

**EFC's statement on human sexuality:  
History of our discernment process**

1. Northwest Yearly Meeting (NWYM) discussions/controversy

- 1987: the Yearly Meeting adopted a statement on human sexuality, which was included in the *Faith and Practice* (F&P) section "What Friends Believe". This statement included this language: "We denounce, as contrary to the moral laws of God, acts of homosexuality, sexual abuse, and any other form of sexual perversion." (Appendix 1.)
- F&P also contains a provision for expelling a member church whose departures from F&P guidance are deemed by the Yearly Meeting Elders to be "shattering" to the Yearly Meeting.
- Spring 2012: A letter from a group of George Fox University alumni calling themselves "One George Fox" released a letter to "the George Fox University community", asking for improved understanding and treatment for LGBTQ students at the University. The letter was signed by several hundred alumni. (See Appendix 2 and <http://www.onegeorgefox.org/>.) Unofficial and heated YM discussions began that spring and summer (notably on the pastors' email list), prompted by the publication of the letter and the fact that some persons in leadership in YM churches had signed it.
- July 2012: At the annual sessions YM leadership organized small "listening group" discussions, designed to share understandings in a non-threatening forum; and a general session to air views on appropriate expressions of human sexuality. Evaluations of the listening group experience were generally positive and appreciative of the opportunity to begin a discussion of the subject of same-sex relationships. The open session revealed a wide spectrum of understandings and tolerance levels. Some at this meeting voiced the view that churches currently not in compliance with the F&P statement should be disciplined.
- July 2012: YM Elders announced—in response to the discussions during YM week described above—that they would form a task force to bring a proposed revision to the statement that would "season it with grace" while leaving intact the Yearly Meeting's historical understanding of same-sex relationships.
- July 2013: that revision was brought for first reading, but the decision was postponed for another year, in order to permit time for seasoning and for local meetings to study it.
- August 2013 – July 2014: The responses received by the clerk from local meetings and individuals reflected a wide and active disagreement in our understanding of same-sex relationships. EFC's minuted response of April 13, 2014, is attached (Appendix 3).
- July 2014: the revision proposal did not receive approval upon the delayed first reading, leaving the existing statement still in effect. The YM did affirm that the existing statement still remains troubling for some (see YM 2014 minutes). The YM discussions from this point centered on the controversy over West Hills Friends Church's public positions and actions.

2. West Hills Friends Church controversy

- 2012: WHFC released a minute regarding their affirming understanding of same-sex relations, and were brought "under the care" of the Elders (per Elders' report at YM 2014; see YM minute #9).
- July 2015 the Elders announced (after the close of YM sessions) their decision to "release" West Hills from membership in NWYM.
- August 2015: eight churches in the YM, including Eugene (8/23/15), sent letters appealing this decision to the Administrative Council. (See attached letter from EFC, Appendix 4.)

3. Eugene Friends Church's deliberations

- August 23, 2015: EFC, in a meeting for worship and business, approved a minute authorizing sending a letter to the YM Administrative Council, appealing the release of West Hills by the YM Elders. This meeting reflected a diversity of views on the matter, and finally produced a very brief letter based largely on procedural matters (see appendix 4).
- September 2015: in a meeting for worship and business, a letter was read from Marie and Karla identifying their relationship as a 36-year long “committed, loving relationship” between two life partners. They asked that we make a decision about our willingness for them to continue in leadership, in light of the nature of their relationship [“in light of the West Hills decision by the NWYM Board of Elders and some statements made at our August 23rd business meeting, it is clear to us that the time has come for you to decide if Karla and I may continue in the roles we gave been called to in this church.”]
- September (October?) 2015: at a meeting for worship and business we approved a minute affirming them in their leadership roles, Karla as Clerk of Stewards, and Marie as Clerk of Elders, through the end of their terms.
- Following this decision, which was controversial, several members decided to leave EFC.
- The decision was reported to NWYM Elders, who appointed a subcommittee to “come alongside” EFC in the continuation of this continuing discernment process.
- Fall 2015: the EFC Elders developed a plan for a process for the congregation to carefully discern God’s continuing leading in the matter of same-sex relationships in the context of EFC’s life and ministry. This process may be seen both as a continuation of the deliberations concerning Karla’s and Marie’s leadership (to see if we wished to make a statement with general applicability, along the lines of the affirmation we had made in their particular cases); and also as part of the church’s preparation for seeking a new pastor following Clyde’s retirement in spring 2018.

