

1 *Thomas Ellwood on recalling his own marriage in 1669: ... "We sensibly felt the Lord with us*
2 *and joining us, the sense thereof remained with us all our lifetime..."*

3 4 5 **Marriage**

6 **Sent to monthly meetings November 2019**

7 **For consideration and Input**

8 9 **What is Marriage?**

10
11 1) Marriage is a spiritual, emotional, and physical union of two adults who promise
12 with God's assistance a lifetime together. For those who choose it, marriage can be a
13 powerful framework for their lives built with generosity of spirit, mutual love, and
14 sensitivity to Divine guidance. It is our witness in NEYM that two people may be called
15 to marriage regardless of their gender identities.

16
17 2) A marriage is part of a broader context that extends beyond that of the couple alone.
18 Their love can be a source of strength with which they may sustain not only one
19 another, but their communities of family, friends and meeting. In turn, their marriage is
20 supported when these communities offer the couple their care, respect, and love.
21 Marriage can be a witness to the Inward Light and the fruits of its nourishment and
22 guidance.

23 24 **Considering Marriage**

25
26 3) Considering marriage at any age is a weighty and joyful decision. Marriage is an act
27 of trust and faith in one another and in the strength of each other's love. It is a spiritual
28 commitment and usually a legal commitment. Friends encourage the couple to examine
29 it in the light of how the Spirit is moving in each of their lives, making sure there is
30 room to support each other's leadings, and to make in their marriage a home for the
31 Spirit. It is important that the couple come to marriage as equals, with mutual respect,
32 each accepting the wholeness of the other.

33
34 4) A foundation of marriage is the ability to look clearly and honestly at oneself and to
35 engage in open communication with one's partner. In preparation for marriage, Friends
36 advise having discussions about attitudes and assumptions, and practical matters.
37 Underlying expectations for roles in the marriage, the possibility of children,

38 connections with family and friends, and attitudes to finances are some of the many
39 questions listed in Appendix 6, B.

40

41 **The History of the Quaker Marriage Ceremony**

42

43 *Friends believe that “we marry none; it is the Lord’s work, and we are but witnesses.”*

44

George Fox, 1669

45

46 5) The Quaker marriage ceremony arose in the seventeenth century as the Quaker
47 movement was becoming organized. Since Friends understood the union of a couple in
48 marriage to be the Lord’s work only, their marriages were not established by a priest or
49 a magistrate; therefore Friends’ marriages were not legally recognized.

50

51 6) As Friends were keen to have their marriages accepted within the general society,
52 they did everything they could to make their weddings transparent and as close to legal
53 marriages as possible. Couples had to be found clear to marry by the meeting where the
54 wedding was to be held. Banns¹ were published in a local newspaper since they would
55 not be read out in a state recognized church. Vows were carefully prepared in order
56 that promises made to one another were made with appropriate modesty and
57 consideration that any marriage would be at risk without God’s guidance. An oversight
58 committee helped the couple negotiate the planning of the wedding through to its
59 conclusion. The wedding took place in a regular meeting for worship where the couple
60 rose and said their vows to each other. Because Friends wished to establish a legal
61 grounding for the marriage, those gathered were asked, as witnesses, to sign a
62 certificate describing the events, the vows, and the date on which the wedding
63 occurred.

64

65 **Marriage under the Care of the Meeting Today**

66

67 7) Friends use the term “marriage under the care of the meeting” to refer to the
68 clearness committee process, the business meeting’s approval of a recommendation that
69 the marriage proceed, the work of the wedding oversight committee, and the wedding
70 itself. Wedding arrangements are begun after the business meeting has approved the
71 recommendation of the clearness committee. After the wedding, continued care of the
72 couple married under the care of the meeting becomes part of the pastoral care the
73 meeting may offer to all its couples. (See Appendix 6, A.)

74

¹ A notice read out on three successive Sundays in a parish church, announcing an intended marriage and giving the opportunity for objections.

