

# THE FUM “WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW” GUIDE

## **A Timeline of Crisis Points for Friends United Meeting, Its Personnel Policy, and Its Theological Diversity: 1988–2008**

*by Carol Holmes*

What follows is my personal understanding, beginning with 1988, of the crisis points in the organization of Friends United Meeting that pertain to the personnel policy and the general board’s theological diversity. It is not the product of a committee, but is a personal work offered with the thought that it may help NYYM Friends understand what has been going on in Friends United Meeting in these two areas of testing. I have conferred with both Johan Maurer and Christopher Sammond in preparing it and have incorporated suggestions from them both.

### **The 1980s**

In the late 1980s, challenged by painful events in the Friends United Meeting community—one was the arrest of an individual by the Richmond, Indiana, police for solicitation; another was an instance of someone who showed bad judgment around boundaries—the FUM staff and board began discussing homosexuality.

The first document below gives a brief history of that discussion and its results. (This document was written by Ben Richmond in 2003 to give background to the FUM general board, which was in the process of revisiting the personnel policy as the result of an incident that occurred at the Nairobi Triennial in 2002 [see below].)

Here is Ben Richmond’s background paper (as found on New England Yearly Meeting’s Web site).

### **History of FUM policy regarding appointment of homosexuals**

Until 1988, Friends United Meeting had not been able to openly discuss or reach a decision regarding its position on homosexual relationships. That year, staff made a decision not to appoint a gay man to the Quaker Volunteer Witness program, and to request that the Board adopt a personnel policy that would give staff guidance on the issue. In response, Friends United Meeting received a flood of letters from individuals and meetings, and staff conducted visits in several member yearly meetings to test possible policy options. Ben Richmond prepared a “Working Paper on Appointment of Homosexuals to QVW” to discuss the issues involved and made recommendations for policy. This paper was circulated to the Board prior to the October 1988 meetings, and in the concluding minute on the subject requested that the paper “be saved as a contextual and historical document.” After a preliminary discussion within the World Ministries Commission (which oversaw the QVW program), a revised version of the recommendations from that paper was presented to the General Board.

Board minute 88 GB 52 reflects the thorough and tender discussion of the issues involved. Three paragraphs were separately approved:

- (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 their sexual orientation, should be in accordance with these testimonies.

According to the same minute, the General Board also approved adding the following statement:

These policies are based on Friends beliefs as interpreted by Friends United Meeting since its beginning.

In March 1991, the General Board Executive Committee approved (91 GBEX 18) circulation of an “Organizational and Personnel Policy Manual.” It took the QVW policy and extended it as follows:

Friends United Meeting holds to the traditional Friends testimonies of peace (nonviolence), simplicity, truth speaking, community, gender and racial equality, chastity, and fidelity in marriage. It is expected that the lifestyle of all staff and volunteer appointees of Friends United Meeting will be in accordance with these testimonies.

Friends United Meeting affirms the civil rights of all people. Staff and volunteer appointments are made without regard to sexual orientation. It is expected that sexual intercourse should be confined to marriage, understood to be between one man and one woman.

This wording has been retained in all subsequent editions of the Personnel Manual.

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 applied the policy to all staff and volunteer appointees of FUM.

*prepared by Ben Richmond, spring 2003*

Johan Maurer has written about his memories of being in the room when 88 GB 52 was approved on his blog, *Can You Believe?* In his blog post, he was attempting to speak to the perception that FUM imposed the personnel policy in an authoritarian fashion.

What actually happened was that months of consultations and study led to a General Board meeting, clerked humbly and carefully by Paul Enyart, in which a decision was made almost regretfully by a roomful of people practicing mutual submission. Many people had to give up something desired by their home constituencies, including those Friends who still felt that homosexuality was criminal or should at least be socially disadvantaged. The actual policy goes directly against those points of view, and upholds the civil rights of all people regardless of sexual orientation.

(For those wishing to read more of Johan Maurer's reflections on Friends United Meeting, of which he was general secretary from 1993 to 2000, here is the link to his archive of posts about FUM from January 27, 2005, to November 22, 2007. There are 20 of them: <http://johanpdx.blogspot.com/search/label/fum>.)

## **The 1990s**

After Minute 88 GB 52 was approved in 1988 and after the Personnel Manual was adopted by the Executive Committee in 1991, it was recognized by everyone that the board was divided. Indeed, the divisions on the board seemed so great to some that a push for realignment was made between 1990 and 1993 by then-General Secretary Steven Main. This is remembered as "the Realignment Controversy."

Main felt that the dually affiliated yearly meetings—the reunited Orthodox and Hicksite yearly meetings: Canadian, New England, New York, Baltimore, Southeastern—because of their universalism and because of the fact that many members did not identify as Christian, did not belong in FUM and encouraged them to make Friends General Conference their single affiliation.

Realignment failed.

The dual affiliates did not leave. Instead, one singly affiliated yearly meeting left to join Evangelical Friends Alliance (now International); the Western Association was formed to allow Whittier Friends Meeting (Ann Davidson's home meeting) to stay within FUM; Steven Main resigned; and after Harold Smuck's healing interim service Johan Maurer was named general secretary.