#### 4. EFC’s discernment process

- Book study: EFC Elders identified four books that we would read and discuss as a congregation, to draw out and process the important issues and understandings that posed difficulties in finding unity about a shared understanding of same-sex relationships. Sue Scott agreed to serve as our facilitator for these conversations. Two discussion dates were offered for each book, to permit as many people as possible to participate. Copies of the book were made available to those who could not afford to buy them. Two months were given to read and discuss each book. The four books were
  - *A New Kind of Christian* (Brian McLaren) This title was chosen to give insight into the changing cultural landscape and challenges for the post-2000 church
  - *Blue Parakeet: rethinking how you read the Bible* (Scott McKnight) This title was chosen to help us see and understand different approaches to seeking truth in the Bible.
  - *Washed and Waiting* (Wesley Hill) This title was chosen to represent a thoughtful presentation of an abstinence position for gay Christians.
  - *Letter to My Congregation* (Ken Wilson) This title was chosen to represent a biblically affirming understanding of committed same-sex relationships.

The discussions were consistently well-attended and characterized by honest, respectful sharing of views.
- Two general discussion meetings were held following the completion of the book study series, designed to move us toward the discernment of a shared understanding of EFC’s inclusion of gay and lesbian persons. The honest and tender concern of these discussions was consistent with the minute previously approved, relating to the YM revision proposal, which captures best the heart of the sharing in all our meetings (Appendix 3). Friends shared openly and poignantly their own

experience and that of friends and family members, many of whom had been excluded from the Christian community on the basis of aspects of their sexuality.

- On the basis of the discussions at these meetings, the Elders drafted a “Statement on Human Sexuality”, which was discussed at two general meetings. This statement was revised once more, and presented again at two further meetings.
- December 4, 2016: At the second of these two meetings a final version of the statement was approved (see Appendix 5).

**Appendix 1: Letter to NWYM churches conveying the existing and proposed revised text of the Faith and Practice statement “Christian Witness to Sexuality”.** Note: only part 1 is pertinent.

April 30, 2013

Dear Friends in NWYM,

We will consider three proposed revisions to *Faith and Practice* at our annual sessions in July. Because they pertain to matters of belief, they have been fashioned under the close guidance of the Elders, as well as the *Faith and Practice* Revision Committee. For the same reason, they will be considered twice—once for first reading in July 2013, and again for second reading in July 2014. In each case other Friends provided important advice to the formation of the text, which I’ll describe in each case below. Because the statements and queries in *Faith and Practice* supply a vital description of our common faith and life together, we hope you will give these proposals careful attention and prayer in your local meetings prior to coming together in July. In the end, it is the voice of Christ we expect to hear and respond to faithfully.

**Faith and Practice revision proposals for first reading in 2013.**

Proposed revisions are laid out in **bold**, and current language is given in square brackets.

1. Statement on Human sexuality (in the section titled “What Friends Believe”). At Yearly Meeting 2012 the Elders told us that they intended to charge a task force to review the current statement on human sexuality and, while not changing our historic understandings, to “season it with grace”. The task force, consisting of the *Faith and Practice* Revision committee, one Elder, and one member of the Administrative Council, produced a draft proposal, which was then reviewed and approved by the Elders. In its deliberations the task force gratefully considered the advice offered by the small listening groups that met during our annual sessions in 2012.