75 **The Clearness Committee Process**

76
77 8) When a couple asks for a clearness committee for marriage, the guiding concern
78 of the meeting is that the couple has a committed relationship, and that they are
79 aware of the need for Divine assistance for the success of their marriage. In the
80 clearness committee meeting, the committee engages the couple in a conversation
81 on the meaning of marriage under the care of the meeting. The clearness
82 committee also helps the couple to explore their expectations for the marriage
83 relationship, the responsibilities they will be bringing to the relationship, and their
84 hopes for their future together. It is a time for everyone present to explore together
85 what marriage promises and entails and how it can be guided by the Spirit. This
86 conversation provides the opportunity for the couple to reflect upon what they are
87 called to express to each other in their vows, and for the clearness committee to
88 ensure that the vows reflect an understanding of the spiritual basis of the Friends
89 marriage ceremony. This enables both the couple and the meeting to participate
90 with integrity. Couples often comment that they look forward to this careful
91 discernment in the presence of others who are there to support and guide them.
92 The experience may forms bonds within the group that last long after the wedding
93 day. Some monthly meetings appoint two separate clearness committees, one for
94 each member of the couple. After their separate meetings, a joint meeting of the
95 committees and the couple is held. (See Appendix 6, C&D.)

96
97 9) Occasionally, a meeting is asked to take responsibility for a wedding under its
98 care where neither person in the couple is a Friend. This may be a couple searching
99 for a spiritual home who, in future years, may become committed members of the
100 meeting. It may be a couple simply looking for a venue, or a wedding format. In
101 either case, care should be taken to listen with an open heart and help the couple
102 discern the way forward with integrity. The meeting may choose to support the
103 couple in creating a ceremony “after the manner of Friends” where the marriage is
104 made legal by a justice of the peace or other public official, rather than a meeting
105 representative.

106
107 **The Oversight Committee**

108
109 10) After the request to be married under the care of meeting has been approved
110 by the business meeting, an oversight committee is appointed to help the couple
111 with their wedding plans. The oversight committee consults with the couple as
112 they finalize their marriage vows and make wedding arrangements. The
113 committee also makes sure that the legal documents are requested in time and
114 returned, signed, as required by the state. (See Appendix 6, E.)

115

116 **The Wedding Ceremony**

117

118 11) Today, a Friends' wedding ceremony occurs during a specially called meeting
119 for worship. The couple comes into the meeting room together, signifying their
120 unity in taking this step together and that they are freely giving themselves to each
121 other. In unprogrammed meetings, after a time of gathered worship, the couple
122 exchanges their vows followed by the reading of the certificate. The ceremony
123 returns to worship where those who are moved to speak may do so. In New
124 England's semi-programmed meetings there will usually be readings, music and
125 spoken prayers, in addition to the exchange of vows and a period of open worship.
126 In the traditional Quaker vows, each person promises "with Divine assistance" to
127 be a loving and faithful partner as long as they both shall live. The commitment is
128 to each other, understanding that the commitment is made in the presence of God,
129 and their families and friends. Other words may be chosen for the vows, but the
130 intent is the same. Whether or not there is a pastor facilitating the ceremony, there
131 is no one "performing" the marriage. Some couples experience being joined by the
132 Spirit before the time of their wedding. For them, the wedding ceremony is the
133 public acknowledgement of a spiritual reality. For others, the public exchange of
134 vows brings about a shift in the relationship.

135

136 12) Friends and family members attending a Quaker wedding may be
137 unacquainted with Friends' ways. Care should be taken in weddings that include
138 many non-Friends to explain the wedding service so that all may fully participate.
139 (See Appendix 6, F.)

140

141 **Sustaining a Marriage**

142

143 13) No ceremony can create a marriage. A marriage is created by two people, over time,
144 through love and patience, each supporting the other while appreciating their
145 differences. The different gifts of a couple can be a strength in dealing with the
146 complexities of life, and the gifts of one person can provide the support that allows the
147 other's gifts to flourish. Just as a couple learns to appreciate one another's gifts, they
148 learn to accept each other's vulnerabilities with generosity of spirit. The marriage grows
149 in the love that is fostered in this creative balance of support. One need not only discern
150 the right marriage partner but also consider how to be the right marriage partner.

151

152 14) Committed, intimate relationships are built on a foundation of truthfulness and
153 humility. Within a marriage, this requires willingness to be honest with one's partner
when one is feeling afraid, hurt, angry, or vulnerable, as well as to generously express

154 gratitude and joy. Sensitively and honestly naming one's sense of the condition of the
155 relationship is an essential practice for maintaining intimate relationships. Being willing
156 to work together will accomplish more than working alone. Humor can often ease the
157 way. Treating one another courteously, with kindness and gratitude, nourishes the
158 relationship. Marriage is not just about learning to live with one another, but building
159 up trust and actively cherishing one another.

