

Bethesda Friends Meeting  
FUM/BYM Session (#1 of 2)  
Minutes, Jan. 20, 2008

This is the amended draft. Thanks to all who offered fixes. Below the minutes are a clarification of AFSC's origins from Susan Kaul and answers gained by Liz Hofmeister to several questions left pending on Jan. 20.

Forty-six Friends and visitors met in the Music Room at 9:30 to begin discernment on future relations between Bethesda Friends Meeting and Friends United Meeting. After a short period of silence, moderator Jillaine Smith reviewed the agenda. She apologized for the unwanted time pressure, caused by our need to advise Baltimore Yearly Meeting on our views by April 1. Anyone moved to compose a query was asked to submit it as a way to guide next week's worship sharing.

ARE co-clerk Frank Greve distinguished between the first session's purpose, which is to arrive at a shared sense of the facts and context of the concerns, and the Jan. 27 session's purpose, which is to air our views about what should be done. More focused discussion of FUM/BYM issues will take place at the February business meeting. Several guests were introduced as relative experts: Walter Brown of Langley Hill Meeting, who's done a number of intervisitations to Indiana YM's annual sessions; Ted and Ria Hawkins, the Meeting's Quaker historians; Anna Crumley-Effinger and Jill Terrill, two interns at the Quaker United Nations Office who are members of Midwestern FUM meetings; and Liz Hofmeister who's been active in Quaker groups at many levels.

Michael Morfit, the Meeting's co-clerk, introduced the issues at hand, which he said had many dimensions and, in some cases, 19th Century roots. He said the current discussion was just another step in this historical process. Michael said that Baltimore Yearly Meeting had tried to keep up a connection with both Friends General Conference, to which BYM is closely aligned, and Friends United Meeting, whose positions are, in some cases, troubling. He noted that BYM has withheld its contributions to FUM for two years. The main concerns, he said, involved FUM'S personnel policy against hiring or naming to voluntary leadership positions persons who were in same-sex relationships or who engaged in sex outside of marriage.

Beyond that issue, Michael said, were doctrinal differences over what it means to be a Friend; concerns about the quality of FUM corporate governance and uncertainty about FUM's commitment to Quaker process. He also expressed both appreciation and uncertainty about FUM's development and support of Quaker missions in Africa. Michael noted that BYM's three representatives to FUM's board felt that the current Yearly Meeting policy of withholding contributions was having no effect, and that the BYM representatives to the FUM board had concluded that it was time to "fish or cut bait": to engage with FUM in a new way or to withdraw from it.

A Friend asked whether there weren't more than two choices. Michael said that BYM's FUM representatives in the summer had recommended that BYM withdraw, given their concern about financial and management problems and, especially, the unlikelihood of any change in FUM's policy on the employment of people living together outside of traditional marriage. In October, however, BYM's representatives stepped back from the brink, noting improvements in internal decision-making, new signs that the board leadership respected Quaker process, management

improvement at FUM's largest hospital in Kenya. In sum, Michael said, while BYM's current middle way hasn't worked with FUM, there may be another middle way.

Ria, who's been working on these issues at the BYM level, said she'd also heard from a BYM representative to FUM that new FUM leadership was allowing broader participation in decisions and had set up a trustee's committee to assess and reform FUM's projects in Kenya. This BYM representative felt the relationship with FUM was worth continuing and that BYM had a role to play in its future. The representative urged that BYM participate more fully in FUM leadership nominations.

A Friend summed up this news as indicating progress in everything but personnel policy. A second Friend distinguished between FGC, which he described as liberal, flexible, and determined to attain perfection in its decisions, and FUM, which he described as hierarchical and military-like, and therefore better at getting things done. FGC, because it's so different, will always view FUM as having a problem, he said, but he suggested that BYM increase its involvement with FUM and help them and the people they work with to get past those problems.

A Friend asked why no information was offered on Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's response to FUM's issues. Another responded that PYM has never been a part of FUM. It has nonetheless contributed to the Ramallah Friends Schools and other initiatives that it favored, as BYM might like to do.

Walter Brown, who said he'd attended Indiana Yearly Meetings three times as a BYM intervisitation committee member, next offered his views of their situation. He said the Eastern and Western meetings had much diversity in them, from evangelicals who interpret the Bible literally, to some participants much more friendly to Eastern Friends, supportive of the Peace Testimony, etc. These meetings are shrinking in membership, Walter said, having lost 1,300 members in a decade and gone from 17,000 at the end of World War II to 2,000-to-3,000 today. This makes these meetings entirely reluctant to take a step (such as relaxing their stands on gay marriage or the employment of unmarried couples living together) that would divide them and cost them members.

As it is, they are losing meetings to Evangelical Friends International and, occasionally, to Friends General Conference.

Anna Crumley-Effinger affirmed the dwindling membership, which she thought due to mainly to deaths and to the gradual implosion of small rural meetings. She said attendance at monthly meetings was up and that more young families were being drawn to become Friends. City meetings were growing in attendance, she said, and many younger people were turning away from big meetings in favor of home meetings in groups of 12-20.

A question next arose about how much FUM takes as an administrative charge from contributions to its overseas mission work from BYM or other contributors.. Also unclear was whether one Friend's offer to cover FUM administrative fees still stands. Liz Hofmeister promised to track down these uncertainties and several others that arose. She noted that a few FUM foreign missions, such as Ramallah, might survive with direct donations but she said that many others would die without FUM's administrative and financial support from the United States.

