

Report from Nurture Coordinating Committee

Concerning Ongoing Local Meeting Discernment Regarding Friends United Meeting's Personnel Policy and Brooklyn Meeting's Minute on the Concern

Friends may recall that, at last year's Summer Sessions, Nurture Coordinating Committee (NCC) reported that we had received a minute from Brooklyn Meeting with the following concern, and I will quote the minute:

Brooklyn Monthly Meeting urges that New York Yearly Meeting ("NYYM") Follow the example of Canadian Yearly Meeting and draft a letter to Friends United Meeting ("FUM") expressing displeasure at its current discrimination against LGBT Quakers in paid and unpaid positions of service or leadership. The letter to further state that until such time as such policies are laid aside and equally embraced for all Quakers, it will only designate its payments to FUM for specific projects, such projects which in the opinion of New York Yearly Meeting are worthy enough to exceed the damage to Equality and human dignity done by FUM's discriminatory personnel policies.

At such time that New York Yearly Meeting undertakes such designation of Its payments to FUM, Brooklyn Monthly Meeting will cease its present withholding of a portion of its Covenant Donation to NYYM in protest of FUM's discriminatory personnel policies.

Following the 2015 Summer Sessions, NCC asked the yearly meeting office to send out to all monthly meetings a memo that included the Brooklyn Minute, the New York Quarterly Meeting endorsement, the wording of the FUM personnel policy in question, the historical connection between NYYM and FUM, and some of the NCC minutes of our discernment. A few responses were received.

NCC considered this again during Coordinating Weekend at the end of January this year. It became clear that not enough background information had been given with the first letter, so a follow-up letter was sent with more information about FUM's deliberations, and several documents were added to the FUM area of the YM website. It was sent a month or so before Spring Sessions.

To date, NCC has received responses from 11 monthly meetings. The following meetings forwarded a minute that spoke about both their reactions to the Brooklyn minute and their recommendation for how NYYM could best work toward changing FUM's personnel policy: Bulls Head Oswego, Ithaca, Flushing, Cornwall, Old Chatham, and Manasquan. Flushing reduced their 2016 covenant donation by the percentage they felt would be sent to FUM. Bulls Head-Oswego, Ithaca, and Manasquan encouraged NYYM representatives to FUM to pursue their efforts of "continued and purposeful dialog" with FUM. Bulls Head pointed out that NYYM does not have its own sexual ethic. These meetings expressed their appreciation to Brooklyn for highlighting this concern, but did not unite with NYYM's withholding financial support to FUM. New Brunswick has spent several months in discernment, but NCC hasn't yet received a minute from that meeting. Hudson Meeting has found this a divisive issue, and has lost one member because of it. Poughkeepsie sent a report of comments made during a meeting considering the Brooklyn minute. Poplar Ridge sent a minute from 2005, when NYYM did a great deal of discernment around this concern.

The most recent minute, with a cover letter, is from Old Chatham Meeting. The meeting “remains deeply troubled by the issues of discrimination represented by the personnel policies of Friends United Meeting...” Old Chatham discontinued financial support of FUM nearly a decade ago. They are deeply troubled “that our financial covenant with NYYM includes allocations for FUM, and feel this underwriting of discrimination must end.” Old Chatham will withhold 1% of its covenant donation, and will redirect that as a contribution to Ramallah Friends School. Some Old Chatham Friends, as a matter of conscience, do not wish to support any FUM programs, so a corresponding amount will be withheld from their contribution to Ramallah Friends School. Old Chatham encourages NYYM Nominating Committee to seek qualified self-identified LGBTQ Friends to serve on the FUM Board. They also request that “NYYM continue to labor with the discriminatory issues which so trouble us, and to consider whether continued financial support of and membership in FUM is in keeping with NYYM testimonies and the Light given us.”

To date, NCC doesn't feel that we have heard from enough monthly meetings for NYYM to make any change in our policy toward FUM. For the moment, we recommend that our representatives to the FUM General Board should continue their dialogue.