160 15) Friends find resources to nurture marriage through their daily dependence on the
161 Spirit, as well as finding support from one another and through the support and
162 examples within their circles of community. Prayer and the sharing of spiritual insights
163 and leadings can be strengthening.

164 16) Should a marriage come to include children or other members, there will be new
165 sources of joy and new challenges. Building the wholeness of a larger family
166 community is based on the same principles as building the wholeness of the marriage,
167 and involves an awareness of the special joys and challenges of living with others.
168 (Please see The Family and Children Section, yet to be written.)

169

170 **Challenges in a Marriage**

171

172 17) It takes careful tending to keep a marriage fresh and strong. Time brings change:
173 new jobs, moves, and the growth of the family are all pieces of life that shift the
174 dynamic of a relationship. Unexpected turns and the inevitable difficulties and sorrows
175 of life require flexibility and mutual support. As people grow through their youth to
176 middle age and beyond, their perspectives of how they are called to live in the world
177 change.

178

179 18). Problems which arise need not come between a couple if they are committed to
180 facing them together rather than feeling themselves to be on opposing sides. A couple
181 that addresses challenges openly, listening to one another's concerns, may find clarity
182 in addressing their difficulties. Couples may find support for balancing the demands of
183 a shared life through marriage enrichment programs and couples' workshops. Over
184 time, the love that brought a couple together may continue to grow and transform in
185 ever richer ways, although not all marriages will hold.

186

187 **Separation and Divorce**

188

189 19) Friends know that there are times when divorce is necessary. We encourage a
190 struggling couple to ask the meeting for support through a clearness committee. If a

191 meeting finds it is unable to meet the needs of the couple, the meeting may help the
192 couple find other resources

193

194 20) The members of a couple, who find they have come to the end of their marriage,
195 must remember that such a passage does not imply they have come to the end of their
196 responsibility for the relationship, nor to the end of the need for ongoing discernment of
197 a faithful path in the relationship. Addressing the needs of children should be key
198 during a time of transition in the family. Children need to witness the possibility of a
199 continued commitment to following Divine guidance, and to understand the necessity
200 for moving forward with personal integrity. Whether or not children are involved, the
201 difficult experience of separation and divorce will be a time of necessary soul-searching,
202 and can be a time of personal growth, and unexpected transformation.

203

204 21) If a couple divorces, it is important that a meeting endeavor to maintain contact
205 with both individuals, especially when there are children involved. It may be that only
206 one of the former couple will continue attending meeting, in which case, special care
207 should be taken to reach out to the individual no longer attending to find out in what
208 way the meeting might support them. The simple act of reaching out may itself foster
209 healing.

210

211

212 **Extracts**

213

214 1) For the right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priest' or
215 magistrates'; for it is God's ordinance and not man's; and therefore Friends cannot
216 consent that they join them together: for we marry none; it is the Lord's work, and we
217 are but witnesses.

218

George Fox, 1669

219

220 2) Friends believe that the marriage ceremony is far more than the mere fulfillment of
221 legal or social obligations. It is rather the consummation of a period of searching for
222 God's will and purpose in two lives and therefore should be entered into joyfully,
223 reverently and soberly. In the midst of a specially called meeting for worship, in the
224 presence of God, surrounded by a loving community of family and friends, two
225 individuals take each other freely and equally, asking for God's help in realizing their
226 high hopes for a creative and lifelong partnership. We feel that it is an awareness of the
227 Light within each person that gives this new and deepening relationship the special
228 grace of steadfastness and trust, no matter what the future may hold. As we grow in
229 love, constancy and forgiveness in response to God's presence in our lives, we find our
230 marriages raised to new levels of courage and creativity. Within marriage it is in the

231 promise to love, rather than in the external form of the relationship, that the potential
232 for spiritual growth lies. What is required of us is our commitment, because whatever
233 comes, will be change, often totally unexpected.

