

From Lisa Stewart, Palm Beach Meeting, FUM Representative

Dear Friends:

Whenever I attempt to discern way for SEYM I come up blank. I can only say where I am with regard to our involvement with FUM

You all on the Discernment Committee know I began this journey four years ago when I felt called to learn more about the difficulties SEYM was having discerning God's will with regard to our membership in Friends United Meeting.

After serving on the FUM General Board during the time it was struggling to define its identity, I followed my leading to be a bridge between programmed and unprogrammed Friends. I served as volunteer staff with the Africa Ministries Office in Kenya for 2 ½ months last year. I felt strongly that I was supposed to be there simply to be "present" with our Kenyan brothers and sisters. Happily, I was able to assist John Muhanji and Eden Grace in a few small ways with some of their tasks. I was also privileged to participate in some Friends Church Peace Teams training following the post election violence.

I feel I gained so much more than I gave. I learned that we members of unprogrammed meetings and members of Friends churches have so much more in common than we have differences. Our exterior trappings and theologies are as different as we suspect and make us look worlds apart. But the underlying threads are bonds that I hope will bind us together for generations to come. I see our Testimonies of Peace, Simplicity, Integrity, Equality and Community evident in West Palm Beach, Florida, in Richmond, Indiana and in Kakamega, Kenya. Quakers all over the world are committed to working for justice and equality using non-violent strategies.

I know this appears simplistic and perhaps it is. It is what it is from where I sit. I am painfully aware that we have much work to do in achieving gender equality and I am committed to working for this for as long as I am able.

I plan to return to Kenya this summer to continue some of the same work I had been doing and to help cover the AMO offices while Eden Grace and John Muhanji are away in the States. My meeting gave me generous funds last year and this year I have requested financial assistance from SEYM as well as moral support and spiritual nurturing. I have an Anchoring Committee in my home meeting.

Obviously I am clear about what are my leadings for me. As for SEYM, I have not achieved clarity about what is best for the body of our organization. I have vacillated back and forth. At times I felt passionately that we must remain affiliated if we are to remain true to our moral compass – that we must have a seat at the table in order to effect an end to gender discrimination in the FUM personnel policy. At other times I felt passively ok with disaffiliating if we could at the same time support those missions we chose to help if that is what seems best for our yearly meeting.

Today I simply do not know.

Love and Light, Lisa

Assessment of FUM-SEYM Relationship

From Ellie Caldwell

Since 1972, Southeastern Yearly Meeting has been dually affiliated with Friends General Conference and Friends United Meeting, a reflection of the origins of Florida Quakers. For most of our short history, we have had frequent contact with FGC, but little with FUM, feeling rather estranged and not knowing much about “them.” We’ve mostly ignored our connection, for a couple years we wondered about it, and now for three years we’ve been very exercised about it. There was the “Richmond Amendment” frenzy a few years ago that left us shaking our heads, but it went away. For most years, no representatives attended each other’s meetings at all. Now all that is changing.

In SEYM we have spent three years, 2005-7, discussing, threshing, talking about, crying over, and angry about our FUM affiliation. In 2007, we decided to put the issue on hold for two years and if there is no further Light, recommend disaffiliation at YM 2009. Yearly Meeting 2008 was marked by a lack of the “FUM discussion,” time we needed to enjoy our time together and be spiritually renewed. However, we have committed ourselves to resolving the issue at our 2009 Yearly Meeting. As someone who has traveled the spectrum of this, I’d like to sketch out what I feel we need to consider.

I started from a place of strong commitment to keeping all Quaker bridges in place. I attended the FUM Triennial in Iowa in 2005 as an FGC Central Committee Rep and I have been attending pan-Quaker FWCC meetings for the last three years. I have very much enjoyed meeting with people from various worlds of Quakerism. If we can’t meet together, how can we ever grow? How can we ever truly know each other? And if we can’t make peace among ourselves, how can we expect to make peace in the world?

What many of us have come to is the thought that perhaps we don’t belong on the FUM Executive Board, the “inner world” of FUM. Perhaps visiting each other’s gatherings would be enough. As far as FUM is concerned, there are “observers” and “representatives,” some of whom are appointed to the Executive Board. I would like an alternative—not as separate as “observers,” but not board membership either, although I doubt that’s possible.

The particular issue is the hiring policy which states that unmarried couples cannot work for FUM, and marriage is only for one man and one woman. This policy actually originated from the difficult behavior of two heterosexual couples, in case anyone’s interested. It also is difficult to accept in the African community where more than one wife is common.

Two experiences have had an impact on my attitudes about FUM. In Iowa I met a lesbian couple who introduced me to their adopted children. And in North Carolina I met a gay man who told me he and his partner attended the FLGBTQBC worship at FGC, spoke of their walk with Christ, and were laughed at. Friends, there is judgment on all sides. Do we really need to separate from an organization whose members are as diverse as we are?

The FUM Discernment and Worship group has met throughout this year to bring Light and Love to this decision-making process. I have heard people say they don’t want to come to Yearly Meeting next year because they fear it’ll be another FUM rehash. After four years, all of us are very tired of this issue. It’s taken a lot of energy, time and attention away from our lives and our Yearly Meeting. If it were at all possible—and I know it’s asking for a miracle—I think it would be wonderful if we could arrive at Yearly Meeting 2009 ready to come to unity on the issue of affiliation with FUM.

