

Report to BYM Concerning FUM
By John Smallwood & Rachel Stacy
BYM Reps to FUM
August 2007

The events of this past year have raised serious questions concerning FUM's direction and the continued participation of BYM in this organization. **Now, we believe, is the time for BYM to make some decisions.** What is BYM's vision for its future relationship with FUM? What is our understanding of the Divine calling for FUM? What role should BYM, as a YM or individuals, to play in this calling?

We have attended FUM Board meetings in Richmond, IN (Oct. 2006), Kakamega, Kenya (Feb. 2007), and Plainfield, IN (July 2007). We also participated in a FUM Board tour in Kenya and Uganda, and a Board Retreat in Plainfield, IN. These experiences have left us deeply troubled by FUM's present course.

We must begin, however, with **our deep appreciation for the work and effort of the FUM staff.** They are admirable in their dedication and commitment to service. They work mightily in situations which demand too much and supply too little support. The problems we see reside not with the staff, but with the inconsistency of corporate vision with corporate resources. We believe the staff is placed in situations not likely to succeed.

Corporate Governance & Direction. The FUM Board adopted a sophisticated Strategic Plan in February. Goals of this plan were developed in Board focus groups meeting in 2006. The plan is thorough, and, if followed, can offer an opportunity for reform at FUM. Unfortunately, we have doubts that this will be the case. **The FUM decision making process is very centered in the Presiding Clerk and a few other Board members. This process feels to us to be closed to new thoughts and persons.** We say this while acknowledging that it is the same leadership which has adopted the Strategic Plan. The General Board is not always informed of key decisions until after their completion. **We see a failure of the present leadership to use the broad experiential and spiritual talents of the General Board,** which itself seems to acquiesce to this narrow leadership approach. Some recent decisions reflect questionable wisdom. For example, the FUM Executive Committee agreed to assume the management of the deteriorating Kaimosi Hospital in Kenya. This an endeavor entails grave responsibility and demands complex skills. Just this month, it was just reported to the FUM Board that hospital administrative staff corruption and inattention by the Kenyan Supervisory Board has opened serious financial and legal liability for FUM. Also, preventable deaths have occurred at this hospital since it has come under FUM Management. This raises, to us, questions of moral culpability by FUM. Clearly more thought, expertise and experience was needed to structure this effort to save a failing hospital. This pattern of setting goals, raising expectations, beyond the skills and resources of FUM occurs in other projects and can lead to tragic consequences. The key problem we see is corporate governance. Thus, while the Strategic Plan has potential to open FUM to reform, we do not see a desire in the present leadership for the radical changes which are necessary.

Financial Soundness. **Serious financial shortcomings continue to plague FUM.** We see this as a warning sign that FUM is not doing things well. After drastic personnel cuts, heroic efforts of the present staff, the cutting back on Quaker Life and closing of the Book Store, the budget for Richmond seems to be met. But this comes with a cost. Some important functions, such as the North American Ministries are being covered only part time. **Of great concern to us is FUM's**

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inability to raise enough funds for its overseas staff. Overseas staff people, like the Principals of the Ramallah Friends School and the Friends Theological College, and Field Staff in the African Ministries Office, must continually travel back to the US to raise money for their own sustenance. Despite these staff efforts away from their demanding, overseas work, inadequate funds are being raised. Major mission efforts have been initiated by FUM in the Turkana and Samburu regions in Kenya and FUM has been unable to raise funds to adequately sustain these missions. Even if FUM is awarded US Government grants to rebuild decayed infrastructure in Kenya, this US taxpayer money will only disguise the eroding financial base of the organization. Here too the problem resides in corporate governance.

Inclusiveness Restricted: Personnel Policy. At every meeting this year, there was a struggle about FUM's identity. These conflicts were prompted by the discomfort of BYM and other consolidated YMs with the FUM personnel policy and its general approach to gay people. In Kenya, discussion of the FUM personnel policy and the acceptance of gay people were vigorously suppressed in the Identity Group meetings. John attended all the meetings of this group and personally raised these issues for consideration. Many East African Board members present were aware that these issues would arise and several took a forceful lead in stating their fervent belief that homosexual behavior was contrary to Biblical authority and improper. The vocabulary and tones of these comments were harsh and hurtful. Christian compassion, forgiveness and invitation to God's community did not seem present. A few Kenyan Board members tried to suggest further study, but these comments were quickly overwhelmed by strong statements of theological correctness from others. The only North Americans to protest such views were those representatives of the east coast consolidated yearly meetings. While not expressing themselves as harshly as the East Africans, a significant group of the North American Board members share similar views. With these entrenched views of homosexuality, **there will be no change in the FUM personnel policy in the near future.**

Inclusiveness Restricted: theology. There is a forceful minority on the FUM North American Board that believes that a clearer theological foundation will strengthen FUM. At the identity group meetings in Kenya and at the Board meeting, these North American Friends from the Midwest acted and raised a request to reaffirm the Richmond Declaration. This request did not apparently arise from any recent study or analysis of the Richmond Declaration. Many East African Board members immediately supported this step. It was not clearly stated why this step was necessary at this moment. Several North American Friends from the consolidated yearly meetings strongly expressed the discomfort such a move would have in their yearly meetings. At least one Kenyan Friend suggested further time for reflection. These clear indicators of spiritual caution were ignored by the Presiding Clerk. At the Board meeting, the Clerk declared the sense of the meeting to reaffirm the Declaration, giving those who were not united the opportunity to be recorded as standing aside. This decision places BYM in a challenged position. BYM has been a part of FUM from the beginning, but has never affirmed the Richmond Declaration. We believe the FUM leadership is making a mistake. **The drive for theological homogeneity will not strengthen FUM, but more likely it will sap it of spiritual vitality.** In the July retreat, after hearing historian Thomas Hamm's lecture on the checkered history of the Richmond Declaration, the Board seemed to change course a bit and simply affirmed its 1992 mission statement:

"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."

Our Closing Thoughts. It is difficult to send money to an organization with the dysfunctional aspects described above. On the other hand, it is also difficult to remain within FUM, advocating change, but not to contribute financially. It is difficult to remain a part of an organization which exhibits so little concern for our own BYM history and suggestions for policy and direction. It is difficult to participate in an organization with the corporate governance problems and the spiritual direction which FUM exhibits. The path that the FUM leadership is presently traveling does not seem to lead to our inclusion. It is also difficult to sever ties with part of our history.

However, it is also essential to acknowledge that BYM is a consolidated, not united, yearly meeting. We have members who are committed Christians sympathetic to orthodox and conservative Friends. We have members to whom FUM's mission statement deeply resonates. To separate from FUM, may leave such members without avenues of expression, fellowship and nurture. The care and development of all BYM members must be considered.

While both of us are united in our assessment of FUM, we each reach slightly different conclusions. Rachel feels it is time for BYM to depart from this damaged organization. John is willing to continue another year, only with BYM's clear mandate to do so and to advocate serious FUM corporate reform. He is not hopeful of change, but feels a tug of common history with orthodox Friends. As Thomas Hamm said at the FUM Board retreat, **separations in Quaker history have rarely brought the peace and tranquility that some had expected.**

Rachel feels the disfunctionality of FUM is so great that she cannot continue as a BYM representative. See her attached resignation letter. John is willing continue as a BYM representative, only if BYM seriously grapples with its participation with FUM and indicates its desire to have representatives take part in FUM.

We are sad to have to submit such a report. We have tried to be faithful to the insights God has given us.

RACHEL STACY & JOHN SMALLWOOD