234 **Living with Oneself and Others, 2001**

235

236 3) ...two young trees [are] planted close together in common soil at marriage. They send
237 down roots together, and feed on many of the same nutrients. But as they grow taller
238 and older, some of the roots shoot out in different directions, away from each other,
239 seeking mutually alien soil. Nevertheless, the older original roots stay intertwined.
240 Nevertheless the older, original roots stay intertwined. Similarly with the branches
241 above ground. Many of the branches intertwine and shape each other in the happy
242 embrace of shared space.... But these trees are not only growing in one direction,
243 toward each other, they are growing in all directions. Like the roots, some of the
244 branches stretch far away from the common center, and breathe a mutually alien air.
245 Each tree is in itself whole and individual and growing according to its inner design, yet
246 shaped on the one side by its partner, and on the other side by the outside world.

247

Elise Boulding, 1978

248

249 4) Never marry but for love; but see that thou lovest what is lovely.

250 He that minds a body and not a soul has not the better part of that relation, and will
251 consequently want the noblest comfort of a married life.

252 Between a man and his wife nothing ought to rule but love. As love ought to bring them
253 together, so it is the best way to keep them well together.

254 A husband and wife that love and value one another show their children and servants
255 that they should do so too. Others visibly lose their authority in their families by their
256 contempt of one another; and teach their children to be unnatural by their own
257 example.

258 Let not enjoyment lessen, but augment affection; it being the basest of passions to like
259 when we have not, what we slight when we possess.

260 Nothing can be more entire and without reserve; nothing more zealous, affectionate and
261 sincere; nothing more contented and constant than such a couple, nor no greater
262 temporal felicity than to be one of them.

263

William Penn, 1693

264

265 5) Single young adults, searching for a satisfying life style, need reassurance that their
266 choices may be, and should be, made to suit their individual needs and not to conform
267 to family expectations or societal pressures. Such pressures may push many into
268 marriages for which they are not ready or not suited. Perhaps more people today have
269 the courage to choose singleness and make a whole life. There have always been
270 beautiful examples of this among Friends, and their lives shine.

Family Life Subcommittee of New England Yearly Meeting, 1978

271
272 6) I have casually referred to my second marriage in 1902, as though it were merely one
273 event among the many events which came in succession. But it was very far from an
274 "ordinary" happening. Every aspect of my life was touched and transformed by that
275 initiation into a new and sacred fellowship. We promised in simple Quaker marriage
276 custom to be "faithful and loving," but we little knew what a wealth of tacit
277 commitments lay hidden under those three explicit words of promise. How little of life,
278 especially of married life, can be pattern-stamped and groomed into line by explicit
279 agreements in advance. Every crisis of life brings situations which could not be
280 anticipated or planned for beforehand, and for which there could be no contractual
281 arrangements. Every occasion of our lives has brought into play the unformulated and
282 tacit commitments which only love can supply.

Rufus M. Jones, 1934

283
284
285 7) One of the great illusions of our time is that love is self-sustaining. It is not. Love
286 must be fed and nurtured, constantly renewed. That demands ingenuity and
287 consideration, but first and foremost, it demands time.

David Mace, 2016

288
289
290 8) Marriage, to women as to men, must be a luxury, not a necessity; an incident of life,
291 not all of it.

Susan B. Anthony, 1875

292
293
294 9) *Job Scott writes to Eunice Anthony in 1780, shortly before their marriage:*
295 Having felt thee abundantly near this evening, I am free to write what revives for thy
296 perusal, hoping it may be useful towards our rightly stepping along through time
297 together. First, dearly beloved, let me tell thee, that however short I may be of strict
298 adherence to the Light of Life; yet it is my crown, my chief joy, to feel the holy
299 harmonious influences and in-shining's of the love of Jesus my Savior upon my soul;
300 and I feel that without this I must be miserable indeed. I also believe that the true
301 enjoyment of the marriage union consists eminently in both being engaged to draw near
302 to the Lord, and act in his counsel; which I not only wish but in a good degree expect,
303 may be our happy case. If it should, though we have as it were a dry morsel to partake
304 of, as to the things of this life; yet we may joy in the Lord, and rejoice in the God of our
305 salvation. Thou knowest I have no great things to invite thee to. May we, the remainder
306 of our lives, earnestly press after resignation to the Lord's will, and above all things,
307 strive to please him who only can give peace, in whatever circumstances we may be.
308 Then, I trust, the guardian angel of his holy presence will encamp around us, and his
309 everlasting arms be underneath to support.