Yes, I have sadness and a lack of comprehension about the prospect of separation from any group of Quakers. However, I think we should officially disaffiliate at our 2009 Yearly Meeting. We are not in the same place as FUM in many areas. Separation from FUM may be a sacrifice but the alternative sacrifice, the loss of many of our gay members, is unacceptable. I propose the following minute:

Southeastern Yearly Meeting minutes its disaffiliation from FUM as of the close of our Yearly Meeting session April 12, 2009, with a continuing commitment to keep open channels of communication, to welcome visitors from FUM at our Yearly Meetings and Monthly Meetings and to insure that at least 2 visitors will be appointed and funded to attend each FUM Triennial.

Subject: An open letter on FUM affiliation

From: Kody Hersh <kody.hersh@gmail.com>

Date: Monday, December 15, 2008 9:35 PM

To: <admin@seym.org>, <anastacia.sallen@ncf.edu>, <annsundberg@verizon.net>, <david@land

Dear Friends,

For the past couple of years, I have been fairly publicly quiet about SEYM's affiliation with Friends United Meeting. It is such a complex issue, with such deep emotional implications on so many levels. Having grown up in this yearly meeting, I treasure our unity, and want to respect the feelings of Friends on all sides of this issue. I love you all so much.

It has taken some time for me to season this issue enough to feel comfortable speaking about it. I served for a while on our FUM-affiliation discernment committee. I attended a cross-branch young adult Friends' conference at Earlham in May, and FUM's triennial sessions in North Carolina in July. I have engaged as deeply as I know how with all aspects of this issue and the communities involved. I've prayed hard.

The link and attachment below reflect the fruit of more than two years of reflection. They are my best current understanding, and also something beyond my understanding. They were given to me in a way that felt like the giving of ministry out of worship.

I hope you will take some quiet, reflective time to consider them. I welcome your feedback. Feel free to share my words with others as you see fit.

With all my love, in the hope of faithfulness,
Kody Gabriel Hersh

**[http://unwaveringbandsoflight.blogspot.com/2008/12/
open-letter-on-friends-united-meeting.html](http://unwaveringbandsoflight.blogspot.com/2008/12/open-letter-on-friends-united-meeting.html)**

At our annual sessions in the spring of 2006, my yearly meeting, Southeastern, wrestled for the second year in a row with the issue of our membership in Friends United Meeting. The body of about 150 Friends who were gathered there labored late into the night on our last evening together, struggling for a unity that evaded us. As midnight approached, only a few Friends left to go to bed. Most stayed, yawning but intently focused. We are fierce, we SEYM Friends, and we are passionate. We have a burning thirst for justice, and a deep love and respect for our LGBTQ members. We also have a broad theological spectrum among us as individuals, and an equally deep love and respect for those-- mostly Christian-identified-- Friends who draw support, sustenance, and affirmation from our FUM affiliation.

We finally crafted a minute that was cautiously and wearily approved in the wee hours of the morning. It stated that we would lay down our formal membership in Friends United Meeting for a discernment period of two years. At the end of those two years, if we did not find unity to rejoin, our affiliation would be permanently laid down. That was two years ago-- which means that at this April's annual sessions, we will revisit the issue once again, and presumably make a more-or-less-final decision.

To say that this has been weighing on me doesn't quite communicate the extent of my preoccupation. I have been worried, frightened, frustrated, and deeply concerned about this issue for the entirety of the past two years. Then, last week, the presiding clerk of FUM's general board circulated a letter he had received from the superintendents of five large, fairly conservative FUM-affiliated yearly meetings in the United States, referring to "current undercurrents [in FUM] that erode unity and undercut important ministry" and requesting that the board form an immediate, specific plan for confronting those issues. Since reading that letter, I have all but stopped sleeping.

When I lie awake at night-- thinking about this unsettlingly ambiguous letter, about my beloved yearly meeting, about Friends United Meeting as a whole-- I often find myself writing letters and scripting conversations in my mind. In these imaginary communications, I explain to Southeastern Yearly Meeting, my Quaker family, why I, a transgender, queer, unprogrammed young adult Friend who couldn't talk un-ironically about Jesus until I was almost out of high school, am aching for us to maintain our relationship with Friends United

Meeting.

First, let me say that this position is a huge transformation from what I originally felt and thought when our FUM membership became a live issue. As a queer person who has experienced a vocational call to religious service, FUM's personnel policy seemed to me not only wrong in a general, moral sense, but also personally painful. I didn't see much reason to stay in an organization with such a discriminatory policy-- particularly since, as far as I could see, we didn't have much of a relationship to begin with. Growing up in SEYM, I was unaware for years that such a thing as programmed Friends or Friends United Meeting existed-- despite the fact that they constitute the majority of Quakers in the world today. I was shocked when, probably in my mid-teens, I discovered that my ultra-liberal yearly meeting was actually a member of Friends United Meeting. It didn't make any sense to me, mostly because I was embedded in the "us and them" mentality of a culture, in Quakerism and beyond it, that sees Christianity as a monolithic entity of socially-conservative fundamentalism.

