

History of FUM policy regarding appointment of homosexuals.

Until 1988, Friends United Meeting had not been able to openly discuss or reach a decision regarding its position on homosexual relationships. That year, staff made a decision not to appoint a gay man to the Quaker Volunteer Witness program, and to request that the Board adopt a personnel policy that would give staff guidance on the issue. In response, Friends United Meeting received a flood of letters from individuals and meetings, and staff conducted visits in several member yearly meetings to test possible policy options. Ben Richmond prepared a “Working Paper on Appointment of Homosexuals to QVW” to discuss the issues involved and made recommendations for policy. This paper was circulated to the Board prior to the October 1988 meetings, and in the concluding minute on the subject requested that the paper “be saved as a contextual and historical document.” After a preliminary discussion within the World Ministries Commission (which oversaw the QVW program), a revised version of the recommendations from that paper was presented to the General Board.

Board minute 88 GB 52 reflects the thorough and tender discussion of the issues involved. Three paragraphs were separately approved:

- (a) We affirm the civil rights of all people to secular employment, housing, education and health care without regard to their sexual orientation. In particular, we condemn violence, whether verbal or physical, against homosexuals, and call for their full protection under the civil rights laws.
- (b) We reaffirm our traditional testimonies of peace, simplicity, truth speaking, gender and racial equality, personal integrity, fidelity, chastity and community. We recognize that there is diversity among us on issues of sexuality. For the purpose of our corporate life together, we affirm our traditional testimony that sexual intercourse should be confined to the bonds of marriage, which we understand to be between one man and one woman.
- (c) The lifestyle of volunteers under appointment to Quaker Volunteer Witness, regardless of their sexual orientation, should be in accordance with these testimonies.

According to the same minute, the General Board also approved adding the following statement: These policies are based on Friends beliefs as interpreted by Friends United Meeting since its beginning.

In March 1991, the General Board Executive Committee approved (91 GBEX 18) circulation of an “Organizational and Personnel Policy Manual.” It took the QVW policy and extended it as follows:

Friends United Meeting holds to the traditional Friends testimonies of peace (nonviolence), simplicity, truth speaking, community, gender and racial equality, chastity, and fidelity in marriage. It is expected that the lifestyle of all staff and volunteer appointees of Friends United Meeting will be in accordance with these testimonies.

Friends United Meeting affirms the civil rights of all people. Staff and volunteer appointments are made without regard to sexual orientation. It is expected that sexual intercourse should be confined to marriage, understood to be between one man and one woman.

This wording has been retained in all subsequent editions of the Personnel Manual.

The 1988 minute placed the personnel policy within the framework of traditional Friends testimonies and said that the policy applied to the corporate activities of FUM. The wording of the 1991 Personnel Manual explicitly applied the policy to all staff and volunteer appointees of FUM.

prepared by Ben Richmond, spring 2003