(For those wishing to know more about the Realignment Controversy, here is a link to an article by Bill Samuel: [www.quakerinfo.com/quakalig.shtml](http://www.quakerinfo.com/quakalig.shtml).)

Shaken by the Realignment Controversy that nearly destroyed the organization, the FUM board was able in 1993 to unite around a mission statement that helped to heal and focus it:

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.

## **The Nairobi Triennial, 2002**

In 2002, as part of its effort to become equal partners with Friends in Africa, FUM held its first triennial overseas—in Nairobi, Kenya. It was a huge undertaking. No one had ever planned an international triennial before, let alone a triennial in a developing country, and some things went awry. One of them was that too many people were invited to be worship-sharing group facilitators. When General Secretary Retha McCutchen saw that the list of names was too long, one of the facilitators she asked to step aside was the clerk of Baltimore Yearly Meeting, Lamar Matthews. She did so knowing that

Lamar was an openly gay man living with his partner—not because she disapproved of this, but because she believed that this would be difficult for the Kenyan hosts of the triennial to accept.

While Retha and Lamar found personal understanding and reconciliation with each other in Nairobi, it was after the Nairobi triennial in 2002 that calls came forward from Baltimore Yearly Meeting Friends to the FUM board to reconsider the personnel policy.

The New York Yearly Meeting representatives to the FUM general board during this time were Ruth Kinsey of Farmington Friends Meeting, Jens Braun of Old Chatham Meeting, and Carol Holmes, then of 15th Street Meeting, with Ann Davidson attending as president of the United Society of Friends Women International.

The personnel policy was discussed at almost every general board meeting between Fall 2002 and Spring 2005 (when Ben Richmond's background paper, cited above, was used). The board did not find unity to amend the policy or remove it—but it also did not find unity to reaffirm it. The board was divided. Stopped. In the face of division, with no clear direction forward, it is Friends' process that whatever has been minuted as approved in the past remains in place. So 88 GB 52 remains standing after three years of discussion by the FUM General Board between 2002 and 2005.

At the Des Moines triennial in 2005, Retha McCutchen spoke of discrimination and of the incident at the Nairobi triennial (although she did not name Lamar). In her speech, she affirmed and upheld the spiritual gifts that God had given the man she had discriminated against. And she named what she did as “discrimination.”

Here is the URL for “River Teeth for the Lamb's War,” the keynote speech delivered by Retha McCutchen in Des Moines 2005: [www.fum.org/about/triennial%202005/keynote.htm](http://www.fum.org/about/triennial%202005/keynote.htm).

Here is the excerpt described above in which Retha speaks of what happened in Nairobi:

There had been 20 plus names listed for possible worship sharing leaders. We only needed 12. I made a decision not to invite a person in a homosexual relationship to be a worship group leader. This was not a policy decision; just something I felt was a courtesy to our hosts. I also asked American women to wear skirts rather than pants, but no one reacted to that!

It was at the Triennial sessions that I discovered this person had already been asked to serve and subsequently had the invitation withdrawn. This is where the pain comes in. Whether you support the decision I made or not, what is important is the pain and humiliation caused a human being through my actions. And that makes my handling of the situation inexcusable.

Upon discovering that the invitation had been extended and then withdrawn, my immediate response was to apologize. Only through the Spirit of God could what I was feeling be honestly transmitted.

What I received in return was a blessing of forgiveness like I've never before experienced. Again, there were no adequate words. This godly man touched my life deeply in a way that removed my feelings of guilt.

Can he work for FUM? No.

Is he being used of God? Yes.

Do I understand all this? Absolutely not!

What I do understand is spirit-to-spirit communication and I'm willing to accept that at face value.

Revelation 22 “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ... On each side of the river stood the tree of life, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”

### **Aftermath of Des Moines, 2005**

At Des Moines, Retha McCutchen stunned almost everyone when she announced that she would retire as general secretary of FUM effective February 2006. At the same time, Ben Richmond's retirement from FUM after 20-some years of service was officially celebrated. At Des Moines, FUM lost its two most experienced leaders. In December 2005, a third senior staff member left. For the next year the board was focused intensely on financial and staffing issues, which were both at a crisis point, until Sylvia Graves emerged as an interim general secretary in June 2006. Also in June 2006 the board began an extended strategic planning process, partly to make sure that such crises didn't occur again and partly to help address the tensions of the theologic diversity on the board. This process, which was making progress, was to have large impact when it was transplanted to Kenya at the first-ever joint meeting of the North American and African general boards in February 2007.

The NYYM representatives to the general board for this triennium (July 2005 to July 2008) who took part in the strategic-planning process were Christopher Sammond of Bulls Head Meeting, Richard Goodman of Westbury Meeting, and Carol Holmes, continuing but now of Brooklyn Meeting. (Ann Davidson was no longer president of USFWI but served as an alternate representative, as did Regina Haag of Adirondack Friends Meeting.)

### **Kenya, February 2007**

As part of the continuing effort to achieve equal partnership with its African yearly meeting constituents, the FUM North American board accepted the invitation to a joint meeting with the African board in Kenya in February 2007. Airfares to Kenya run around \$1,000. As a result, only Christopher Sammond went to Kenya on behalf of NYYM.

The report that Christopher Sammond wrote, with the help of Carol Holmes and Richard Goodman, about the challenging events in Kenya has been on the New York Yearly Meeting Web site at [www.nyym.org/pubs/FUMRepsReport0704.pdf](http://www.nyym.org/pubs/FUMRepsReport0704.pdf) since it was first presented to Spring Sessions in 2007. We urge Friends to familiarize themselves with it.

This report has been circulated among Friends in several other yearly meetings and has been found helpful to them in understanding what happened in Africa. Two events that occurred in Kenya have had a large impact.

### **The Sermons of African Pastors**

Word traveled among North American Friends quickly about two sermons preached in Africa where North American board members were present. One occurred the first day North American Friends arrived in a Friends Church on Ngong Road. It focused on a passage from Romans about shame, and NEYM board member Will Taber spoke out against it. Then, at the opening of the FUM board sessions several days later, a Ugandan pastor preached a sermon on Romans 1:18–32 in which a call-and-response of “Praise God” went up from many of the worshipers in response to the acclamation, quoting Rm1:18–32, that “even those who condone such acts are worthy of death!” The word that spread rapidly on the Internet was that an African FUM pastor preached death to homosexuals and their supporters and that FUM did nothing to repudiate it.

In fact, the FUM leadership was disturbed by the sermon, but because FUM is not very adept at using the Internet, word of what was done to repudiate it has not spread as rapidly. Within a few days of the sermon, the pastor was visited by Eden Grace, an FUM staff member in the African Ministries Office in Kisumu from New England Yearly Meeting. In short, he was elated.

In addition, at the October 2007 board meeting in response to a minute from New England Yearly Meeting’s Ministry & Counsel and a letter from Canadian Yearly Meeting, the following minute was approved by the FUM board:

Allegations that Friends United Meeting (FUM) is hostile to homosexuals and their allies, and that FUM condones physical or emotional violence against homosexuals and their allies, have been circulated among Friends and on the Internet.

The General Board of FUM/Richmond, in session this 13th day of 10th month, 2007, is clear that God loves all persons, and that hostility toward any person is not consistent with the Christian Gospel. In particular, this General Board condemns the threat of physical or emotional violence against any person.

The words of the minute are spare on the page. But many of those who were in the meetinghouse at Woolman Hill experienced great power in the room as the clerk presented it. One Friend spoke of fears for his life and visions of machetes as he had listened to the sermon of the Ugandan pastor. Others spoke of the pain of having their lifelong faith attacked. As the clerk read and reread the words of the minute slowly and carefully, almost as *lectio divina*, all were gathered together with heads bowed.

### **The Reaffirmation of the Richmond Declaration**

Another matter of concern coming from the joint Kenyan board meeting was the reaffirmation of the Richmond Declaration that occurred. Although it was an extremely painful experience for dually affiliated Friends who had worked so hard and well together to navigate diversity through the strategic planning process in North America to find themselves shunted aside while the declaration was reaffirmed as a basis for faith, it is clearly minuted that adoption of the Richmond Declaration is not necessary for a yearly meeting to be a member of FUM.

### **Kenya, January 2008**

As of this writing—January 31, 2008—Friends United Meeting is working to stay in contact with Quakers in Kenya in the wake of the violence that erupted following the Kenyan election in December. News reports are that close to 1,000 people

have been killed. Those on the ground say the numbers are incalculable. The worst violence has been in western Kenya, including the city of Kisumu where FUM has its Kenyan headquarters, which has been ravaged by destruction. The nearby Kaimosi Hospital and Friends Theological College seem to have escaped damage so far. But on January 28, the U.S. Embassy evacuated the Graces, with their two young children, to Nairobi. As of this writing, Ben and Jody Richmond remain in the Kaimosi Hospital compound at Friends Theological College with 3,000 Kenyans have come there for refuge. In neighboring Eldoret, the Eldoret Friends Church was sheltering some 62 families.

The African office of Friends United Meeting organized a peace conference in Kakamega over the last weekend in January drawing together 60 Quaker leaders in Kenya. Mary Lord, formerly of the AFSC, who just happened to be in Kenya visiting and vacationing, spoke to Kenyan Friends about the Peace Testimony. Eden Grace wrote a report from the conference that Friends can read here: <http://updatesonkenya.blogspot.com/2008/01/peace-conference-main-speakers-1252008.html>.

(Much more information is available about Kenya on the Internet. Many Quakers—in both Kenya and North America—are posting information on their blogs.)

The January meeting of the African board of FUM was cancelled because of the danger.

FUM has an emergency fund in place to receive contributions earmarked for Kenyan relief.