The deconstruction of those us/them categories is one of the reasons I long for us to have a fully engaged relationship with Friends United Meeting. As long as we are members of FUM, they (Christians, programmed Friends-- whoever) cannot be "the other." If we begin to think of them that way, our illusion will be shattered by the individual relationships that are facilitated by institutional affiliation. I don't mean to say that our cultural and theological differences across branches are superficial; I believe them in most cases to be quite profound. But over the past few years, I have made some wonderful connections with Friends from solely-FUM-affiliated meetings, and I have seen that they are my spiritual kin. They are people like Terri, the wonderful, warm staff person whom FUM has sent to our annual sessions for the past three years, who has become a beloved part of our community. Or like my friend Cheryl, who is in a committed lesbian partnership and has labored for years with her FUM-affiliated yearly meeting to have them endorse the recording that her monthly meeting has given her as a minister. Or like my friend Betsy, who loves Jesus, preaches like wildfire, and just opened a store in her town dedicated to eco-friendly living. FUM, like Christianity as a whole, is far from being a monolith-- but we will never know that if we don't maintain meaningful individual and collective relationships within it.

But wait-- we have lots of Christians in our yearly meeting! We can learn these lessons from them, right? Which brings me to my next point. I had no idea how theologically diverse my yearly meeting was, until we started talking about our relationship to Friends United Meeting. I don't think this is a coincidence. Our discernment process has asked deep questions: Who are we, in SEYM? What do we believe? What language do we/should we use? Is Christianity a part of our identity as Friends, and if not, what is our relationship to a Quaker movement that has seen itself through several centuries as primitive/restorationist Christianity? Simply having these questions posed, and held firmly in our collective consciousness, opened up space for Friends in our yearly meeting to speak their most authentic spiritual language. Suddenly we were talking about the Bible, asking each other about Jesus. I experienced a new depth and richness in our worship, as we became more comfortable hearing each other's truth spoken on its own terms. It was struggle that pushed us to be more honest with one another, and I fear that, should we decide to give up on the challenge of authentic relationship with FUM, we will slowly go back to the way things were. Our spiritual language will shrink back to a tight, sterilized collection of un-offensive words.

So... what about the personnel policy? We were advised early on in our discernment process that we should not choose to remain affiliated with FUM in order to change the policy. To carry such an agenda would only frustrate us, and everyone else in the organization. The personnel policy is not changing anytime soon-- not with the level of divisiveness that this issue currently carries in U.S. yearly meetings, nor with long-overdue efforts to more fully include African Friends in FUM's governance structures. But I believe that it will change, sooner or later. Sooner, if the Friends serving on the general board are given opportunities for loving, non-confrontational fellowship and service with LGBTQ Friends and their allies. Later, if we all leave. Hearts and minds change through relationship, not rhetoric. No one will re-evaluate the personnel policy because we withdraw. They might re-evaluate the personnel policy because we stay, and appoint brave and faithful people to the general board who can be open about their identity as LGBTQ or allied while focusing their attention and energy on FUM's powerful service work (instead of pushing, or being perceived as pushing, an agenda

that detracts from that work). There are already people doing this work of transformation-- serving openly on the board or in leadership positions in constituent yearly meetings, sometimes without ever mentioning the personnel policy directly.

And the work of FUM is worth being involved in. Having heard from those who are serving as staff and volunteers of its various initiatives, I have come to believe that FUM is doing important, transformative, and faithful work in culturally sensitive ways, and that work needs to continue as long as we are clear that God is leading us to it and it has relevance for those served. From educational and medical initiatives like Kaimosi Hospital and Ramallah Friends' School, to support for Kenyan Friends' peace initiatives over the past year, the work that I see FUM engaged in is, I believe, part of what Friends are called to in the world. Unlike Friends General Conference, which understands its purpose as service to North American Quakerism, FUM is committed to manifesting Quaker faith through an embodied, outward-focused commitment to a transformed world. The work is powerful and precious.

Finally, I hope you will forgive me if I pull a card (to use a rather un-Quakerly metaphor). It is the card of youth.

There is a broad, and I think growing, movement of Friends who are drawn to, and deeply invested in, cross-branch relationship building. Much of this energy is centered in young adult Quaker communities. My generation-- or at least, a large and energized subset of it-- is not interested or invested in the kind of isolationism at best, spiritual one-upmanship at worst, that has characterized intra-faith Quaker relationships since we started splitting into factions in the first half of the nineteenth century. We have been holding conferences and gatherings that reach across theological, cultural, and organizational lines. We are also holding a question in our hearts: How is God going to use the Religious Society of Friends... the whole Religious Society of Friends? Is there some vision, some wholeness, to live into?

Personally, I see each of the branches of Friends carrying a piece of the original message of the Quaker movement-- and a piece of Quakerism's potential for a spiritually vibrant future. I believe that everything we do to create and maintain authentic, deep relationships among the different branches of Friends is a step toward a more vital Quakerism. Because I carry this conviction, I am proud to be from a dually-affiliated yearly meeting-- and sad and scared that we may cease to be one, and others may follow in our wake. I wouldn't be so invested-- or experiencing such anxious insomnia-- if I didn't think this is a critical historical moment for Friends. What one yearly meeting does for unity or disunity in a single meeting for worship with attention to business can affect Quakerism for centuries to come-- just pick up a Quaker history book and trace the impact of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting annual sessions in 1827, the year of the Hicksite-Orthodox split.

I want to live out the next 60-70 (God willing) years of my life in a Quakerism that is committed to deep seeking, to dialogue, to relationships that challenge the people who are in them. I want to give that to my children and grandchildren. Long after the personnel policy is a dead issue, the fruit of our commitment to dynamic engagement, fellowship, and spiritual bridge-building (or the absence of that commitment) will be manifesting in the quality and vibrancy of religious life in Quakerism. It is to that ultimate goal that I hope we will turn our attention and focused discernment.