Job Scott, 1797

310

311

312 10) Marriage is to be taken seriously, but not always in grim earnest; its problems take
313 perspective from fun, adventure and fulfilment, and joy and sorrow are mingled
314 together. We rejoice in success, but we must also be glad that we can console each other
315 in failure. 'With my body I thee worship' is to many a blessed phrase: but while some
316 find a perfect physical relationship easily, others reach it the hard way, and it is not less
317 precious for that. It is wonderful never to quarrel, but it means missing the dear delight
318 of making it up. Children bring joy and grief; some will have none and will miss both
319 the grief and the joy. For some, there is a monogamy so entire that no other love ever
320 touches it; but others 'fall in love' time and time again, and must learn to make riches of
321 their affection without destroying their marriage or their friends. Let us thank God for
322 what we share, which enables us to understand; and for the infinite variety in which
323 each marriage stands alone.

324 We thank God, then, for the pleasures, joys and triumphs of marriage; for the cups of
325 tea we bring each other, and the seedlings in the garden frame; for the domestic drama
326 of meetings and partings, sickness and recovery; for the grace of occasional
327 extravagance, flowers on birthdays and unexpected presents; for talk at evenings of the
328 events of the day; for the ecstasy of caresses, for gay mockery at each other's follies; for
329 plans and projects, fun and struggle; praying that we may neither neglect nor
330 undervalue these things, nor be tempted to think of them as self-contained and self-
331 sufficient.

332 **London Yearly Meeting Revision Committee, 1959**

333

334 11) God's love is ministered to most people through the love of our fellow human
335 beings. Sometimes that love is expressed physically or sexually. For me and my lover,
336 John, God's love is given through our homosexual relationship. In common with other
337 people who do not have children to raise, we are free from those demands to nurture
338 other vital things. This includes our meeting and the wider Society of Friends.

339 We both draw on our love a great deal to give us the strength and courage to do the
340 things to which God calls us. ... Our spiritual journey is a shared one. Sometimes the
341 pitcher needs to be taken back to the fountain. In order to grow, I need my church to
342 bless and uphold not just me as an individual, but also our relationship.

343

Gordon Macphail, 1988

344

345

346 **Advices and Queries**

347

348 **Advices for the individual:**

349 1. Share your spiritual needs with your spouse and support their spiritual journey.

350 Make time for spiritual refreshment together.

- 351 2. Make space in your life to nurture the relationship with your partner so it may grow
352 and unfold. Respect your spouse's interests and set aside time for enjoyment of each
353 other.
- 354 3. Accept your partner as a whole, recognizing and accepting their vulnerabilities as
355 well as their strengths. Remember that a loving relationship is built on respect, trust,
356 and allowances for differences, and requires time, flexibility, generosity of spirit and
357 a commitment to remaining anchored in love.
- 358 4. Regard one another other as equally important when considering the decisions of
359 your lives.
- 360 5. Know that a marriage that does not last does not have to be a failure, but part of a
361 search for ongoing integrity. Seek loving support from those around you when
362 entering troubled times, as many have done before you. All marriages have rough
363 spots.
- 364 6. Remember that your marriage, and any marriage, has an impact on those around
365 you, on children and on other people in the meeting. Realize that in living out your
366 spiritual values as a couple, you and your spouse will support others in doing the
367 same. If you lose touch with that inner voice, it will also impact those around you.
- 368

369 **Queries for the individual:**

- 370 1. Do my partner and I have a sense of spiritual connection? What part do our
371 individual spiritual journeys play in our relationship and is there mutual respect for
372 the direction of those journeys? Are we able to seek spiritual solace together, through
373 prayer or other means?
- 374 2. Have I considered the possibility that my partner or I may receive a leading that
375 takes us away from our family, puts us in harm's way, or causes financial strain? Am
376 I open to seeking divine guidance in such situations?
- 377 3. Do I seek Divine guidance together with my spouse in our life together? Are we open
378 enough to that guidance and to each other to face in love those things that challenge
379 us?
- 380 4. Have my spouse and I considered traditional roles in marriage, our attitudes toward
381 them and toward modern variations? Are we aware that one can impose a role
382 expectation on another without being aware of it?
- 383 5. How does my faith inform my perception of sexuality within marriage? Do my
384 partner and I understand each other's attitudes towards fidelity?
- 385 6. Am I ready to make adjustments to my personal life to meet my partner's needs with
386 kindness and understanding? How?
- 387 7. Do my spouse and I share interests we can enjoy together? How do we show respect
388 for each other's individual interests? What dreams do we each have? What dreams
389 do we share? Do we allow time for enjoyment of each other, and of a variety of ways
390 of nurturing one another and the relationship?

