

## Lake Erie Yearly Meeting Harassment Policy

*Friends General Conference, in keeping with Friends' historical concerns for equality and justice, is committed to providing environments for staff, volunteers, committee members, and program participants which are free of discrimination and harassment. Demeaning actions, words, jokes or comments based on an individual's gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age or faith will not be tolerated. We also note that sexual harassment, both overt and subtle, is an illegal form of demeaning and oppressive misconduct which we want to prevent and which, if alleged, we will investigate thoroughly and fairly.*

FGC Central Committee, 10/22/95

*In spite of some Quakers' participation in the abolition movement to end enslavement in the United States; in spite of some Quakers' commitment to dismantling Jim Crow during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's; in spite of some Quakers' visible work to support the Black Lives Matter movement and in spite of all of us feeling horrified when yet another unarmed black or brown person is shot by police, our Meetings remain mostly white and Friends of Color do not necessarily feel safe or welcomed in a Quaker faith community.*

Institutional Assessment on Systemic Racism within Friends General Conference, October 2018

Lake Erie Yearly Meeting wants to make its Annual Gathering and other committee meetings, visits, and programs free of harassment. This policy addresses a number of forms of harassment, described below. Our consciousness of the need to prevent and respond to these types of harassment has been heightened by our realization that such behavior does occur at Friends' events.

**Sexual harassment is unwanted sexual or gender-based behavior generally involving the exercise of formal or informal power by the perpetrator over the victim.** It is a form of misconduct that is demeaning to another person and undermines the integrity of the relationship. It is illegal, and is strictly prohibited within LEYM. Sexual harassment may be verbal (suggestive comments, threats, insults, jokes, sexual propositions), nonverbal (suggestive, insulting or obscene gestures, noises, leering, displaying pornographic material), or physical (touching, brushing body, coercing sexual intercourse, assault).

Other forms of harassment based on race, age, disability, sexual orientation or gender identity all generally involve the exercise of formal or informal power by the perpetrator over the victim. The key words are "unwanted," "discrimination-based" and "formal or informal power," plus the basis of the behavior in differences in gender, race, age, ability, sexual preferences, or gender identity. While this list includes several characteristics that we are aware often form the basis for harassment, the policy is intended to be broadly interpreted to include harassment based on other similar characteristics.

Harassment is defined both by the feelings of the person who experiences it and by the intentions of the alleged perpetrator. What one person might consider an innocent comment or behavior could actually be experienced as harassment by another person, particularly if the alleged perpetrator persists in the behavior after the implications have been brought to his or her attention.

Does this mean that we must refrain from offering hugs to friends, or making comments about a friend's appearance? No--not if the person welcomes the hug or the comment. But we should be sensitive to the possibility that another might be made uncomfortable by such behavior. If there is any question about how another may feel, ask first (e.g., "May I give you a hug?"). This is simply part of our responsibility as members of a caring community of Friends.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU FEEL HARASSED

- 1. If you feel harassed by the comments or behavior of another person at an LEYM event, and if you feel able, you can tell that person clearly that you find their behavior objectionable and ask them to stop it.** Of course, there are situations in which it is difficult to confront such behavior on the spot. If someone does tell you that they has been offended or embarrassed by something you did, please do not argue about their feelings or how you intended your behavior. You cannot tell someone else how they should feel about something you say or do. Just apologize and be mindful so as not to repeat the objectionable behavior.
- 2. Reporting incidents of sexual harassment, racial harassment, or harassment based on sexual orientation:** LEYM has established a small "Harassment Discernment Committee" (H.D.C.) which includes a group of 5 people made up of diverse representation, so that people bringing a harassment complaint will feel comfortable. Please see the following section for details on the H.D.C. If you feel unable to confront the person, or find that they repeat the objectionable behavior despite your request to stop it, you may approach this committee with your concern. **Note that you may choose to pursue either an informal or a formal procedure for dealing with the situation.**
- 3. If you witness or are told about a situation involving possible harassment:** Try to check it out with the person who appears to be experiencing the harassment; if they feel uncomfortable about the behavior, encourage them to confront it or report it. If it is impossible to talk with the person, or if the person is not prepared to make a report themselves, yet you are convinced that harassment occurred, then a report may be made directly to the H.D.C.