Joel Cook on FUM 12/07/08

Dear Friends,

I'm sorry the discernment committee will not be meeting this weekend. I look forward to seeing you all in February.

I have been praying and thinking about SEYM's membership in FUM and have had the following (and attached) thoughts. Most, or all, of you will have heard me share some of these thoughts in our past meetings. Some of the thoughts are new.

As in our first meeting, I am sharing where I am now, so I can be free of attachment of these particular ideas and be open to the moving of the Spirit.

You may share these thoughts with others if you think that would be helpful to our work.

Peace,

Joel Cook

My thoughts on SEYM membership in FUM

From Joel Cook – 12/7/08

The current personnel policy of FUM promotes evil. To paraphrase John Woolman: When men of good reputation act contrary to Divine Love in some small way, they strengthen the hand of those who would take such actions to the extreme. While the FUM personnel policy states that gays and lesbians should not be discriminated against in secular employment, FUM's refusal to employ otherwise qualified gays or lesbians adds to the erroneous belief that gays and lesbians are somehow intrinsically less worthy than straight people, that we are "dirty" and "immoral," and that we are not suited to doing God's work in the world. This underlying message in the FUM personnel policy strengthens the hand of, and gives moral support to, those who discriminate against, assault, and even murder gays and lesbians. After all if the Church disapproves of us it must mean that God disapproves of us and we must be worthy of death.

All of this is based on a misunderstanding of what the Bible actually says, and the willingness to accept that which is handed down to us without examination. "Customs generally approved and opinions received by youth from their superiors become like the natural produce of a soil, especially when they are suited to favorite inclinations." (John Woolman). And who does not have the "favorite inclination" of feeling superior to another?

This said, I believe that the current situation has presented us with an opportunity for spiritual growth. As William Penn wrote: "Love is the hardest lesson in Christianity. But for that reason it should be most our concern to learn it." Love in this sense is not an abstract idea or a warm fuzzy feeling. It is an action even when we don't want to take it. It is difficult because it requires sacrifice – self-sacrifice.

Jesus taught his followers: 'You have heard that they were told, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." But what I tell you is this: do not resist those who wrong you. If anyone slaps you on the cheek, turn and offer them him the other also. If anyone wants to sue you and takes your shirt, let him have your cloak as well. If someone in authority presses you into service for one mile, go with him two. ...' You have heard that they were told, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But what I tell you is this: Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who causes the sun to rise on good and bad alike, and send rain on the innocent and wicked. If you love only those who love you, what reward can you expect? ...There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds." (Matt 5:28-48)

It is easy for me to see how these words apply to others, what they should do, and how they should treat me. It is far more difficult for me to apply this teaching of Jesus to my life without regard to the behaviors of the others I am interacting with. Yet, this is the way I grow spiritually. Not by demanding that others treat me "right," but by treating others with love and kindness even (and especially) when love and kindness are not reciprocated.

We are quick to quote George Fox that we should "walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one," but slow to actually do it. Our membership in FUM, because of (not in spite of) its difficulty, presents us the opportunity to grow in the Spirit and to practice what we profess to believe.

There may be many reasons why SEYM should lay down its membership in FUM. The personnel policy is a strong reason to stay affiliated. Perhaps, however, we are not ready for this level of growth.

I have been considering my own situation and relating it to SEYM's membership in FUM. I am not at this time a member of the Religious Society of Friends. I resigned my membership in Plainfield (NJ) Meeting when we moved to Florida. I have not joined a meeting and feel no great urgency to do so. In part I do not want to officially join a meeting because of contentious issues, like SEYM's membership in FUM. (And if my past experience is any guide when this issue is resolved another will come to the surface, ad infinitum.) These sorts of disagreements are a distraction from what truly matters, they sap our energy and focus, and they prevent us from being God's loving hands in this sorely troubled world.

This does not mean that I am not actively involved in Palm Beach Meeting, where I attend. I regularly attend worship. I participate in and occasionally lead the Adult Forum before meeting. I give of my time and talents as I am able. But I do not need to be involved in the issues that, to me, are a distraction from what is truly important. I am able to cultivate personal relationships (to the extent that living an hour away and working full time allows), to share my experience and study with interested f/Friends, to worship with and at times minister to f/Friends.

What is important about FUM? Is it the organization and structure? Is it the work they coordinate and facilitate around the world? I believe it is the work FUM facilitates, its ministries, that are important. Do we need to be an officially affiliated Yearly Meeting to participate in FUM's work in the world?

The letter from the General Superintendents of Indians, Iowa, North Carolina, Western and Wilimington Yearly Meetings is correct that we in SEYM "suffer from painful conflict connected to our relationship with FUM; conflict that eats up valuable time and energy." We have become consumed with disagreements and hostility within SEYM over this issue.

Perhaps it is time to change our focus from the structure and organization "FUM" and concentrate on being helpful with the work of FUM. To do this we might take the approach to FUM that I have with Palm Beach Meeting – be active "attenders."

As a starting point for discussion for how this might work, I propose the following points:

- 1) SEYM lay down its official membership in FUM.
- 2) SEYM make an ongoing financial commitment to FUM's projects. Let's say \$2,000.00 per year earmarked for the Kenyan hospitals, Ramallah Friends School, and the Belize School.
- 3) SEYM invite FUM staff to Yearly Meeting (and Interim Business Meeting) Sessions, every year, to address SEYM and report on the World Ministries Projects.
- 4) SEYM encourage members to attend FUM Triennial Sessions for the purpose of inter-visitation.
- 5) SEYM encourage members to support financially and to volunteer to assist the work of FUM. Perhaps going so far as to coordinate "work weeks" where a group of f/Friends from SEYM would go to an FUM project site for a week or two to work. (Maybe several f/Friends could go to Kenya to make repairs and renovations at one of the hospitals, or go to Ramallah Friends School to tutor students. Sounds like a good project set-up for young Friends.)