- 391 8. Do my partner and I have the willingness to listen and to be open and honest in our
392 communication with one another, especially at times of unexpected life changes? Can
393 we bear the consequences together of such changes? Have we discussed aging and
394 the changes it brings?
395 9. How do I react to my spouse's friends, parents and other relatives? How do I
396 balance care of my marriage with maintaining close, supportive relationships with
397 family members or close friends who may live far away (especially in case of illness
398 or old age)?
399

400 *Queries for couples to consider before marriage are in Appendix 6, B.*
401

402 **Advices for the meeting:**

- 403 1. Cultivate an atmosphere of trust in the meeting that promotes the willingness of
404 couples and individuals to share their joys, sorrows, and difficulties.
405 2. Do not equate the thoughts and feelings of one member of a couple with those of that
406 person's partner. Understand their uniqueness and the differences between them.
407 3. When troubles arise in a relationship, remember to keep confidences, and
408 respectfully consider the needs of each person.
409 4. Honor the time it takes to resolve problems.
410 5. As a marriage of members is integral to the meeting community, recognize that a
411 divorce will affect the whole. Allow time for adjustment and healing.
412 6. Nurture those in couple relationships and those who are not. Recognize the value of
413 single adults and support them, as well as those who are in couples.
414

415 **Queries for the meeting:**

- 416 1. Is the meeting prepared to wholeheartedly support a marriage without regard to
417 gender identity before such an occasion arises?
418 2. Does the meeting offer resources for support of relationships such as library
419 materials, marriage enrichment opportunities, clearness committees, or discussion
420 groups?
421 3. Is the meeting careful to support both members of a couple, in a divorce or
422 separation, and any children they may have, without being drawn into taking sides,
423 knowing that no-one is infallible or beyond forgiveness?
424 4. Has the meeting a full understanding of the expectations of the Quaker marriage
425 process, and can the meeting gently lead a couple who is not ready for this process in
426 another direction?
427
428
429
430

431 **Appendix 6**

432 **6A. Process for Marriage under the Care of a Meeting.**

433 It is important to note that the process from first requesting marriage under the care of
434 the meeting until the clearness committee's report to Ministry and Counsel is approved
435 can take as long as four or five months. Wedding arrangements are begun after the
436 business meeting has approved the recommendation of the clearness committee.
437

- 438 1. The couple writes a letter of intention to the clerk of the meeting. The letter may be as
439 short as a simple statement of the couple's wish to be married under the care of the
440 meeting. The clerk shares the request at the next business meeting.
- 441 2. The meeting, or the responsible committee of the meeting, appoints a clearness
442 committee or two separate clearness committees, one for each member of the couple.
- 443 3. The couple and the clearness committee(s) meet one or more times to discern
444 together whether all are clear that such a marriage may proceed.
- 445 4. The clearness committee reports its discernment to ministry and counsel or other
446 responsible committee, which then forwards its recommendation to meeting for
447 business.
- 448 5. Meeting for business reviews the recommendation.
- 449 6. If the decision is to proceed, the meeting appoints an oversight committee to have
450 care of the wedding on a date set by the couple.
- 451 7. The couple and the oversight committee make plans and arrangements for the
452 wedding ceremony.

453 **6B. Queries to be Considered by the Couple before Asking the Monthly Meeting for**
454 **Marriage under Its Care.**

455 The covenant of marriage is both a joyful and a solemn obligation. The couple
456 considering marriage under the care of a Friends' meeting should discuss frankly with
457 each other the commitments and responsibilities assumed in marriage and in
458 establishing a home. The questions that follow have no "right" answers, but are
459 intended as aids to spiritual discernment.

