

**Report of NEYM Ministry and Counsel to NEYM sessions 2005
on the discernment within NEYM in response to
the 2004 NEYM Minute of Exercise on FUM's Personnel Policy**

At the 2004 Sessions, Friends approved the following minute regarding FUM's personnel policy.

Minute 74. Friends heard the second draft of the minute of exercise on concerns about Friends United Meeting's personnel policy and asked that explicit reference to FUM's hiring policy and practices be included.

Minute of Exercise on FUM's Personnel Policy

New England Yearly Meeting Friends gathered at our annual sessions reaffirm our belonging to Friends United Meeting, not only as co-founders, and firmly led co-participants in its ministries, but as Friends whose faith has been strengthened and recharged by God's presence in our worship, work, and fellowship with FUM Friends. FUM remains one of the most important places where we meet Friends who challenge our beliefs, and where African, Latin-American, Middle Eastern, and North American Friends meet face to face, growing in love and understanding. Since the 1940s when we were called to re-unite our previously separated Yearly Meetings, and since the early '90's when we developed special bonds of love and mutual ministry with Cuba Yearly Meeting we have learned to live with our differences, and we have come to feel how painful it would be to live in isolation from other Friends.

At the same time that we cherish our membership and participation in FUM, many of us are troubled by FUM's personnel policies and practices, which exclude non-celibate gays and lesbians, and unmarried heterosexual couples from leadership roles. Within NEYM we have struggled for years with same-gender marriage, and while support is not universal, we have watched as Friends' understanding of the truth has grown to include the belief that an individual's sexual orientation is no measure of their ability to express God's love through committed long-term relationships.

In the same vein, over the years we have grown to understand that God's gifts of ministry and leadership are bestowed with no consideration of sexual orientation or marital status. Indeed we have been blessed countless times by the ministry and leadership of those who would not be allowed to serve under the FUM policies. While some are hurt, and some are angry, we are ALL troubled by the lack of unity on this issue. In the interest of creating a more perfect world, Gospel Order requires us to seek together for God's will, and for the love, which has been wounded by our differences.

We invite the FUM Board to come again to New England, to work among us, to worship and be hosted by all of us, to see our lives speaking. We make ourselves available to be invited to worship and testify among FUM Friends, and among other yearly and monthly meetings about these concerns.

As we continue discernment within NEYM, we ask the administration of FUM to consider, as we have at NEYM 2004 sessions, "Who is your neighbor?" Jesus taught us that love and compassion for the neighbor who does not look like us is more important than the written law.

Friends approved the minute.

New England YM representatives to the FUM General Board were charged to carry our concern during the upcoming FUM General Board meeting. We direct that this minute of exercise be sent to our monthly meetings and quarterly meetings under the care of the Ministry & Counsel Working Party on FUM's Personnel Policy, accompanied by whatever other materials seem necessary for consideration. We expect M&C to bring a minute based on the discernment over the year to our 2005 sessions.

A working party was formed consisting of Friends from Ministry & Counsel, Friends from the NEYM FUM Committee, and Friends from neither committee. About 20 Friends participated in some or all of the meetings of the working party. The working party reviewed the details and origins of the policy as well as the responses of other YMs to the policy. A packet of information was created and approved by the full M&C.

The approved packet was sent to all MM clerks, all QM clerks, all pastors, and all members of YM M&C in February. Twenty-four MMs, about 1/3 of the MMs in NEYM, responded as of August 1, as did three individuals. Of these 24 MMs, 19 sent minutes formally approved at meetings for business, others sent informal notes on threshing sessions. We have heard that a number of MMs are beginning to thresh the concern, or plan to do so in the coming months.

The Working Party met on July 25 and read aloud the responses from MMs. We were struck by the evident care and thought that Friends had put into their consideration of the concern. Threshing the concern brought gifts from God, as Friends looked at the deeper issues behind the concern. We sensed a deep yearning to move beyond our own MMs and to join with others in understanding the range of Quakerism and how Friends live out their faith. We sensed substantial unity on the following points:

1. concern about the policy, as it blocks ministry within FUM by Friends valued in NEYM
2. a desire to remain part of FUM
3. a desire to come to know better Friends from other YMs in FUM
4. the importance of having that be truly loving and open
5. no wish to withhold the contributions to FUM from NEYM in FY2006.
6. gratitude for the gift of struggling with this concern.

Based on this process, we sense that Friends in New England Yearly Meeting are ready to consider fully affirming the sense of the Minute of Exercise on FUM's personnel policy from Minute 74 of the 2004 Sessions.