

## Enclosures for preparative, monthly and quarterly meetings, as well as worship groups in New England Yearly Meeting from Annual Sessions 2004

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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.

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### **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*