**18. Christian Witness to Human Sexuality. We believe that God created humans with a desire for connected community, for friendship, for family, for sexual intimacy, all of which are part of God’s good creation. We give testimony that the purpose of sexual intimacy is both for procreation and for formation and sustenance of bonds between husband and wife, which are good for the health and stability of the family and the community. We believe, therefore, that distortions of sexual intimacy including infidelity, premarital sex, and homosexual acts contribute to brokenness of the individual and the community. We aim to be a community whose supreme vital purpose is relationship with the Christ who lovingly pursues every person—a community that provides a place to be open, honest, and accountable with sexual desires, wounds, and brokenness—a place where people can grow in the understanding and practice of connecting intimately. We affirm the journey toward healing, reconciliation, and sexual wholeness out of loving concern for the individual and for the good of the entire community.**

[Current statement: We hold that only marriage is conducive to godly fulfillment in sexual relationships for the purposes of reproduction and enrichment of life. We consider sexual intimacy outside marriage as sinful because it distorts God’s purposes for human sexuality. We denounce, as contrary to the moral laws of God, acts of homosexuality, sexual abuse, and any other form of sexual perversion. The church, however, as a community of forgiven persons, remains loving and sensitive to those we consider in

error. Because God's grace can deliver from sins of any kind, we are called to forgive those who have repented and to free them for participation in the church.]

2. Query on conflict and differences. At Youth Yearly Meeting 2012 the high school youth, seeking the leading of Christ, drafted a revision to our query (#6) on dealing with conflict within the church. Middle school youth also offered input to this process. This draft was offered to the Elders, who approved it cordially with minor stylistic alterations, to be brought for first reading. It should be noted that this draft query and the draft of Query 16 that follows contain some important stylistic changes designed to help us use them more effectively in self-examination: 1) they use the first person "I" rather than "you"; and 2) they employ open-ended questions rather than those that can be answered by "yes" or "no".

**Query #6: Recognizing human imperfection, how do I strive to follow Christ's example in the way I love and respect others? When confronted with a conflict, how do I actively show Christ with a compassionate and grace-filled heart? Am I leaving space for change? How do I value the other person when charged with their reputation, remembering that they, too, are a child of God? How do I build up the individual in the light of God?**

[Current version: As followers of Christ do you love and respect each other? Do patience and consideration govern your interactions; and when differences arise, do you resolve them promptly in a spirit of forgiveness and understanding? Are you careful with the reputation of others?]

3. Query relating to harmful, addictive or distracting behaviors. This revision was made in response to discussions at our meetings for worship and business at Yearly Meeting 2010. In that discussion it was discerned that the current query relating to harmful or distracting behaviors did not represent a unity among Friends present. In January 2011, at their midyear meeting, the Representatives worked carefully on drafts to offer the Elders, which they hoped expressed the leading of Christ on these matters. Using these drafts as a starting place, the Elders composed a new query.

**Query #16: How am I attending to the Spirit of Christ in order to live a life so dependent on Him that I avoid any substance, practice, or activity that claims time or attention that is His or has the potential to harm myself or others? How do I avoid enabling others to pursue interests, activities, or substances that could ensnare them? How do I educate myself and others about the destructive potential of alcohol and other drugs?**

[Current version: Do you discipline your mind and body to serve as instruments of the Lord? Do you avoid pornography? Do you abstain from harmful, addictive, and unnecessary drugs-including alcoholic beverages, tobacco, marijuana, and cocaine-and from profiting through their use? Do you refrain from gambling and taking part in lotteries?]

To see the current statements and queries in their context in *Faith and Practice*, consult the section titled "What Friends Believe" at <http://nwfriends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/faith-and-practice-2011-2012-08-20.pdf>. Section 8.09 in "Organization of the Yearly Meeting" lays out the process for considering revisions.

Seeking Him together,

Tom Stave, Clerk

## **Attachment 2: One George Fox letter, Spring 2012**

Dear George Fox University Community,

We are the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and allied alumni of George Fox University. We are called OneGeorgeFox and we have a message of hope.

To LGBTQ students and those experiencing same-sex attraction: You are not alone. Your feelings and desires are normal and natural. And God loves every part of you, including your sexual orientation and gender identity. Many of us, just like many of you, never heard these truths while growing up or while at George Fox. Many of us felt isolated, confused and compelled to fight our same-sex attractions. However, in our post-George Fox lives, we learned to face the realities and complexities of our true selves and to live happy lives and enjoy healthy relationships that are consistent with our sexual orientations. Life gets better. And there are people, including people of devout faith, who care about you, who want you to live a free, honest life, and who will walk with you on the sometimes-scary journey toward authenticity and wholeness.