## **NYYM YOUTH STATEMENTS AND MINUTES**

### **Farmington Friends Teens**

**Submitted to Monthly Meeting October 23, 2005**

The teens at Farmington Friends were given a witness from the High School Group of New York Yearly Meeting. This document was a response to FGC's minute on gifts in ministry across a range of sexual orientations,. The High School Group of NYYM wished to express their full support in the equality of the entire human race, by affirming Quaker beliefs in equality of people, despite any differences, including differences in belief systems, gender, physical attributes, or sexual orientation.

The teens from Farmington respond with the following:

We do not always practice what we preach in our everyday lives. We understand the concept of all people having the same Light within and deserve the same rights and respect. It is a challenge to hold true to this in our day to day lives. Sometimes the friends we hang out with at school exclude kids who are different and it is hard to stand against those friends. We fear rejection by others, so we go along with the crowd. Sometimes, what we believe doesn't coincide with what our parents might believe or teach us. Their attitudes about sexual orientation, lifestyles, and belief systems are different from our own and we might feel confused or hesitant to embrace our own belief in everyday experiences we are faced with.

We as a group also discussed the idea of the "Light within" which is a fundamental Quaker belief. There are times, some of us find it difficult to comprehend that humans can behave so differently, but have the same light within. Some human behavior is so difficult to accept, including: violence toward others, war, and terrorism. What would it mean to fully accept someone who hurts other people or engages in violent behavior? It would seem that there is a difference between accepting the person as a spiritual being, and accepting the behavior that they show. Recognizing this difference and knowing how to act is something we as a group were unable to identify.

Our teen group discussed that we often interact differently with others when we are in a group vs. as an individual. There might be people at school that seem weird, but in our hearts we want to accept them. There are situations at school that bring all sorts of people together, like sports and drama club. These situations give us the opportunity to get to know people we don't normally interact with. When we get to know others on an individual basis we are reminded that we are more alike than different.

We asked ourselves why it seems so easy to reject or dislike people who are different from ourselves. People seemed to be afraid of ideas they do not understand. There is fear of things we have not been exposed to nor had experience with, because we might be put into uncomfortable situations.

In our discussion, some of the teens brought up the Sunday that Claude Peters brought the message to the Meeting. They feel that Claude's message was something that everyone should hear, because he identified the ideas of what it means to be a loving and accepting person in the face of violence and terror.

### **JYM Minute from Senior High Group:**

**Approved July 27, 2005**

During the 2005 NYYM Summer Sessions, Friends meet each day with the Senior High Group to talk about the adult business sessions. When the group heard about the FGC minute and the concerns that arose in the session, the young friends set about to write their own minute. Following proper Quaker practice, they wrote and approved a minute, and presented it to the adult sessions in Friday.

We the Senior High Group of New York Yearly Meeting, encouraged by FGC's minute on gifts in ministry across a range of sexual orientations, wish to relay our full support of the equality of the entire human race. We reaffirm our beliefs in the Quaker testimony of equality in that, despite all differences including but not limited to differences in belief system, gender, physical attributes, or sexual orientation, everyone has the same Light Within and so deserves the same rights and respect.

Our concern is that each person be recognized for their Inner Light and the characteristics that make them individuals. Our differences in beliefs, race, abilities, and sexuality are the source of our strength as a group. Without them we would not be the wonderfully diverse and original people that we pride ourselves on being. By allowing ourselves to appreciate each person's individuality we give ourselves the opportunity to become closer to the Light, to each individual and to ourselves.

We request that our witness be added as an addendum to the NYYM Epistle. We also ask that those who read this take the time to search for their own truth in our words. We ask the monthly meetings to labor with this topic and to forward our witness to their high school groups for further discussion. Our hope is to encourage contemplation and digestion of this issue that many of us hold close to our hearts.

### **Minute on Sexuality, Powell House Youth Program**

The Senior High School group met at Powell House on April 22-24, 2005, to discuss the conference topic of "Sex & Religion". Over the weekend, friends discussed what they knew about sex and how their religion affected their views. Out of the discussion, the participants wrote and approved the following minute.

"Sexuality is our remarkable capacity to give and receive pleasure, comfort and mutual care through our bodies and through sensuous touch..." *Marvin M. Ellis, Erotic Justice: A Liberating Ethic of Sexuality*

We as friends affirm that sexuality is a natural aspect of human life and that it is an ever-unfolding facet of our being. Sexuality is an outward expression of love that comes from deep within. It includes deep connections that we have with each other filled with love, trust, respect and the deepest sense of the Divine. As an extension of deep love, it is an expression of the Divine.

If approached with respect, reverence, and awareness, sexuality can lead us to a fuller understanding of others and ourselves. In our experience, we have found sexuality to have many forms from sexual intimacy to tender loving care through physical and emotional closeness. It is a predisposition to physically touch but can occur without any physical contact at all. It is a desire to share the same inner emotion through connecting with another person.

Communication, verbal and non-verbal, is essential in developing the trust for a positive sexual experience. Sexual intimacy can be hurtful and damaging so friends are encouraged to approach it with sensitivity. Sexual relationships are joyous and nurturing when they include trust, respect, mutuality and the readiness and consent of all partners.