## WHAT LEYM'S HARASSMENT DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE WILL DO IN RESPONSE TO A REPORTED INCIDENT OF HARASSMENT

### Who is the Harassment Discernment Committee (H.D.C.)?

The H.D.C. is made up of 5 people of diverse representation (male, female, LGBTQ, persons of color, younger, older). Diversity is crucial to this process, so that the person bringing a harassment complaint will feel both represented and able to trust members of the committee.

Two members are tied to LEYM positions: 1 appointed by Ministry & Nurture, and 1 member of the Executive Committee. These two individuals will proactively recruit the remaining 3 positions. These positions will be recruited and named during Annual Sessions, for approval during a business session and will serve for one year. They can be asked if they wish to serve in subsequent years.

H.D.C. members will be identified in all event program information.

- 1. Informal procedure:** If you feel embarrassed or offended by another's behavior, you may simply want an opportunity to discuss the experience with another Friend and think together about how to handle it. If so, a member of the Harassment Discernment Committee will be glad to meet with you for a confidential discussion of the incident(s). We welcome you to bring a support person with you during this conversation. If this discussion is sufficiently helpful, and you are able to stop or avoid further objectionable behavior, the H.D.C. will consider your concern to have reached closure and no further

steps will be taken unless the committee member determines that the nature of the complaint is serious enough to warrant further action, such as a formal procedure.

**2. Formal procedure:** If you wish a formal investigation and more assistance in dealing with the alleged harassment than that afforded by the informal procedure, you will be asked to submit a written, signed complaint. This complaint may be brief, but it should include name(s) and a description of the objectionable behavior, the context, and your feelings. When such a complaint is received, two members of the H.D.C. will meet with you in confidence, discuss the alleged harassment with you, and then proceed with a thorough investigation of the complaint. As in informal procedures, a support person is welcome. Such investigation will always include, but not necessarily be limited to, a meeting of the investigators with the alleged perpetrator. The H.D.C. reserves the right to make an independent decision to initiate the formal procedure in any case which it deems sufficiently serious to require a formal investigation and the possible consequences as listed below. In this event, both the complainant and the alleged harasser will be notified of such a decision.

**3. The members of the committee will discern the merits and gravity of the complaint and how to handle the situation.** If the H.D.C. team determines that harassment did indeed occur, possible consequences include:

- a) Asking the person perceived to harass to acknowledge and stop the offending behavior;
- b) Requiring this person to stay away from the person who experienced the harassment for the duration of the event,
- c) Engaging in a restorative circle/conversation, if both persons agree,
- d) Requiring the person perceived to harass to leave the event, and/or
- e) Refusing to accept this person at future events.

The discernment team will communicate its decision and the action taken to the individual who submitted the formal complaint and to the full H.D.C. Any decision to exclude a harasser from future events may be appealed by the harasser to the H.D.C. prior to the registration period for a subsequent event.

**4. Complaints will be treated with confidentiality and discretion.**

**5. Every effort will be made to protect persons making bona fide complaints from any kind of retaliatory action.**

#### **ACTING AS FRIENDLY BYSTANDER**

A person who has experienced sexual harassment may need to share the distress with someone in whom she or he has confidence and respect. If you are chosen, remember that however inadequate you feel, the other person trusts and respects you enough to share a matter of concern with you.

The most important gift you can offer is time – time for listening in a supportive and non-judgmental way, allowing space and silence for reflection.

The ideal outcome would be one where the harasser has been helped to accept and understand the outcome of her or his behavior, and has stopped it; the person who has been harassed no longer feels threatened; and both are enabled to remain at peace in the LEYM community.