The point being, that we remove ourselves from the distracting, time and energy wasting, internal conflicts of FUM, and turn that energy and focus toward acting with true love toward Friends in FUM and their ministries around the world.

Does God want us to be "members" of FUM, or to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick?

RE: FUM Membership

From Phoebe Andersen, Representative an Discernment Committee

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Twelfth Month 23, 2008

Dear Friends,

What follows is a combination of three different reports of some of the work I have been doing in 2008 for SEYM as your representative. As the work of representing us at these three different bodies is all interrelated, I will tell it to you chronologically. I would ask you to be patient with me.

SEYM-FUM Discernment Committee

At YM 2005, I felt called to represent SEYM to the Friends United Meeting (FUM) General Board. Since then I have learned a great deal about FUM which I have shared with you in past reports. At the 2007 Fall Interim Business Meeting, an ad hoc committee for discernment of the SEYM-FUM relationship was approved and I felt called to join the committee.

At the initial meeting of the ad hoc SEYM-FUM Relationship Discernment Committee, we approved our committee approach to the discernment process. We agreed that the Spirit, the Light, the Holy Spirit, God and the experiences of early Friends would be our leaders. We affirmed that we would dedicate a day every few months to gather as a committee for a full day (9 am to 5 pm) of worship, worship sharing and spiritual fellowship. Essentially, we agreed to stand in the Light and be open to where the Spirit would lead us in our discernment.

At our first meeting in the Sarasota meeting house, after an initial period of worship, everyone was invited to speak to their personal feelings regarding the SEYM-FUM relationship. After everyone had shared, we agreed to set aside our personal feelings and go back into worship and be open to what Spirit may share with us in worship. Then, after a break, we settled into worship sharing and started to share where the Spirit had led us at that point. All of the sharing was centered on God's love for us and God's and Jesus's commandments to love one another. We found ourselves delving into Scripture and early Friends experience, most movingly of William Penn which affirmed our initial opening from the Spirit.

We further affirmed that the format we had used for the initial meeting felt right-ordered and would become the model that we would follow to structure any of the remaining SEYM-FUM committee gatherings. Additionally, we affirmed that we needed no human clerk for this ad hoc committee because the Holy Spirit is our Guide in this discernment process. Though we did accept Lisa Stewart and Mary Jo Klingel as our conveners.

The second meeting of the ad hoc committee, held at Palm Beach meeting house, brought some new faces to the discernment as we followed our process. It also brought another spiritual opening to the committee. We experienced a regret that we had been participating in a good deal of judgment as we were intent on bearing witness to our Light on the sexual ethics question. We felt led to seek forgiveness of those we had unfairly judged and to offer forgiveness to those who had been in judgment. It was deeply moving to give away to God our judgments and bask in His forgiveness.

We met again at our yearly meeting gathering during the daily worship sharing time. We gathered in fellowship with some new Friends but the worship time was too short to get back to the deeply centered place of our earlier meetings.

We met over the summer at the Tampa meeting house with a few new faces. After an initial period of worship, we repeated our exercise of sharing our personal feelings about the SEYM-FUM relationship. Interestingly, we found an even greater diversity of personal feeling regarding the future of the relationship

than we had 9 months earlier! So again, we tried to set aside our personal feelings and open ourselves up to what “the still, small voice of God” would share with us. We did experience another spiritual opening. Our “new Light” was that there was a great need for deep spiritual healing within our own Yearly Meeting, among Friends in general, and in the world. We need to open our hearts in love, covered in forgiveness and deeply listen to each other and begin healing.

2008 FUM Triennial

Shortly after our summer meeting in Tampa, I attended the 2008 FUM Triennial in High Point, NC in my capacity of SEYM representative to the FUM General Board. I experienced a loving, Friendly Triennial, but one that avoided any reference to the concern regarding sexual ethics.

My joy at the Triennial was to convene a daily Worship Sharing group. The group was by self-selection a diverse gathering of African and North American Friends. On the first two days, the group coalesced and the worship sharing was rich. On the last day, the Spirit moved the group to modify the morning’s worship sharing queries to reflect on the concern of sexual ethics that the Triennial as a whole was lovingly avoiding. An African pastor spoke movingly (I am paraphrasing his words) on the dichotomy between what his culture has taught him (that all homosexuals were evil and should die) which he felt agreed with certain Scriptures he found calling homosexuality an abomination; that, reflected against his recent understanding that the North American FUM General Board had recently affirmed that all humans were beloved by God and any violence towards anyone was not the way of Christ. Thus this Friend’s thrice repeated haunting query to our worship sharing group was “In Light of all of this (culture & Scripture vs. the FUM General Board minute), how do we proceed?”

As worship sharing convener, I was afraid that Friends would begin to debate the concern rather than continue in worship sharing. Instead, we were blessed with a lengthy profound silence filled with the sense of the Holy Spirit at work. Great Love welled up amongst us and a messages of love for God and for one another came from some of us. As I closed that worship sharing, we held hands in love. We were still of diverse opinion, but affirmed love as our unity in our daily walk with Jesus.

