

Minute on the New England Yearly Meeting FUM Withholding Mechanism
Approved 4-9-2020, Wellesley Friends Meeting

In 2008 Wellesley Friends Meeting wrote a Minute Against Discrimination; our community remains in unity with this Minute which states:

As Friends we believe that there is that of God in everyone. Early Friends' testimony of equality led them to reject discrimination based on gender, and in later years, on the basis of race. In this spirit, and after years of discussion, worship sharing, and discernment, Wellesley Friends Meeting approved two minutes: the first welcomed gays and lesbians to the Meeting and agreed to care for those who had been married under the care of other Meetings; the second affirmed that the Meeting will joyfully take under its care the marriage of couples cleared for marriage "regardless of gender."

Because of our strong witness against discrimination, we are deeply disturbed by the personnel policy of Friends United Meeting which discriminates against gays and lesbians.... It is our experience that God calls us to service regardless of our sexual orientation. The injustice and cruelty of this policy has shaken us and spiritually wounded many in our own community whom we hold dear.

Wellesley Friends Meeting is grateful for the work, care and love that led to the acceptance of a FUM withholding mechanism (Minute 2009-54) at the 2009 Sessions of the New England Yearly Meeting (NEYM). The withholding mechanism acknowledges the role of individual conscience. It provides a tangible way to recognize that Friends United Meeting's personnel policy falls short of the Quaker revelation that there is that of God in every individual, including those who find love outside of marriage as defined by the FUM personnel policy.

The withholding mechanism accomplishes multiple purposes.

- It sends a clear message that the personnel policy is not acceptable to us.
- It allows those who cannot contribute to FUM in good conscience to continue to contribute to our monthly meeting and to NEYM.
- It allows those who wish to support FUM financially to continue to do so.
- It allows monthly meetings to stay in relationship with our Yearly Meeting.
- It avoids incurring further losses of Friends from our Meeting community.

The sunset of the FUM withholding mechanism could have posed an existential crisis in Wellesley Meeting. This issue had already caused a schism in our community. Instead, our threshing sessions and small group discernment have highlighted our deep love for the Wellesley Meeting community and for each other, as well as our shared desire to respect the diverse witnesses held within our Meeting. Through hard work and tender engagement with each other, we have arrived at a unity that we know to be true: we all disagree with the personnel policy. We express that disagreement differently. We honor our differences with love for one another.

Withholding has, at times, been misunderstood. It is not intended as financial leverage, but rather as a witness of faith and conscience. We wish to draw a clear distinction:

- The ability to withhold honors the witness of those who cannot in good faith support an organization that has a harmful policy.
- We do not believe in using money as a tool of coercion.

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We took faith during the era of the FUM withholding mechanism that there was a commitment by NEYM to hold the FUM personnel policy in the Light and work unceasingly to reach a broader unity on that of God in all Friends, gay and straight. NEYM has not engaged enough in this difficult work. With the non-renewal of the Withholding mechanism, we fear that it will be assumed that NEYM is comfortable with the policy as it stands and we will lose the fundamental Truth that our LGBTQ siblings are created and loved as they are, and God does not expect or want them to be other than they were created to be.

We at Wellesley Friends Meeting are united in supporting vigorous engagement with FUM about the personnel policy. We pray for a wider understanding throughout New England of the importance of a means to tangibly bear witness against the policy. We seek a way to accommodate this tangible witness, insufficient as it is. To that end, we request that the Yearly Meeting continue the FUM Withholding mechanism, with the only end date being when FUM removes from their personnel policy the expectation that “sexual intercourse should be confined to marriage, with marriage understood to be between one man and one woman.”

There is strength in our diversity, and deep love and integrity in our shared will to honor our differences. As a Meeting we unite with this minute as an expression of God’s love.