### **YouthQuake Minute From the 2004 NYYM Summer Session**

30. Sarah Faith Dickinson, clerk of the Nurture Coordinating Committee, introduced Christine DeRoller, Yearly Meeting Representative to the YouthQuake Planning Committee, who brought the following minute for our approval.

New York Yearly Meeting supports YouthQuake's invitation to build a spiritual community based on love, respect, truth and understanding across the breadth of Friends. We understand and support the focus of YouthQuake as a corporate exploration and experience of Christ-centered Quaker spirituality. We recognize that even among Christian Quakers there is diversity in our practices and core beliefs. There are Christians who believe that Christ has come to teach his people himself (continuing revelation) and those who believe in the

inerrancy of the Bible. There are Christians who believe in eternal damnation and those who believe God's grace is a gift for all. There are Christians who believe homosexuality is a sin and those who believe it is part of God's creation and yet another expression of the infinite love that is Christ's. We call upon the YouthQuake Planning Committee to be open to leadership from across this breadth of Christian Quaker practices and beliefs, including leadership in the form of gifted youth workers who are homosexual as well as heterosexual.

Friends approved the minute.

## **NYYM MONTHLY MEETING STATEMENTS AND MINUTES**

### **Albany Monthly Meeting**

Dear Melanie-Claire [Mallison, clerk of Nurture Coordinating Committee] and Committee Members:

At Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business on April 9, 2006, the Friends of Albany Meeting approved sending a copy of the attached Minute to you in response to your mailing dated February 2, 2006. We found the Minutes and statements from other Meetings and especially from Junior Yearly Meeting to be interesting and inspiring and we will distribute copies and plan to have further discussion of the topic.

Sincerely, in Friendship

Anne Liske and Maggy Wiard, Coclerks

Called Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business

March 30, 1996

After discussion and worship-sharing, the following Minute was approved by the Meeting:

Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another, but praying for one another, and helping one another up with a tender hand. — Isaac Pennington, 1667

Acknowledging that Albany Friends Meeting has struggled for many years to find unity, we recognize that each of us brings different personal experiences to the search. We affirm the need for continued healing of those who have been hurt in the process and of the Meeting community as a whole.

We value that of God in all people. We honor each person's spiritual search. We welcome each person's search as part of the Meeting's search for divine truth.

Albany Friends Meeting, following its normal clearness processes, welcomes all persons, including gays and lesbians, as full members of the Meeting, with all the responsibilities and rights, including marriage under the care of the Meeting.

We affirm the need for continuing discernment about family and relationships.

### **Brooklyn Monthly Meeting**

2006.06.07 Helen Mullin and Mary Pagurelias, acting under a personal concern, propose the following minute:

Recognizing that of God in all persons, Brooklyn Monthly Meeting reaffirms that we welcome all Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Friends and attenders. We further reaffirm that we support and recognize the celebration and loving commitment of all relationships which express the love between two people, regardless of their sex, gender or orientation.

Friends are in unity with this minute. One Friend asks to be recording as standing aside, not because of a lack of unity with the content of the minute, but because of concern about what the Friend considers the excessively emotional nature of the process.

Helen Mullin, Mary Pagurelias, and Joe Garren will arrange a meeting in the near future with all who may have an interest in this concern, and they are urged to contact one of those three persons about this.

### **Croton Valley Meeting**

Meeting for Business, January 20, 2008

Attending: Glen Johnson, Jim Wood, Tanya Cooper, Isa North, Polly Goodwin

The meeting began with a few minutes of silence, shortly after 10:00 A.M.

Friends considered the Scarsdale Monthly Meeting's minute regarding Friends United Meeting:

Friends noted that Scarsdale Meeting has been engaged for some time with the questions raised by FUM's policies toward gay and lesbian Friends whom we dearly love. Scarsdale Friends Meeting is in unity in finding these policies abhorrent. Although the meeting agreed that NYYM should remain affiliated with FUM, it recommended that NYYM communicate to FUM that it considers the personnel policies of FUM related to gays and lesbians contrary to the inclusive ministry of Jesus.

Croton Valley Meeting unites with this minute. The clerk will so inform the Clerk of Purchase Quarter.

Polly Goodwin, CVM Clerk

### **Easton Monthly Meeting**

At our May 7 Meeting for Business, Easton Monthly Meeting endorsed the following Friends General Conference Minute:

Our experience has been that spiritual gifts are not distributed with regard to sexual orientation or gender identity. Our experience has been that our Gatherings and Central Committee work have been immeasurably enriched over the years by the full participation and Spirit-guided leadership of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer Friends. We will never go back to silencing those voices or suppressing those gifts. Our experience confirms that we are all equal before God, as God made us, and we feel blessed to be engaged in the work of FGC together.

We will continue to labor with our concerns about Friends United Meeting's staffing policy and hope to respond to it more directly in the future, as we see our way clear. Below is Easton Meeting's minute on marriage which we approved at our June 2003 Meeting for Business:

Easton Monthly Meeting affirms its willingness to solemnize celebrations of marriage for both same gender and opposite gender couples. It is the intent of Easton Meeting to follow the order of Friends as set forth in Faith & Practice of New York Yearly Meeting in arriving at clearness for all couples who are led to unite under the loving care of the Meeting.