460 Each question is here because someone found it useful. There may be questions which
461 make one of you uncomfortable. If there is a worry or a discomfort that you have been
462 pushing away, now is the time to look at it. It is the unrecognized issues which most
463 often cause problems. Try to take enough time to allow yourselves to enjoy addressing
464 these questions, and others which may occur to you.

- 465 1. Why do we want to be married? What do we hope the commitment of marriage will
466 bring to our relationship?
- 467 2. Are we seeking a spiritual union, a legal union, or both? If we cannot have or do not
468 want a legally recognized union, are we aware of the many legal contracts which can
469 be drawn up to provide rights similar to those that are part of a legally recognized
470 union?
- 471 3. Why are we asking for clearness and oversight of the meeting?
- 472 4. Can we with integrity be married under the care of the meeting with the traditional
473 vow that references the importance of Divine assistance?
- 474 5. Have we discussed continuing friendships outside of our marriage? Do either of us
475 have emotional or other commitments to another person that could constitute a
476 challenge to our marriage?
- 477 6. Do we share each other's attitudes on earning, spending and saving money, and the
478 handling of finances? Will we share responsibility for our routine financial
479 maintenance?
- 480 7. Have we discussed whether either or both of us will change our names, and have we
481 discussed what last name any children may have?
- 482 8. What are sources of potential conflicts between us? When conflicts arise, what tools
483 do we have to deal with them?
- 484 9. Have we explored our attitudes and visions for family life including: Do we want
485 children? If so, how many? How soon? Might we consider adoption or foster care?
- 486 10. If either of us already has children, what might be the impact of this marriage on
487 them and of them on our marriage? How will we incorporate the children into the
488 new marriage? How will we work with children's other parent/s?
- 489 11. How might we raise, discipline, and educate children if we choose to be parents?
- 490 12. How would caring for children impact our jobs and our careers? How do we
491 envision sharing family responsibilities?
- 492 13. What might be the relationship of the family we are forming to our families of origin
493 and to the meeting?
- 494 14. How do we feel about each other's economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds?
495 How do our family backgrounds affect how we feel about marriage and having a
496 family? How do our families feel about our marriage? How does this impact us as
497 individuals and as a couple?
- 498 15. Do we know each other well enough to have considered the above questions
499 frankly, openly, and without hurry? If not, should we wait—six months, a year—
500 before proceeding with marriage?

501 **6C. Possible Questions to be Considered by the Couple with Their Marriage**
502 **Clearness Committee:**

503

- 504 1. What does marriage mean to you? Why do you want to be married?
- 505 2. Why do you want to be married “under the care of the meeting”?
- 506 3. What do you expect your relationship as a married couple to be with the meeting?
- 507 4. Are you free enough from prior relationships to enter fully into this marriage?
- 508 5. How will you bring children from a prior marriage into this marriage?
- 509 6. Have you shared enough information about your past and your present situation to
- 510 enter into your marriage with integrity?
- 511 7. What are the strengths in your relationship that will support you as you deal with
- 512 the inevitable changes and difficulties you will experience as a couple?
- 513 8. Which of the queries you considered together prompted the richest sharing? Which
- 514 prompted the most discomfort?
- 515 9. Have you considered what vows you will exchange?
- 516 10. Have you considered what Friends means by the “dignity, reverence, and
- 517 simplicity” of a Quaker wedding?

518

519 **6D. Possible Questions for the Marriage Clearness Committee to Ask Itself.**

- 520 1. How well do these two people know one another?
- 521 2. Are these two people embarking on a spiritual union?
- 522 3. Does the couple understand the implications of being married under the care of the
- 523 meeting?
- 524 4. Are there any obstacles to this couple marrying? Is there a role for this committee in
- 525 addressing them?

526

527 **6E. Wedding Oversight Committee Checklist.**

528

- 529 1. Meet with the couple to discuss plans for the wedding, and for the wedding
- 530 reception if it is to be held at the meeting house. Include choice of individuals to
- 531 open the worship, to read the certificate, and to close the meeting. Inquire if the
- 532 couple wishes to have a printed program that introduces the wedding ceremony to
- 533 the guests.
- 534 2. Review the vows with the couple. See that the wedding is accomplished with
- 535 dignity, reverence, and simplicity according to the practices of the monthly meeting.
- 536 3. See in advance that all applicable legal requirements have been met and that the
- 537 proper license has been obtained.
- 538 4. See that all necessary signatures are obtained for the license and that it is filed in
- 539 accordance with state law. The meeting should appoint a specific member of the
- 540 meeting to attend the wedding and sign the license.