2008 Baltimore YM Annual Sessions

A month later, I attended the 2008 annual sessions of Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) as an SEYM representative to BYM’s Intervisitation Committee. Several Friends from other Yearly Meetings were there as well. We spent time sharing about our experiences of intervisitation and spiritual discernment regarding FUM with the intervisitation committee. Later, we visiting Friends participated in a workshop panel discussion on the work of the intervisitation process with BYM Friends and learning of other Yearly Meetings’ approach to the sexual ethics concern. The sharing was rich and supportive.

In attending the business meeting sessions at BYM, it was apparent that BYM has yet to come to unity regarding their FUM relationship. My impression was of diverging approaches to the concern but that they were unable to come to clarity. In reflecting on my experience of SEYM, BYM is struggling as SEYM continues to do in finding way forward. It was validating in a way to experience BYM’s angst coupled with profound love and see the Spirit moving in all of us regardless of our Friendly affiliations.

Spiritual Openings

When we were finally resting at home from all of our Quaker travels this summer, I was reflecting to my husband regarding the depth of the spiritual openings that have come from the extended worship of the ad hoc SEYM-FUM discernment committee. I have been profoundly touched by the three openings I have received while in discernment: Love God and love one another especially those with whom you have a differing measure of the Light; rather than judgment, seek forgiveness; and be about the process of listening and heal-

ing Friends who are hurt by discrimination and division.

My loving and practical husband pointed out that his experience was that God didn't answer specific questions. So, he suggested that even though we have had these spiritual openings, God still hasn't told us what SEYM should do regarding FUM. As we happened to be driving to Meeting for Worship when this conversation occurred, I immediately lifted up the discussion to the Light. What came to me was the certainty that the three spiritual openings were exactly what we were supposed to do. I continued to reflect on that, my fourth opening, and have found clarity and freedom and God's love in all of these openings for me.

I know experientially that I am called to Love God with all of my heart, mind, soul and strength, and I am called to love everyone especially those with whom my measure of the Light differs.

I know experientially that I am called to be mindful of judging others and rather to seek their forgiveness instead; as well as to be forgiving of those who also judge me.

I know experientially that I am called to promote spiritual healing of all Friends through deep listening, forgiveness and love.

I know experientially that I am called to spread this understanding among Friends.

My query to you all is: Do you want to join with God in this work? Please search your heart and see if these openings resonate with you.

In Loving Friendship,

Phoebe Andersen

PS. I also know that whether we stay or go, we should practice integrity and explain to FUM why we became a member in the first place (to offer hospitality to visitors and retirees) and explain that we (SEYM) can not in good faith as a body of Friends ever affirm the Richmond Declaration of 1887. Why not speak our Truth and let the FUM General Board determine whether or not they want us to be members of their body?

Cover Letter—Subject: Additional Light on SEYM FUM Discernment

From: phoebea@comcast.net

Date: Monday, January 05, 2009 2:31 PM

To: Herb Haigh <herbhaigh@mindspring.com>, Lyn Cope <admin@seym.org>
Conversation: Additional Light on SEYM FUM Discernment

Dear Herb and Lyn,

I have felt from you both at times the great pain that this discernment process has caused. It has troubled me that I might have placed a barrier between myself and you dear Friends by my continued sometimes contradictory positions on the FUM question. It has been a struggle for me to stay open to where the Spirit has been leading me and to understand the path to take forward.

I am clear now that our membership in FUM and participation on the General Board is not where SEYM is led. I also believe it is important that we speak our Truth to FUM and clearly share our measure of Light in that we can't ever affirm the Richmond Declaration or the FUM personnel policy.

At this time, I, personally, would envision us participating in a kind of unaffiliated corresponding relationship with FUM in that we continue to offer hospitality and welcome to all Friends, designate a correspondent to receive their mailings and send a few visitors to the FUM triennials, while at the same time, we witness to our Light/Truth as led. That said, however, I will be easy with whatever path SEYM chooses.

I would like to share with you my report and of my work as SEYM representative this past summer as well as my discernment regarding our path forward regarding FUM. In addition, I would like to share with you both Joel Cook's thoughts regarding the FUM relationship as well. I hope that these additional reports provide the balance to Kody Hersh's letter and helps us all further in our continued discernment.

I have great love and respect for you both dear Friends. I pray for all of us to be at peace.

In Loving Friendship,
Phoebe

Subject: RE: Additional Light on SEYM FUM Discernment

From: herbhaigh <herbhaigh@mindspring.com>

Date: Tuesday, January 06, 2009 10:32 AM
To: <phoebea@comcast.net>
Cc: 'Lyn Cope' <admin@seym.org>, 'Pam Haigh' <pamhaigh@tampabay.rr.com>
Conversation: Additional Light on SEYM FUM Discernment

Phoebe,

I am a little stunned. I need time to think of what to say. And I need to re-read your report. When I wrote that I would do my best to stand aside from this issue, I received emails urging me to continue on the path. I don't know exactly what I would have done but I was preparing to quietly withdraw from being active within the Yearly Meeting.

I will respond to you further a soon as I have had time to consider, but what you have written, is the way that I had hoped for.

It may interest you to know that I am writing to you from Utah where I have been following closely the reaction of the gay community to the Mormon support for proposition 8 in California. It is a very sad situation.

