

Summary of work around our evolving relationship with FUM

Prepared by Bruce Neumann for the Feb. 8, 2020 Ministry and Counsel Meeting

After last summer's decision to discontinue the FUM withholding practice, Coordinating and Advisory agreed to oversee and shepherd continuing conversations with Monthly Meetings, in particular with meetings which had discerned to withhold funds.

- This effort began with a letter from me which was widely distributed, explaining what had happened at sessions and giving some sense of the various points that had been made in various conversations. I will note that I had editing help from a number of people.
- C&A put together a list of all Meetings which had at some point minuted an intention to withhold, whether or not they actually had or were currently. Each meeting on this list was contacted by someone from C&A. Several of these meetings never replied to our overtures.
- Beginning in September, various combinations of Noah, Frederick Martin and myself have participated in discussions about our relationship with FUM at Friends Meeting, Cambridge; Wellesley Meeting; Northwest Quarter (held at Middlebury which has been withholding); Providence Meeting; and Worcester Friends Meeting. In most of these cases there was conversation, prior to the meeting, with the clerk or clerk of M&C.
- In addition, Hartford MM held a discussion which none of us from C&A was able to attend, but were in dialogue with John Humphries who led the discussion; and Racial Social and Economic Justice Committee offered a listening session for anyone who longed to speak about their experience of the change in withholding policy, and/or their impressions of the discernment around the issue at Sessions. I was unable to attend, but a number of friends in attendance shared that many different points of view were shared and respectfully listened to.
- On January 6, I sent another letter to all MM's updating Friends on what things have happened, and suggesting how minutes or proposals might find their way to Sessions

Through this work, I have been becoming clearer to suggest that Friends A) appreciate the complexity of the issue and B) look beyond the personnel policy to a wider view of concern for LGBTQ+ friends. If we think of the many LGBTQ Friends who are not in open and affirming meetings, what is the most useful thing we can do for them? I will say that in the Meetings we have attended, I have not felt particularly successful in this attempt, but retain some hope that it is making some shift in the conversation.

While the meetings that we have visited are meetings which have discerned to withhold, I would point out that there are a range of opinions in each meeting

In each meeting we have gone to, Noah has offered the mechanism of MM's sending their contributions to NEYM earmarked for equalization, noting that none of this money goes to FUM. While Friends have been happy to hear of a potential solution for the short term, we certainly have heard a longing for resolution that all can be content with.

I can report that Friends have been thankful for our presence at meetings we have attended. I believe they feel some reassurance that their pain and discomfort is seen and heard. I will also say, though, that because of the variety of opinions in each of these meetings, it is very challenging to find some unity.

I am waiting to see if something emerges as a minute or proposal which might come to Sessions.

Bruce