**Efforts within BYM to Advance Reproductive Justice and Rights since the Dobbs Decision**

**The U.S. Supreme Court decision, Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, overturning Roe v Wade, allows individual states to enact restrictions on abortion. As the dissenting justices noted, in overturning Roe and Casey, the majority rejected the right to privacy as a foundation to other freedoms involving bodily integrity, familial relationships, and procreation. These changes came as some states seek to restrict the rights to vote and limit voice in our democracy. Friends across BYM Monthly Meetings responded with planned actions and newly drafted minutes. BYM Peace and Social Concerns reviewed past BYM minutes and convened a Working Group on Reproductive Justice.**

**I. Monthly Meeting Activities and Minutes**

A. **Friends Meeting of Washington – Outreach and Actions**:

* Since the Dobbs decision was announced, FMW conducted three virtual and one in-person listening sessions, using a worship sharing format, concerning the impact of the Dobbs decision on ourselves, our families, our communities, and our country.
* FMW passed a minute in July and formed an active Working Group on Reproductive Rights; FMW felt very strongly that it was important to pass a minute representing our statement of faith before undertaking action or advocacy; unity was clear;
* FMW communicated by email and letter to meetings in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio (thought to be states within driving distance of Virginia, DC, and Maryland) introducing ourselves, sharing our minute, and offering assistance to Meetings in the development of a minute or individuals needing reproductive care.
* FMW communicated by email and letter to meetings in Florida, communicated many of the same sentiments, and providing information on a lawsuit initiated by a Florida synagogue challenging, based on religious grounds, Florida’s abortion statute. FMW participated in one virtual meeting with the Tallahassee Friends Meeting, sharing information on how we approached the issue and reached unity on a minute.
* FMW has reached out to the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights, but has not yet received a response.
* FMW members and attenders participated in the Women’s March, Our Feminist Future, on July 9, 2022.
* Testimony on July 14, 2022 at a Public Hearing before the DC Committee on Government Operations and Facilities in support of proposed legislation to enhancing reproductive health care and providers in DC; there is a link to this testimony, including statement on behalf of FMW’s Marriage and Family Relations Committee and Personal Testimony by a member, on the front page of the FMW website, <http://quakersdc.org/>
* FMW has collected information on reproductive rights, digital security, and more and shared with other Monthly Meetings.

**Bethesda Friends Meeting** reported their intention to support FCNL now and give full support to all efforts at BYM and elsewhere to make Reproductive Justice, including full insurance and income support for pre- and post-natal care, maternal and child health, as well as child care, a reality for all Americans.

**Blacksburg Friends Meeting**. Blacksburg Friends said they would be happy to help any effort by Virginia Friends.

**Homewood Friends Meeting** co-hosted a clinic escort training on Oct 16 (conducted by WACDTF) in collaboration with a Jewish community who also uses Homewood's Meetinghouse. Some members are trained as practical support volunteers through the Baltimore Abortion Fund. Homewood Friends plan an event (presentation and discussion) in November (after the election) on reproductive justice concerns at the local, state and national level.

Homewood Friends Peace and Social Justice Committee is actively discussing which reproductive justice organizations should be included in the list of organizations to support financially in 2023, as they consider their annual budget. Suggestions put forth include:

* Your local abortion fund or National Network of Abortion Funds, <https://abortionfunds.org/>
* Center for Reproductive Rights, <https://reproductiverights.org/>
* SisterSong, https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice

**Stony Run Friends Meeting** made a sizable donation this year to the Baltimore Abortion Fund from the Meeting's community support fund. Stony Run has several concerned members who are actively involved in a variety of reproductive justice organizations as individuals from local clinic support to BAF to SisterSong and more.

**Alexandria, Frederick and Richmond Friends Meetings** have had discussions concerning possible actions or minutes on reproductive justice.

**Midlothian Friends Meeting.** Friends engaged in a spirited discussion regarding the minute proposed by Friends Meeting of Washington and, regrettably, were unable to unite in order to endorse it. Friends do feel that this is a critical issue facing many in the nation, and reported that this decision in no way reflects a lack of concern among Midlothian Friends.

**2. Minutes Approved by Monthly Meetings**

**Friends Meeting of Washington.** A minute, “Privacy and the State,” was approved by the Meeting for Business in June 2022 (see below); the link on the FMW website is <http://quakersdc.org/>.

Minute: Privacy and the State\*

June 2022

Friends believe that there is that of God in every person, and that the spiritual journey is one of continual seeking and revelation. Often life brings us to difficult, meaningful moments of decision making. We are taught to hold these decisions in the Light, seeking guidance by Spirit. Often, we turn to our community for help in gaining clarity. We know and respect the individuality of each person’s spiritual journey, knowing that decisions can lead to both endings and beginnings, often in unexpected ways.

The decision to have, or not have, children and the decision of who to marry, or not marry, are examples of deeply personal, individual decisions to be made by the person or people involved, in the presence of Spirit. Friends believe that all families have privacy rights and people of all genders have rights to reproductive health care, including pregnancy termination.

If a Friend or couple is struggling with a question regarding these personal decisions and asks the Meeting for help, the Meeting should provide a clearness committee to support them in their decision-making. Friends should also work to decriminalize any such decisions, and to preserve an individual’s right and ability to carry out their decision.

\* This minute was discussed and agreed to at Friends Meeting of Washington’s monthly Meeting for Business, June 12, 2022. It builds on a statement from Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s “Faith and Practice,” which reads: “When the number of children exceeds the financial, physical and even spiritual capacity of the parents, a hardship is worked on all involved. Thoughtful decisions either to have or not to have children should be accepted and supported by the Meeting.”

**Bethesda Friends Meeting** adopted on July 17, 2022 the following minute.

Minute: Privacy and the State

Friends live in the Light that there is that of God in every person, and that the spiritual journey is one of continual seeking and revelation. Often life brings us to difficult moments of decision making. We are taught to hold these decisions in the Light, seeking guidance by Spirit. Often, we turn to our community for help in gaining clarity. Bethesda Friends Meeting respects the individuality of each person’s spiritual journey, knowing that decisions can lead to both endings and beginnings, often in unexpected ways.

The decision to have, or not have, children and the decision of whom to marry, or not marry, are deeply personal decisions to be made by the person or people involved, in the presence of the Spirit. With that of God, every person of every gender and every family has the right of autonomy which includes pregnancy termination.

If a Friend or couple is struggling with a question regarding these personal decisions and asks the Meeting for help, it is the practice of Bethesda Friends Meeting to provide a clearness committee or otherwise support them in their decision-making.

In our role in making public policy, Friends should also work to assure that any such decisions are decriminalized, and an individual’s right and ability to carry out their decision is preserved.

\*This minute builds on the statement from the 1988 edition of BYM’s Faith and Practice cited above.

**Roanoke Friends Meeting** adopted and approved the minute “Privacy and the State” written by FMW. They reported that they appreciated the wording of a draft minute circulated by the BYM Peace and Social Concerns Committee and found the queries to be extraordinarily helpful.

**Adelphi Friends Meeting** (AFM) approved the following minute on October 23, 2022.

Statement on Reproductive Justice\*

As Quakers, we recognize that our spiritual journey is one of continually seeking the Divine and following the inspiration we receive. Often life brings us to difficult moments of decision making. We are taught to hold these decisions in the Light, seeking guidance by Spirit. We may turn to our community for help in gaining clarity. We know and respect the individuality of each person’s spiritual journey, understanding that decisions can lead to both beginnings and endings, often in unexpected ways.

An equitable society does not impose the greatest burdens on those least able to bear them. An equitable society cares for, educates, and ensures that the needs of parents and their children are met.