Subject: FW: Additional Light on SEYM FUM Discernment

From: herbhaigh <herbhaigh@mindspring.com>

Date: Tue, 6 Jan 2009 16:02:07 -0500
To: <phoebea@comcast.net>
Cc: 'Lyn Cope' <admin@seym.org>, 'Pam Haigh' <pamhaigh@tampabay.rr.com>
Subject: RE: Additional Light on SEYM FUM Discernment

Dear Phoebe,

I am supposed to be spending this day riding my motorcycle from Salt Lake City to St George Utah, but the spirit had other plans for me. There is quite a snowstorm gently falling over this beautiful valley so it is a perfect day to read your letter, and your report.

This issue has meant a lot to me so I read your words thru a lot of very private tears. Thank you so much for you work, your words and you dedication to this issue. I spent my youth as a Baptist and I came to strongly disagree with their perspective, but because there was so much love shared between us during those years I have never been able to fully let go. It is my sense that you struggle with the same kind of issues.

Thank you for also referring to the Richmond Declaration, for the love of my fellow Quakers, I could, with difficulty get past all but the sexual orientation discrimination. When I got there, I could go no further, but both of these positions should be addressed and again thank you for doing so.

I hope we can go forward as you suggest, and I look forward to talking with you personally as soon as possible.

Please continue to mind the light,

Subject: Re: FUM

From: phoebea@comcast.net

Date: Thursday, January 08, 2009 3:00 PM
To: Lyn Cope <admin@seym.org>
Conversation: FUM
Dear Lyn,

You can include my cover letter in the DIAs as an attachment to my report....Phoebe

RE FUM Membership

From Caroline Lanker <ctlanker@hughes.net>

Tuesday, January 20, 2009 9:56 PM
To: Lyn Cope <admin@seym.org>
Subject: Letter about the FUM question

I wish to weigh in with my view of the decision we are struggling with, to affiliate or disaffiliate from Friends United Meeting. So far we have been unable to unite on a final outcome. Some Friends are feeling a lot of pain over the fact that we have not completely disaffiliated. Some Friends are weary of the process and dissatisfied with the amount of time and energy that is being expended in dealing with this one issue. A few Friends have felt moved to engage in prayerful consideration of the issue and a few have been led to engage with FUM directly.

I have observed all of this. My personal concern is not with the final outcome but with the process and the effect on the Yearly Meeting. My concern is that SEYM hold to our commitment to follow the leading of the Spirit and not attempt to resolve this issue out of our weariness or out of our personal determination or even out of our pain.

The fact that we have not been able to unite on a solution leads me to believe that the Spirit has not finished working on us. I believe that the reason we took up so much time at the 2007 YM Gathering dealing with this, to the detriment of other business and activities, was because we were attempting to rush the Spirit. There was a sentiment among many people that we could not leave those Yearly Meeting sessions without coming to some decision. If, at this year's Gathering, we do not feel that we have to rush the Spirit and come to a final decision, if we are content to allow the issue to remain incomplete, then we also do not need to spend an inordinate amount of time on it.

The minute that was passed in 2007 notwithstanding, we should be content to seek the guidance of the Spirit afresh at the upcoming Yearly Meeting sessions. We should not feel bound by the requirement of the 2007 minute that attempted to prescribe how we would be led in 2009.

I believe strongly in the concept that a meeting (monthly, yearly, or other) may have a calling laid upon it collectively. Just as individuals may experience leadings that are quite uncomfortable and resist them, so this may happen with a meeting. When a leading is given to a group, it is even harder to find clearness in following that leading.

Marcelle Martin spoke in her Michener Lecture about prophetic ministry. She explained that her understanding of prophetic ministry was in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, who discerned what the Lord wanted his people to do or discerned what was being done wrong and preached the message they had received. That term, *prophetic ministry*, resonated with me.

I have thought for some time that SEYM has received a calling to testify that homosexuality is not a sin but a human condition. That homosexuals and heterosexuals are equally God's children. And that a homophobic interpretation of the Bible is misguided. This is not a trivial ministry. Prejudice due to sexual orientation is a real problem in the world. At its worst, homophobia leads to murder. More subtly, the disapproval of society can take a terrible toll on the well-being of people in many ways.

I believe the Yearly Meeting united in following this leading when it adopted the new Faith and Practice section on Marriage and Commitment. That was a significant step, but a relatively comfortable one. When the issue of the FUM personnel policy came up, it got a lot harder and more uncomfortable. We struggled; we shed tears; we just wanted the issue to go away; but we could not reach unity on continuing or dissolving our affiliation with Friends United Meeting.

During this process, a few people came forward who were willing to actively follow the leading of the Spirit. Some felt called to attend FUM meetings and try to engage the other affiliates of FUM. Over time, they became part of a larger group that meets in extended worship, trying to discern the leading of the Spirit in this matter. The results of their engagement with other FUM Friends have been mixed. They were not greeted with open arms. But both the engagement and the discernment in worship have begun to bear fruit.

I don't believe that it is too much of a stretch or hubris to think that this Yearly Meeting is called to prophetic ministry in this matter. There seems to be a strong conviction by many that discrimination against people because of sexual orientation is wrong. Do we feel strong enough to continue to support a ministry on this issue? Granted, not everyone in the Yearly Meeting will feel a personal calling to such ministry. A few people feel the call as a personal one, but what makes it a corporate calling is that the body of the meeting supports and participates in the process. I don't feel I am called to active ministry. However, I do feel led to support those that heed this call to ministry as long as they feel led by it.