To the broader George Fox community: There are many LGBTQ people that are part of this community. Treat us with respect. Treat us as fully human. Don't make fun of us. Instead, stand up for us when you see us being bullied or harassed. We are human beings just like you and share similar hopes and dreams. We want to fall in love with someone. We want to have a family. We want to feel safe. To learn more about us, ask us questions. And listen.

To allies who have not voiced their support: Please come out in support of LGBTQ students! They need to know you are there. These students encounter prejudice, judgment, condemnation and bullying, and they need to know who will be safe to talk to and who will treat them with care and respect. Whether you are a student, a faculty member, an administrator or otherwise connected to the George Fox community, LGBTQ students need to know you exist.

To the George Fox administration, its Human Sexuality Committee, the Board of Trustees and the Northwest Yearly Meeting of Friends: Like heterosexual people, most of us have a very basic human need for the emotional intimacy and physical affection that comes from a committed relationship. Consequently, making acceptance of LGBTQ people within the George Fox community contingent on celibacy is not loving or responsible. We are not asking for permission to live "a promiscuous gay lifestyle." We want a spouse. We want a family. We want romance! And we deserve a community that accepts us and will nurture our relationships and our families. We are building that community now through our alumni group, OneGeorgeFox. The students are also building that community through a student group called GFU Common Ground.

Some people will probably respond to this letter by telling us that we are free to pursue that community, but not at George Fox. That position denies reality. We are George Fox. We are part of this community. We have great friendships here. We spent years studying and learning about ourselves while at George Fox. We also carry the name of our alma mater with us on our resumes, professional bios and publications. Moreover, a place like George Fox should be open to reexamining long-held beliefs, particularly when there are significant numbers within that community who are harmed by existing policies and who hold different beliefs. The George Fox community has always contained LGBTQ students. Our hope is that we can be part of creating change within our community, so that LGBTQ students can come to George Fox to study, to worship and to serve, in a safe and affirming environment.

To students, alumni and others who would like to talk more about this or who need support, please reach out to us. We are a diverse, open and vibrant community that is excited to meet you. If you would like to connect with one of us, email [contact@onegeorgefox.org](mailto:contact@onegeorgefox.org) or visit [www.onegeorgefox.org](http://www.onegeorgefox.org) for some helpful resources.

With much love and hope for the future,

[List of signers follows]

### **Appendix 3: EFC response to NWYM F&P revision proposal:**

Eugene Friends Church  
Meeting for worship and business  
April 13, 2014

#### Minute on proposed revision of the F&P statement on Human Sexuality

The following minute was approved. The meeting was clerked by presiding clerk Lorri Morse. At the request of the EFC Elders, and with the clerk's approval, the discussion of this issue was clerked by Tom Stave. There were approximately 30 people in attendance.

"At our April 13, 2014 business meeting Eugene Friends Church considered the proposed revision to our *Faith and Practice* statement on Human Sexuality. In our discussions, we affirmed that we love and respect one another, despite differences we may have in our understandings about these issues. We also affirmed that our unity is found in Jesus Christ and his love for us, rather than in our agreement about issues. We committed ourselves to listening together for the voice of Jesus Christ, our teacher.

"We affirmed the proposed statement's positive description of God's purposes for human sexuality, and God's concern for wholeness in relationships, including those in which our sexuality is involved. Our general impression was that the proposed new statement was kinder in tone. As we considered the specific issues, particularly same-sex relationships, we expressed a number of concerns and perplexities. Many of us related stories of friends and family members who are in active same-sex relationships, and who have left the church because of their experiences of hurt and rejection and a feeling of endangerment in the church. The church as a safe place for gay and lesbian people was a frequent theme. Those who shared these stories urged that we consider actual experiential knowledge of healthy same-sex relationships in our discussions; and that we treat gay/lesbian people as individuals rather than as a homogeneous group. We expressed a strong desire to make love for gay and lesbian people a strong factor in our deliberations. We confessed that our own sinfulness, both sexual and otherwise, is no less than that of those expressing same-sex attraction in their relationships. Several expressed a struggle between the desire to honor what they understand is the Bible's teaching about the sinfulness of same sex relationships, and the desire to act in an authentically loving and including way to those in these relationships. Concern was expressed by several that both statements would repel their gay and lesbian friends who might want to fellowship with us. Many shared their sense of the complexity and difficulty of the issues, and noted that a conclusion satisfactory to most Friends is hard to see at this point. APPROVED"



