Friends United Meeting Report

Georgia Fuller, Langley Hill

BYM Representative to the General Board

Interim Meeting, June 10, 2022

 Representatives to the General Board for the new Triennium (three-year term) met September 30-October 2, 2021 by zoom. Representatives and staff attended from around the world. FUM, like every organization, has been laboring to survive the COVID Pandemic. By our meeting March 3-5, 2022, some representatives and staff were able to meet in Richmond, IN in person and the rest of us used zoom. The organization has experienced numerous staff changes both in Indiana and Kenya, with many long-time members retiring and current members being promoted to keep the organization functioning.

 Kira Young, Director of Finance, has converted our financial reports to a form that even I can read. It has been a mammoth task to put income (which comes from several different endowments, grants, sales, rent, and different kinds of contributions) and expenses (which occur in the U.S., Ramallah, East Africa, and Belize) all in the same program. This is a major step forward in keeping FUM functioning in good order!

 During their tenure in our African Office, Shawn and Katrina McConaughey traveled to our many projects and did masterful work supporting the local leadership with quiet assurance. As a result, many of them have stepped up to new responsibilities. This is fantastic!

 When FUM redid its by-laws to move us to a true global partnership, it also opened the possibility of membership to groups other than yearly meetings or formal associations. As a result, several African congregations in North America have approached us about joining FUM. One American congregation in Indiana has also inquired about membership. Growth is exciting and invigorating. Because of my training in cultural anthropology and social change and my experience with some of FUM’s diversity, I can see the downside of growth. The downside is even more diversity. Twice at the March meeting I brought up the need for us to find “a way to have difficult conversations.” (Difficult conversations is an FUM phrase.) This is a glimpse of the sociological diversity we now have:

 East Africa Yearly Meeting in the tribal region of the Luhya Tribe has been replaced by 21 yearly meetings.

 Friends’ meetings have spread to the Samburu and Turkana tribes in Kenya

 Missionary work in Tanzania is growing

 A significant number of African Friends, who have lived in the US and Canada long enough to become somewhat Westernized, have formed their own Quaker churches

 We now have two Friends organizations in Indiana instead of one.

 We now have two Friends organizations in North Carolina instead of one.

 Representatives from other yearly meetings approached me after the March Board meeting about the need for FUM to develop a way to have difficult conversations. As a result, I sent a letter to our Presiding Clerk, Ron Bryan, our General Secretary, Kelly Kellum, and our Director of North American Ministries, Colin Saxon, explaining why we need to develop a way to discuss our differences now, and not wait until our diversity erupts into a crisis. It is attached.

 This work is in the embryonic stages. Talking about it in public would stifle the opportunity for General Board members to exchange ideas, to refocus concerns, and to explore different ways to approach them. Sexual ethics and gender identity are among the issues. Because of the current composition of the General Board, I can promise you that concerns about sexuality and gender in FUM will not go away. It is wise to say no more at this time.

 I am not with you today because the Executive and General Boards of FUM are meeting now.