

Report to Baltimore Yearly Meeting, Annual Sessions
Frederick, Maryland, August 5, 2022
Regarding Friends United Meeting
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BYM Representative to FUM

The next Triennial of Friends United Meeting, followed by the triennials of Quaker Men International and the United Society of Friends Women International will all be in Kenya, July 1st-8th, 2023. The location is Kabarak University, which was the site of the 2012 Gathering of Friends World Committee for Consultation. It is close to Lake Nakuru, home of a National Park of zebras, giraffes, flamingos, and monkeys. Safaris and opportunities to visit various FUM projects will be available both before and after the combined triennials. Stay tuned for more information.

As many of us remember, the three 2020 Triennials were also scheduled to be in Kenya. The last completely in-person meeting of the FUM General Board was in early March of that year, before COVID. I asked the man who was presenting the plans for the Triennials if all of our members in Baltimore Yearly Meeting would be welcome. The speaker looked at me with very wide eyes. He didn't understand that I was asking about LGBT inclusion. He was not readily aware of what happened at the 2002 Triennial in Kenya. Some of us here might not be aware either. Briefly, at the 2002 Triennial in Kenya, the participation of our Presiding Clerk raised some controversy because he is a Gay man in an acknowledged relationship. This controversy began a very painful decade for us here and for many members who were on the FUM General Board.

Now I ask myself, well duh... ? Why did I wait until four months before the Triennials to raise that question? Well, because at the 2017 summer Triennial of FUM the participation of our

General Secretary, also a Gay man in an acknowledged relationship, never even caused a ripple. And I assumed that everybody knew BYM is a Rainbow Yearly Meeting. In the fall of 2017, I had introduced myself to the Triennial General Board, composed of both new and carry-over members like me. I said that my sister was a Lesbian—she’s my best friend—and I love her. But that was 2017. Just three years later, in 2020, FUM had a different General Board, a different Presiding Clerk, and a different General Secretary. In a global, multi-dimensional, multi-cultural organization, many questions, particularly one about inclusion and exclusion, need to keep reappearing.

The good news is that others are posing this question in different ways. The representatives of New England Yearly Meeting have been tasked, by a minute from their membership, with continuing the conversation about the personnel policy that excludes LGBT employees. In addition, we are fortunate that a transwoman representative has joined the FUM General Board. I regret that I have only been attending Board meetings by zoom and have not been there in person to sit with her. But I’m happy my physical presence has not been necessary. She says she has only encountered some puzzlement and the struggle to accept. Having these two voices on the Board, frees me to focus on what I am most passionate about. I speak most authentically about pastoral care.

Change in any organization takes time and a multitude of different approaches. Mine has always been pastoral. Foremost in my thinking is my friend whose Gay son committed suicide. Despite her best efforts, and the efforts of her daughters, whom I knew well, to affirm the young man’s orientation, the militant, homophobic preaching of their church took his life. Also, in my mind I still sit with my Gay colleague back in 1979. He had recently found his friend hanging in the apartment and had cut

him down in a vain effort to save his life. Back when BYM did not have unity to financially support FUM, I would send donations by check with the note, “your personnel policy endangers the lives of your own children.” But that was over 12 years ago and no one who read those notes still works in the FUM office. So, it’s clear that I need to keep repeating, “your personnel policy endangers the lives of your own children.”

Last June I was attending an Executive Board meeting with FUM folks who have known me for six or more years. The subject of the personnel policy came up. I said that for me the policy is not the main issue because FUM in the US only employs about twenty people. The issue is pastoral because hundreds of Quaker kids need someone to talk with about their maturing sexuality and gender identification. A pastor on the Executive Board asked me, “What do you mean by pastoral?” Without thinking I said, “Do you love my sister? Do you believe that she is a beloved child of God—no qualifications, no second-class belonging?” I just let that settle with the other Executive Board members, including the one who zoomed in from Kenya. Sometimes that’s the best thing to do.

But later, when I did think about the question, I thought, how strange that men who have been pastors for decades would need to ask that. The answer is so obviously direct in its simplicity, “Do you love my sister—my best friend—whom I love?” Obviously, this is another thing I need to keep repeating.

Thank you, Friends, for the opportunity to represent us on the General and Executive Boards of Friends United Meeting. This June Triennial will conclude my ninth year of service. Travel to Indiana three times a year is getting difficult. Thank God for zoom! In addition, Walt Fry is no longer a BYM representative to the FUM Board. It is time to think about new representatives and approve them no later than our June Interim Meeting.