

EPISTLE REGARDING FRIENDS UNITED MEETING'S PERSONNEL POLICY

30 July 2004

To Friends Everywhere

Baltimore Yearly Meeting is deeply troubled by Minute 88-GB-52 of Friends United Meeting (FUM) General Board as applied in the Staff's 1991 personnel manual. This policy effectively bars from staff and leadership positions those Friends who cannot sign, abide by and enforce a policy of discrimination against any person in a sexual relationship outside the bond of marriage, defined in the policy as between one man and one woman. Our Gay and Lesbian Friends are particularly affected by this policy. We believe the basic Gospel teaching that Christ is "the true Light that enlightens every person who has come into the world (John 1:9)." We have seen the Light of Christ in our Friends who are not heterosexual, and to this truth we do bear witness. Further, we believe that this policy of discrimination is contrary to the guidance of the Living Christ, our Inward Teacher, as we have experienced it in our gathered worship.

We cannot condemn any long and loving relationships. We respectfully call to Friends' attention the words of George Fox, who pointed out that marriages are not made by magistrates or by meetings, but by God: "We marry none; it is the Lord's work." We ask Friends to affirm with us that all faithful, loving relationships give evidence of the active and sustaining presence of Divine Guidance and Divine Grace. Are we rejecting God's work among us by refusing to accept these relationships? We ask all Friends to weigh this question carefully.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting has been greatly enriched over the years by the Spirit-guided leadership of many Friends who could not be hired nor hold leadership volunteer positions with this policy. We have felt the power of their ministry; we have rejoiced in their love. As members of FUM, we cannot agree to have their voices silenced in our name. This policy has already caused great pain for many Friends in FUM, including some of Baltimore Yearly Meeting's most revered and Christ-centered leaders.

We believe that a policy that requires staff and volunteers to have the endorsement of their Meeting or Church would be a more accurate measure of their character and more in keeping with how God would have us treat each other in Christian love.

In spite of the pain this issue has caused, we do not wish to break community with Friends United Meeting. We believe that we share common ground. We unite with FUM in affirming that all intimate relationships should be grounded in love, respect and discipline as a reflection of God's love. God calls us to worshipful consideration of these issues to come to a deeper revelation of Divine Truth.

We welcome the opportunity to engage with Friends everywhere in prayerful exploration of what God requires of us.

In the Light,

Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends