at the board meeting in Kakamega, and it effectively communicated to FUM as a whole that such rhetoric would not be tolerated.

As we have stepped back from pushing hard in a situation that is clearly polarized and intransigent, the liberal and centrist Friends within the yearly meetings affiliated only with FUM have begun to find their voice and to speak out. This means that some of the conflict is being moved from the “proxy battleground” back to the yearly meetings, with the result that these yearly meetings are having to work through their own lack of unity. We believe that our response to be still and wait in the absence of unity is bearing fruit, albeit slowly.

At the same time, the few Friends on the board who believe that theological homogeneity and what they call “moral purity” are the means to the revival of FUM have continued to try to institutionalize homophobia. Our work has been to reject the various maneuvers in this direction, while at the same time not losing our center or escalating the conflict.

Finally, we continue to seek a way forward out of the impasse we are in. We are clear that intervisitation, the sharing of our time in worship together ~~without agenda~~ is one important part of how to move forward. We have been advocating and will continue to advocate for a program within FUM that supports agendaless bridge-building through worship and fellowship. For now,

intervisitation is being accomplished by holding board meetings in different yearly meetings. Last fall, the board met at Woolman Hill, where midwestern and southern Friends experienced the hospitality and s/Spirit of New England Yearly Meeting Friends. In February 2010, the board is scheduled to meet at Powell House when we will have our own opportunity to know one another better. This spring Sylvia Graves demonstrated her commitment to intervisitation by making as wide a tour as possible of our monthly meetings while she was in New York for a week for National Council of Churches meetings.

In many of the conversations we have witnessed in our yearly meeting about the conflicts within FUM, we have seen that partial and inaccurate information has exacerbated an already inflamed topic. To help us all in our discernment on how to be in relationship with the rest of FUM, we have assembled a number of documents on the NYYM Web site, under the Nurture section, in two places. One is headed "Friends United Meeting," and the other "Minutes on Gender Issues." We will continue to add information to this site. We urge Friends to read everything posted there.

It is not a good use of our time to have lengthy conversations based on partial or inaccurate information. We ask again that individuals and monthly meetings contact the FUM representatives, past and present, to make sure that the information they are working with is accurate and up-to-date. The outgoing General Board representatives are Carol Holmes and Richard Goodman. The incoming General Board representatives for the new triennium will be Christopher Sammond, Steven Ross, and Beatrice Beguin. In addition to these five Friends, Jens Braun, Ann Davidson, and Regina Haag are also named NYYM representatives to the 2008 FUM Triennial in High Point and are good sources of information.

Finally, because it happened after Sylvia Graves filed her report, there is no mention of the historic and hope-filled Young Adult Friends Gathering held at Earlham over Memorial Day. It was cosponsored by FUM with Friends General Conference and Evangelical Friends International. Over 100 Young Adult Friends between the ages of 18 and 35 attended. They have sent an Epistle to Friends Everywhere. It begins:

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect?" - Romans 12:2 NRSV

In worship, in small groups, in conversation, we have been transformed. Friends affirmed their love for one another again and again. The act of coming together physically was a first step to enacting loving unity. We are hungry for connection and growth in grace with one another, and the healing of our divisions.

As in 1938, when the work of George Badgley and others from the Young Adult Friends groups of FGC and FUM laid the foundation for the reuniting of New York Yearly Meeting (Orthodox) and New York Yearly Meeting (Hicksite) in 1955, our younger Friends are taking the lead in reaching out to one another to seek loving unity and the healing of our divisions.

Richard Goodman, Carol Holmes, Christopher Sammond