This minute reflects more than three years of prayer and discussion; it was a difficult process. The work, however, brought us to unity in our intent to welcome men and women of diverse sexual orientations into the fellowship of our meeting. We hope that Friends United Meeting will find a way forward toward welcoming the participation, and affirming the gifts, of all those who are called to engage with them in their work.

In the Spirit, Carol Kuhr, Margaret Waterson; Coclerks

### **Ithaca Monthly Meeting**

Minutes of the May 2006 Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business of the Ithaca Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, Inc. Beth Jolles, Clerk

200605.3. Consideration of Previously Laid Over Minutes

A. Spiritual Gifts

Ministry & Oversight requested the following minute be considered in addition to our Marriage: Same Sex Unions Minute passed February 13, 1995:

The IMMRSF, in deliberation on the subject of same-sex union, celebrates and supports the diversity of caring human relationships. We accept for Clearness for Marriage under the care of the Meeting any loving, committed relationship between two adults.

The Ithaca Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends agrees that spiritual gifts are distributed without regard to gender identity or to a person being heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgendered, and we affirm that we are all equal before God. Our Quaker testimony guides us to an all-embracing practice of human equality.

Ithaca Monthly Meeting approved this minute.

### **Manasquan Friends Meeting**

On 2nd Month 19, 2006, Manasquan Friends met for a special session of Ministry and Counsel. Friends agreed to endorse the JYM Minute from the Senior High Group of New York Yearly Meeting. We are happy that we can support the initiative shown by these young people, and we admire their ability to assume a leadership role. We encourage New York Yearly Meeting to prayerfully consider the Senior High Group's minute as a statement in keeping with Friends' Christian roots and Quaker testimonies.

Approved by Ministry and Counsel 2nd Month 19, 2006.

Norma Heller, Clerk of Ministry and Counsel

### **Montclair Monthly Meeting**

At its Monthly Meeting for Business, sixth month 11, 2006, the following minute was approved:

Montclair Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends affirms the right of any F/friend to form a lasting and meaningful relationship based upon integrity, mutual love and commitment. Such a relationship will be respected and upheld by the Monthly Meeting in all matters spiritual and temporal.

Note: This minute is in response to the issue of exclusionary hiring policies of Friends United Meeting. The Montclair Monthly Meeting, while approving the above minute, also directed Ministry and Oversight to address further aspects of the hiring policy, such as unmarried heterosexuals who may be sexually active, whether prior to or subsequent to employment.

### **New Brunswick Friends Meeting**

The following minute was approved by New Brunswick Friends Meeting at the Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business on Second Month, seventeenth day, 2008.

We, the members of the New Brunswick Monthly Meeting, are led to profess our belief that the Spirit and Light of God can be found equally within loving heterosexual and homosexual persons and their relationships. We can have no unity with discrimination against homosexuality nor can we condone this discrimination with silence.

In the spirit of Love, Equality, Integrity, and Peace we find ourselves deeply troubled by expressions of homophobia voiced by some individuals during the 2007 general board meeting of Friends United Meeting in Kenya. We find this to be contrary to Friends' testimony as to that of God in each and every person, and we are concerned about how these voices may lead to the advocacy of violence against gay and lesbian Friends

We ask whether or not Friends United Meeting's good work is being poisoned by the intolerance of some individuals.

We are particularly troubled by the effect these beliefs and practices have on children and their families. We implore New York Yearly Meeting to examine its relationship to Friends United Meeting within this next year and to witness clearly to the dignity of each and every person under God's light. Our commitment to our Quaker values of integrity and equality leads many of us to question whether we as members of Yearly Meeting can continue to remain members and supporters of Friends United Meeting. We continue to hold all Friends in love and the Light. We encourage open, continued and loving dialogue between New York Yearly Meeting and all Friends United Meeting affiliated Friends.

### **Poplar Ridge Monthly Meeting**

**Approved Sept. 11, 2005**

The following minute was forwarded to us from Farmington-Scipio Regional Meeting for consideration: Our experience has been that spiritual gifts are not distributed with regard to sexual orientation or gender identity. Our experience has been that our Gatherings and Central Committee work have been immeasurably enriched over the years by the full participation and Spirit-guided leadership of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer Friends. We will never go back to silencing those voices or suppressing those gifts. Our experience confirms that we are all equal before God, as God made us, and we feel blessed to be engaged in the work of FGC together.

Poplar Ridge approved the following minute, forwarded it to Fall Gathering where it was on the agenda but deferred, and would still like to have it considered by Farmington-Scipio Regional Meeting.

While we cannot speak for the experience of Friends General Conference Central Committee, we agree that spiritual gifts are not distributed with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity, and we affirm that we are all equal before God. Our Quaker testimony guides us to an all-embracing practice of human equality.