Now, the personnel policy is not the only issue on the table with regard to our affiliation with FUM. There are matters of statements of belief and organizational governance. But it is the issue of the personnel policy that seems to incite the strongest feelings of moral outrage. Therefore, on that issue it is most imperative that we make sure we are following the Spirit. I pray that we may come together at the 2009 Yearly Meeting Gathering in unity, not necessarily on a final outcome, but in heeding the Spirit.

In Love,

Caroline Lanker

From the Office

Please note that excerpts from SEYM Minutes 1963-2007 that pertain to FUM affiliation/membership are available on the SEYM website: <<http://www.seym.org>> in the library/archive folder. You will also find the Secretary's report to WIBM-EC Meeting which references this concern.

Please avail yourselves of the opportunity to review both the FGC and FUM websites, as well as other Friends and Peace Organizations. Address are available at <<http://www.seym.org/links.html>>.

Take the opportunity to read the January/February issue of *Quaker Life* with Tom Hamm's Interpretative History, particularly informative on FUM's points of view. Read issues of *Friends Journal*.

Queries Pertaining to the Relationship of SEYM to FUM and FGC

Preface

On an unsolicited basis, several members of Space Coast Monthly Meeting (SCMM) discussed ongoing concerns related to the SEYM/FUM relationship, and decided to prepare a set of queries in advance of Winter Interim Business Meeting and Yearly Meeting (YM). Some involved have participated in the SCMM and SEYM discussions that began in 2006 and continued into 2007 and 2008, and some have not. We are mindful that the minute recorded at YM pertaining to this relationship called for: continued dialogue within SEY, with other dual-affiliated YMs, and with FUM from 2007 into 2009; a cessation of formal discussions during the 2008 YM; and a decision process during the 2009 YM. These queries have been prepared in anticipation of this decision process, and efforts were made to prepare them, as a whole, without any particular perspective, decision process, or outcome in mind.

From the Book of John

13:34: A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

15:17: These things I command you, that ye love one another.

15:18: If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

From the Letters of Paul to the Colossians

3: 9-11: Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.

From The Journal of George Fox, with Notes by Rufus Jones

There is a spirit which I feel, which delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong; but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own in the end. Its hope is to outlive all wrath and contention, and to weary out all exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is of a nature contrary to itself. It sees to the end of all temptations; as it bears on evil in itself, so it conceives none in thought to any other. If he be betrayed, it bears it; for its ground and spring is the mercy and forgiveness of God. Its crown is meekness; its life is everlasting love unfeigned. It takes its kingdom with entreaty, and not with contention, and keeps it by lowliness of mind. In God alone it can rejoice, though none else regard it, or can own its life. It is conceived in sorrow, and brought forth without any to pity; nor doth it murmur at grief and oppression. It never rejoiceth, but through sufferings; for with the world's joy it is murdered. I found it alone; being forsaken. I have fellowship therein, with those who lived in dens and desolate places in the earth; who, through death obtained the resurrection, and eternal, holy life! (1963, pp. 271-273)

Statement by James Naylor before the end of his life (ca. 1656)

O friends, do not cloak and cover yourselves; there is a God that knoweth your hearts, and that will uncover you. He seeth your way. 'Wo be unto you him that covereth, but not with my Spirit, saith the Lord.' Do ye act contrary to the law, and then put it from you? Mercy and true judgment ye neglect. Look, what was spoken against such. My Savior spoke against such; 'I was sick and ye visited me not; I was hungry and ye fed me not; I was a stranger and ye took me not in; I was in prison and ye visited me not.' But they said, 'When saw we thee in prison, and did not come to thee?' 'Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these little ones, ye did it not unto me.' Friends, ye imprison them that are in the life and power of Truth, and yet profess to be the ministers of Christ; but if Christ had sent you, ye would bring out of prison, out of bondage, and receive strangers. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter; ye have condemned and killed the just, and he doth not resist you. (1963, pp. 323-324)

Letter from George Fox to the Long Parliament (ca. 1658)

Queries for Worship and Business

To Members of SEYM

How are you, as a Friend, called to recognize, affirm, and follow Jesus' life and teachings?

What role do Friends' historic testimonies have in your faith and practice?

How do you perceive and respond to those who refer to themselves as Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, agnostic, non-theistic, or pagan Quakers?

How do you feel and respond when confronted with intolerance towards yourself, towards others, or towards others' beliefs?

To Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups

In what ways do members of your MM/WG have familial or other ties to FUM?

On what basis are members of your MM/WG ready to affirm or not affirm the Richmond Declaration?

What is your MM's/WG's view(s) on the relationship between discrimination by FUM on the basis of sexual preference and Friends' historic testimonies?

In what ways, if any, do members of your MM/WG relate historical efforts to improve conditions for those imprisoned (e.g., England) or banish slaveholding within the Religious Society of Friends (U.S.) to contemporary discussions of gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (GLBT) matters among Friends?

For what reasons do members of your MM/WG prefer to (a) dissolve SEYM's relationship with FUM and end threshing discussions (at least for the foreseeable future), (b) maintain this relationship and continue these discussions with representatives of FUM and other Quaker organizations, or (c) pursue some other option(s), much as was arrived at during the 2007 YM?

In light of matters of tradition, conscience, and power, how is your MM/WG prepared to respond if SEYM reaches a decision to either maintain or dissolve its relationship to FUM?

To Southeastern Yearly Meeting

In light of the ongoing intensity and diversity of feeling among Friends and MMs/WGs on these matters, and the potential for divisiveness in light of the final minute from the 2007 YM, what kind of process prior to and at the 2008 YM do representatives of SEYM envision?