Michael worried that even if money were given directly to a project, it might still be operated under FUM rules to which we take exception. He asked about the possibility of change when it comes to FUM's personnel policy. "Slim to none and slim is on vacation," Walter said. He estimated that it would take a generation, even though the policy has many opponents within FUM, because FUM doesn't want to alienate its membership.

Anna, drawing on her knowledge of leaders of FUM's projects in non-violence; in enlightened Quaker theology; in training LOCAL leaders of hospitals and schools and other worthy missions worldwide, said that FUM's personnel policy "gets talked about a lot," but is a sliver of FUM's role in the world community. She added that she'd been upset by it personally when a pregnant but unmarried staffer was dismissed for that reason. On the matter of good stewardship in FUM's African missions, she said that FUM was struggling especially with the challenges of Kenyan leadership and the need for outside (non-Kenyan) control of temptingly large sums of money.

A Friend asked whether BYM depended entirely on FUM to carry out foreign mission work. Yes, she was told, in the sense that FGC does not operate internationally. The American Friends Service Committee, the child of un-programmed Quaker meetings in the main, does operate abroad but in a non-missionary way. (See note below.)

A Friend summarized the FUM issues as coming down to administrative concerns, on the one hand, and spiritual and moral concerns on the other. The Friend said that organizations under stress often are seized by hierarchic efforts to restore control and that they tend to be paternalistic. She cited Martin Luther King's observation that when some people are oppressed, all are, and said that barring people from jobs by reason of sexual preference constituted violence against gay people, or, as in the earlier example, violence against unmarried mothers. She said this was "fundamentally wrong."

A Friend asked what might the effect of FUM's policies might look like in a generation, given that it was turning over missions to African Quakers with different visions of Quaker process and values. It was not clear, the Friend said, whether the FGC view of Quaker process or the African approach would prevail. A friend said he was heartened by the statement published by the Kenya Friends Church, the umbrella organization of the 16 Kenyan yearly meetings, stating the need for a nonviolent resolution to the current political crisis in Kenya. It demonstrates Kenyan Friends' commitment to the Quaker Peace Testimony, the Friend said.

The issues BYM now is grappling are similar to those facing Anglicans and Episcopalians, a Friend observed. All are undertaking modest movements toward equality that challenge traditional thinking, mainly Bible teachings. One common response is to re-impose strict gender roles, especially on women, the Friend said.

After Jillaine reminded those present that time was running out, Ria said in closing that we seemed convinced that we knew the truth, the right way. We need to be humbler, she said, and to keep in mind that people in other meetings are praying that we'll come around.

A moment of silence followed.

Frank Greve  
Co-clerk, ARE

From Susan Kaul:

These notes accurately reflect what was said on Sunday re the AFSC. However, for accuracy in how the AFSC came into being, Thomas Hamm says: "It came into being in 1917 as a way for friends who would not serve in the armed forces to render service during World War I, and, in the minds of some of its founders, as a means of healing Quaker divisions; in its early days, it drew funds and workers from both programmed and unprogrammed Friends: the first four executive secretaries came from pastoral yearly meetings." -from "The Quakers in America, pp. 174-5. I cannot find a citation, but I have read elsewhere that difficulties arose over whether to use 'mission' type language, and the ultimate decision was to not tie service to evangelicalism.

From Liz Hofmeister:

Answers to questions left pending:

Q -- How much does FUM take as an administrative fee for processing contributions to its overseas missions such as Ramallah Friends School and the Kenyan hospitals?

A -- According to Howard Fullerton, a former BYM representative to the FUM General Board and a member of the Board's finance committee, the overhead charge varies according to the size of the contribution but on average is between 5% and 7% of undesignated contributions to FUM's general Global Ministries account. However, when the donor specifies a particular project, the full amount is allocated to that project.

Q -- How much has BYM withheld in its contributions to FUM to date?

A -- Howard Fullerton said that approximately \$35,000 is being held in escrow, representing the monies in BYM's budget for FUM in FY2007 and FY2008.

Q -- What is the status of the offer by Langley Hill Friends Georgia and Hugh Fullerton to personally pay the administrative cost for any BYM contribution to FUM's Global Ministries account?

A-- Hugh Fullerton said that this proposal was circulated at the 2007 annual session but never formally considered by the business meeting. He and Georgia received generally favorable responses from those at annual session who reviewed it. The offer is still on the table, he said.

Q -- What has been the effect of the personnel policy on FUM's overseas staff?

A -- Joyce Ajlouny, the head of Ramallah Friends School, told a BFM forum held in 2006 that she had not been asked to sign the statement requiring that she adhere to the personnel policy at the time she was hired. However, Howard Fullerton said that at the time he was at Ramallah FS with other members of the FUM General Board an issue arose regarding a Moslem member of the faculty who said he intended to take a second wife as is allowed by his faith. He was not allowed to continue on the faculty. Also Howard said that Frank Massey, BYM's former general secretary, actively considered applying for the position of head of Ramallah Friends School several years ago. The personnel policy statement regarding sex within a heterosexual marriage is included in the application document and Frank refused to sign the application form for that reason. According to Howard the school badly

wanted Frank as its new head but as he refused to acknowledge (and enforce?) the policy, he was not hired.

Howard also said that in private conversations with some other members of the board from midwest YMs he has been told that they feel the personnel policy is sucking all the air out of the room and they wish it had never been approved as written. However, Howard said that at this point if the board were to publicly revoke the policy it would cause serious dissension from the right and possible withdrawal by some conservative YMs. Howard's personal belief is that some accommodation might be reached if the board were to leave the policy on the books but tacitly agree not to enforce it.