## **Purchase Monthly Meeting**

**January 13, 2008**

Purchase Monthly Meeting is in unity with finding FUM's policy of excluding gays and lesbians from employment and volunteer opportunities to be antithetical to our understanding of Friends' testimonies. We pray that FUM will adopt inclusive hiring policies and treasure the spiritual gifts that Friends bring regardless of sexual orientation. We firmly support continuing NYYM's affiliation with FUM which includes financial support, the appointment of representatives to FUM's General Board, and the appointment of delegates to FUM Triennials. We understand that our representatives to the General Board are laboring under the weight of this concern, and we hold them in the Light as they prayerfully seek divine guidance in this matter. Friends approved forwarding the Minute to Quarterly Meeting.

## **Rochester Friends Meeting**

**Approved 3rd Month 13, 2005**

Minutes In Support of LGBTQ Friends and Same-gender Relationships

Stepping aside from clerking, Sue Regen presented a minute passed by the Central Committee of Friends General Conference (FGC), describing the many contributions of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer Friends, as well as the positive experiences of Friends who have served with these individuals in conducting the business of FGC. (See text of FGC minute above.)

The FGC minute arose partly out of the committee's discernment about holding the 2005 FGC Gathering in Virginia, a state that recently passed legislation denying legal rights to individuals in same-sex relationships. During the discussion, Friends were reminded of our meeting's minute in support of same-sex marriages.

Rochester Monthly Meeting affirms the goodness of committed, loving, relationships that are enduring, unselfish, mutually tender, and supportive. We find it consistent with Friends' belief in the inner light to recognize the loving commitment of two people, regardless of their sex.

We affirm our willingness as a Meeting to hold meetings for worship in celebration of loving commitment for both opposite-sex and same-sex couples. We will follow the customary and careful process of arriving at clearness for any couple who request our oversight, provided that one or both partners are members of the Religious Society of Friends. We will follow our traditional procedures in the conduct of the special meeting for worship. The couple's choice of "marriage," "celebration of commitment" or some other term to best characterize the special meeting for worship and their ongoing relationship will be discussed in the clearness process and in the plans for the monthly meeting's oversight of the special meeting.

At this time marriage of a same-sex couple is not licensed or recognized by the State of New York. Couples whose marriages are not to be or cannot be registered with the state are counseled that the automatic legal guarantees and obligations with respect to inheritance of property, Social Security benefits, and guardianship of minor children do not apply. Legal contracts and wills can protect property and inheritance benefits for such couples. Other guidance for individuals and clearness committees is available in the marriage file of Ministry and Oversight committee.

The following actions were taken with regard to these two minutes:

Friends endorsed the FGC Central Committee minute and directed the clerk to forward the endorsement, along with our minute on same-sex marriage, to the clerk of FGC, Marian Beane. Friends requested that the accompanying letter express the positive regard for and experiences with gay and lesbian friends in our own meeting community, as well as our strong sense of holding the FGC Gathering community in our prayers as they witness to these concerns while in Virginia.

Friends approved forwarding the two minutes to Farmington-Scipio regional meeting for their endorsement during the business meeting at Spring Gathering in May. Copies of the minutes are also to be forwarded to New York Yearly Meeting for informational purposes.

## **Scarsdale Friends Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)**

**November 1, 2007**

Dear Fellow NYYM Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups,

I am writing to you as clerk of Scarsdale Friends Meeting, Purchase Quarterly Meeting, to share with you a minute concerning NYYM's affiliation with Friends United Meeting that our Meeting approved at our most recent Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business as well as some of the considerations that led us to this action.

In requesting that the clerk of NYYM's Nurture Coordinating Committee to circulate this message widely in the Yearly Meeting, we hope to contribute to and promote a spirit-led discussion and discernment of the way forward.

Following up on a September Worship Sharing Session that Purchase Quarterly Meeting organized on the issue of NYYM's continued affiliation with FUM and a recent communication that we at Scarsdale received, I assume among others, from Montclair Meeting, we had a searching discussion of the issue at our Meeting for Worship with a concern for Business held on October 12.

The minute we approved reads as follows:

The clerk of the meeting referred to a communication from Montclair Monthly Meeting dealing with their concerns about Friends United Meeting (FUM) and asked that the documents be posted to the Scarsdale Meeting website for Scarsdale Friends to consider.

Friends noted that Scarsdale Meeting has been engaged for some time with the questions raised by FUM's policies toward gay and lesbian Friends whom we dearly love. Scarsdale Friends Meeting is in unity in finding these policies abhorrent. Although the meeting agreed that NYYM should remain affiliated with FUM, it recommended that NYYM communicate to FUM that it considers the personnel policies of FUM related to gays and lesbians contrary to the inclusive ministry of Jesus. The Meeting approved this minute. The clerk will send this minute to Purchase Quarterly Meeting and New York Yearly Meeting and request that it be put on the agenda of New York Yearly Meeting fall sessions. The clerk will also respond to Montclair Monthly Meeting, thanking them for sharing their concerns.

While our minute is expressed in terms of unity, reaching that unity was not an easy process since for several members of Scarsdale Meeting, the FUM policies and views were not just an abstract concern about justice, but touched their lives and the lives of their families and friends on a personal level. Friends at Montclair and others in NYYM have expressed a similar anguish.