Adelphi Friends draw on our shared beliefs and practice to support:

* Every person’s ability to freely choose the family relationship that best meets their needs, including full marriage protections for heterosexual, same-sex, gender nonconforming, and interracial couples.
* Ready access to comprehensive sex education and safe, affordable, and legal contraceptives.
* Ready access to high quality, affordable prenatal healthcare and nutrition support for those who are pregnant.
* Ready access to safe, legal, and affordable abortion, with decisions on whether to have, or not have, children to be made by the pregnant person.
* Ready access to high quality, affordable postnatal, infant, and child healthcare, as well as nutrition and other economic support for parents who need it.
* Ready access to high quality childcare and education for all children.
* Protecting children from abuse and exploitation; including physical, sexual, and emotional violence; trafficking; child labor; forced conscription; and the school to prison pipeline.

Our practice recognizes that moral decisions, such as whether to have an abortion or not, are for each individual to discern for themselves. Adelphi Friends Meeting will advocate for and support – to the best of our ability — every individual’s right to make and carry out their personal reproductive decisions.

\*Sister Song, Reproductive Justice, concept and history, https://www.sistersong.net/reproductive-justice

AFM’s Peace and Social Concerns Committee formed a Working Group on Reproductive Justice, which put together a list of questions and answers, including resources and references, to be posted on our website.

**II. Baltimore Yearly Meeting Reproductive Justice Activities and Minutes**

**A. Activities.** BYM Peace and Social Concerns received several draft minutes proposing to address changes in the law after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Row v. Wade in the Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health decision, thus allowing trigger laws to go into effect with additional states proposing new restrictive laws. BYM P& SC convened a new Working Group on Reproductive Justice to review past minutes, and consider future actions and statements.

* The BYM P&SC Reproductive Justice Working Group met by Zoom several times in the Summer. Draft minutes and queries were reviewed and shared.
* Members of FWM and Herndon Meetings led an interest session for about six women at BYM Women’s Retreat (October 8, 2022).
* The BYM P&SC Reproductive Justice Working Group will meet again on October 30, 2022 via Zoom.

**B. BYM Reproductive Minutes, approved August, 1979 Annual Meeting sessions:**

* The Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends opposes any U.S. Constitutional Amendment which would outlaw abortion.
* Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends is advised that in recent months steps toward dialogue have been taken by persons with differing positions on the abortion issue.  We urge concerned Friends and Meetings to take part in and nurture this process.
* Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends recognizes and reaffirms the basic commitment of Friends to the sacredness of life as well as the quality of life.  We do not advocate or encourage abortion as a desirable method of birth control.  Nevertheless, we acknowledge that in some extremely unfortunate circumstances a woman might find abortion the least undesirable of several tragic options.  The responsibility for making such a decision ultimately rests with the pregnant woman herself. We affirm every pregnant woman’s right to safe and effective medical care throughout her pregnancy and the birth.  When abortions are performed, safe and professional medical procedures should be assured.

**III. Future Activities**

**A. Monthly Meetings:**

**Friends Meeting of Washington**

* FMW plans to communicate, again, to Meetings in West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio, and Florida.

* Outreach is planned to other FGC yearly meetings and individual university towns meetings, sending the Minute and our statement.
* Young Adult Friends groups and Quaker high schools and colleges will be contacted.
* Since Philadelphia Yearly Meeting has not taken action on this issue, FMW plans to reach out to meetings there.
* Friends are looking for Facebook groups that may be appropriate.
* Further outreach is planned with Temple Sinai and Faith Aloud (a national nonprofit organization promoting unbiased and judgment-free support for pregnancy, parenting, abortion).
* FMW is considering organizing a monthly action to maintain momentum. FMW Working Group meetings are occasional, with consideration being given to regular meetings

**Adelphi Friends Meeting** Peace and Social Concerns Reproductive Justice Working Group will meet 3rdth Mondays, next on Nov. 21st at 7:30 to consider how to carry out the work of advancing reproductive justice for all. Drop-ins are welcome.

Further actions of other Monthly Meetings are unknown at this time.