**Appendix 4: EFC appeal letter**

August 23, 2015

To: Mark Kelley, NWYM Presiding Clerk

From: Eugene Friends Church  
Joanne Halgren, Presiding Clerk

Eugene Friends Church in its Monthly Meeting of August 23, 2015 (33 persons present), approved the following:

Eugene Friends Church Monthly Meeting respectfully requests, according to 1.03.04 of “Business procedures” in *Faith & Practice*, that West Hills Friends not be released or disconnected from the Yearly Meeting until a time when the Board of Elders may report their action to the Yearly Meeting “in plenary session...allowing time for prayerful consideration of issues raised by the report...”

Six Friends stood aside from this decision.

## Appendix 5: Final EFC “Statement on Human Sexuality”, approved 12/4/2016

### Eugene Friends Church statement on human sexuality

*History and context: The statement that follows describes a consensus that EFC has discerned regarding our understanding of committed relationships between persons of the same sex. We have arrived at this point in our journey after a more than year-long process of listening to each other, the Bible, various Christian writers, our own experience and that of others, and to the Holy Spirit. We acknowledge with humility that individual Christians have come to different personal understandings of the leading of the Holy Spirit in the matter of same-sex sexual relations. Some believe that sexual abstinence is the only appropriate response, while others believe that God blesses committed monogamous relationships between two persons of the same sex. We value each individual’s contribution to our discernment, and trust that all have sought the Spirit’s leading with faithfulness and humility. While our discussions were well attended and vigorously engaging, we also recognize that some in our community did not choose to participate in the process, and we respect their decision. While the statement expresses the sense of our leading as a community, we acknowledge and respect that the views of some individuals may not be in complete unity with its conclusions. We also agree to remain attentive to the Holy Spirit who continues to speak to us. The statement follows:*

**Statement: Eugene Friends Church affirms that God created humans with a desire for connected community, for friendship, for family, and for loving sexual intimacy, all of which are part of God’s love and God’s good creation; and we commit to teach and encourage those values that strengthen and support committed sexual relationships: love, commitment, respect, equality and fidelity. We will not exclude any person from full participation in the life and ministry of Eugene Friends Church solely on the basis of their sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or commitment to a lifelong monogamous same-sex relationship.**

What we learned about ourselves and God’s call through our discernment process: In the process of listening and laboring together, we have discerned the following:

- We affirm that the Kingdom of God is all-embracing, and the call of Christ is for every person to follow.
- We maintain our unity through our common commitment to Christ and to this particular Christian community.
- We respect that all those participating in these discussions affirm a belief in the authority of the Bible, but that on some matters our conclusions differ. As a community we conclude that biblical texts are not condemning of monogamous, committed same-sex relationships, while accepting in love and humility that some individual members do not concur.
- We recognize that many persons have suffered great harm and shame as a result of having been excluded from full participation in the Christian community on the basis of their sex,

gender identity, sexual orientation, or commitment to a lifelong monogamous same-sex relationship; and we desire to avoid such harm in the future, and to help heal injury from past rejections.

- We commit ourselves to treat one another with love, respect, openness and humility, despite differences of understanding.
- We have become stronger as a community and more committed to each other as a result of this group discernment experience.
- We affirm each person's privilege and responsibility to seek God, honor the leading of the Holy Spirit, search the scriptures, pray, consult with other Christians in community, and make decisions according to individual conscience.
- We realize that God may still have much to teach us in this area, and so we commit to continue to listen for the voice of God as we make this journey.