During our discussion at Scarsdale several Friends expressed the view that they were persuaded to agree to continued affiliation, at least for now, because of the support it provided to like-minded Friends within FUM. Moreover, we were aware that our representatives on the FUM board had made clear NYYM's objections to the homophobia that appear to characterize important elements of FUM views and policies.

Nevertheless, we thought it important for our own spiritual health as a Yearly Meeting, that NYYM as a body not to remain silent but to witness for the truth in this matter, even as we seek to work with FUM both to continue the good work it does and to begin to help move them away from views not in conformity with our Quaker Testimonies. Hence, our minute and the recommended message to FUM that it contained.

As instructed in the minute, I wrote to the NYYM clerk and she referred me to the clerk of NYYM Nurture Coordinating Committee as the best way to move forward on our concerns about this matter.

Yours in peace,

Bill Seltzer, Clerk, Scarsdale Friends Meeting

### **Westbury Monthly Meeting**

Dear Friend Melanie-Claire:

In response to your Feb. 2006, communication on same gender issues, Westbury Monthly Meeting has undertaken two programs. First, we began worship sharing over the Friends General Conference minute. We have met for 30 minutes this month, and will continue monthly until we reach a sense of the Meeting.

Second, we have scheduled a discussion on the Friends United Meeting hiring policy for Fourth Month, 30. This may be followed by other discussion periods as we are led. We would appreciate receiving any pertinent information on either of these concerns.

In Peace,

Gretchen Haynes, clerk

## MINUTES AND INFORMATION FROM OTHERS

### Friends General Conference Minute

The following minute from Friends General Conference arose out of reaction to holding the 2005 FGC Gathering in Virginia, a state that had recently passed legislation denying legal rights to individuals in same-sex relationships. The minute was approved by FGC Central Committee in October 2004.

Our experience has been that spiritual gifts are not distributed with regard to sexual orientation or gender identity. Our experience has been that our Gatherings and Central Committee work have been immeasurably enriched over the years by the full participation and Spirit-guided leadership of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer Friends. We will never go back to silencing those voices or suppressing those gifts. Our experience confirms that we are all equal before God, as God made us, and we feel blessed to be engaged in the work of FGC together.

### New England Yearly Meeting

### Minute 04-74

Minute 04-74 is not an action minute, but one which describes our unity on this concern about the exclusion from leadership roles of non-celibate unmarried couples, whether they be heterosexual, gay or lesbian Friends. Also enclosed is a summary of Friends United Meeting's personnel policy.

04-74. Friends heard the second draft of the Friends United Meetings minute of exercise and asked to include explicit reference to FUM's hiring policy and practices.

#### Minute of Exercise on FUM's Personnel Policy Concerns

New England Yearly Meeting Friends gathered at our annual sessions reaffirm our belonging to Friends United Meeting, not only as co-founders, and firmly led co-participants in its ministries, but as Friends whose faith has been strengthened and recharged by God's presence in our worship, work, and fellowship with FUM Friends. FUM remains one of the most important places where we meet Friends who challenge our beliefs, and where African, Latin-American, Middle Eastern, and North American Friends meet face to face, growing in love and understanding. Since the 1940s when we were called to re-unite our previously separated Yearly Meetings, and since the early '90s when we developed special bonds of love and mutual ministry with Cuba Yearly Meeting we have learned to live with our differences, and we have come to feel how painful it would be to live in isolation from other Friends.

At the same time that we cherish our membership and participation in FUM, many of us are troubled by FUM's personnel policies and practices, which exclude non-celibate gays and lesbians, and unmarried heterosexual couples from leadership roles. Within NEYM we have struggled for years with same-gender marriage, and while support is not universal, we have watched as Friends' understanding of the truth has grown to include the belief that individuals' sexual orientation is no measure of their ability to express God's love through committed long-term relationships.

In the same vein, over the years we have grown to understand that God's gifts of ministry and leadership are bestowed with no consideration of sexual orientation or marital status. Indeed we have been blessed countless times by the ministry and leadership of those who would not be allowed to serve under the FUM policies.

While some are hurt, and some are angry, we are "all" troubled by the lack of unity on this issue. In the interest of creating a more perfect world, gospel order requires us to seek together for God's will, and for the love, which has been wounded by our differences.

We invite the FUM Board to come again to New England, to work among us, to worship and be hosted by all of us, to see our lives speaking. We make ourselves available to be invited to worship and testify among FUM Friends, and among other yearly and monthly meetings about these concerns.

As we continue discernment within NEYM, we ask the General Board of FUM to consider, as we have at NEYM 2004 Sessions, "Who is your neighbor?" Jesus taught us that love and compassion for the neighbor who does not look like us is more important than the written law.

Friends approved the minute.

New England YM representatives to the Friends United Meeting General Board were charged to carry our concern during the upcoming FUM Board meeting. We direct that this minute of exercise be sent to our monthly meetings and quarterly meetings under the care of the Ministry & Counsel working party on FUM's personnel policy concerns, accompanied by whatever other materials seems necessary for consideration. We expect M&C to bring a minute based on the discernment over the year to the 2005 Sessions.