- 541 5. Deliver the certificate to the recording clerk for copying or duplication for the
542 records of the monthly meeting and give the recording clerk an address to which the
543 certificate is to be returned.
- 544 6. Arrange for the care of the certificate following the meeting for worship and see that
545 it is signed by all who are present as witnesses.
- 546 7. Report to the monthly meeting that the marriage has been suitably accomplished,
547 that the applicable legal requirements have been satisfied, and that the certificate has
548 been properly recorded. Also, report any name changes resulting from the marriage.
549

550 **6F. Sample Introduction**

551

552 Welcome to this joyful occasion of ____ and ____'s wedding. Love has called us all
553 here today; the family, friends and especially ___ and ___.

554

555 In the Quaker tradition it is understood that no one performs the marriage, that two
556 people marry one another, and that it is the Spirit which seals the union.

557

558 The ceremony will be very simple, in the manner of Friends, or Quakers, as we are
559 better known. We will enter into a shared worship, in which we intentionally center
560 ourselves silently together in the presence of God. This does not come naturally to
561 everyone, but try to gently let go of any discomfort or extraneous thoughts and simply
562 bring yourself back as many times as necessary to the quiet and the beauty of this place
563 and this occasion and to the Spirit in which we all live and move and have our being.
564

565

566 When ___ and ___ are ready, they will make their vows to one another. After they say
567 their vows, they will sign the wedding certificate. At that point the certificate will be
568 read aloud by _____. Then we'll move back into silence, and during that time anyone
569 may speak who feels moved to do so - You may have words of blessing to share with
570 the couple, prayers for their future, perhaps thoughts on marriage, or words which
571 share the joy of this time. It's a time for quiet contemplation and the joy of being in
572 worship together. What you say doesn't need to be polished or eloquent, just from your
573 heart and fairly brief. There will be time for storytelling and congratulations after the
574 ceremony.

575

576 We find that allowing a little silence after someone speaks, allows their words to be to
577 be held, considered and appreciated. So, please leave a little space between speakers.
578 If no one feels moved to speak, we will simply remain in shared silence. The silence can
579 be as powerful as words.

580 I will indicate the conclusion of the ceremony when I offer my hand to the person next
581 to me, and all are then invited to shake hands and greet one another.

582

583 After the ceremony, everyone present is invited to sign the traditional Friends' wedding
584 certificate. Nowadays this is a lovely memento of all who were at the wedding, but in
585 the early days of Quakerism, this was the way of the meeting documented that the
586 wedding had occurred.

587

588 **6G. Traditional Vows.**

589 *Below are samples of the vows and the certificate. Any changes the couple wishes to make should*
590 *be reviewed with the marriage clearness committee.*

591

592 In the presence of God and before these friends, I take thee, _____ (Name) _____, to be my
593 [husband/wife/spouse/partner], promising, with Divine assistance, to be unto thee a
594 loving and faithful [wife/husband/spouse/partner] as long as we both shall live.

595

596 **6H. The Quaker Marriage Certificate.**

597

598 The certificate needs to include:

599 1. Names of the individuals being married.

600 2. Date and location of the wedding.

601 3. Meeting under whose care it is held.

602 4. The vows.

603 5. Space for signatures of the couple, pastor officiating (if appropriate), and of those
604 attending.

605 *Sufficient identification should be used to unambiguously identify the couple and the meeting.*

606

607 **6I. Traditional Quaker Certificate of Marriage.**

608 *(Below is a traditional certificate. Any changes the couple wishes to make should be reviewed*
609 *with the marriage clearness committee.)*

610 Whereas A.B., of [city or town], County of [county], and State of [state], [son, daughter,
611 child] of C.B., and E.D. of [city or town], and F. E., of [city or town], County of [county]
612 and State of [state], [son, daughter, child] of H. and K.E. of [city or town], having
613 declared their intentions of marriage with each other to [monthly meeting name] of the
614 Religious Society of Friends held at [city or town], [state], according to the good order
615 used among them, their proposed marriage was allowed by that Meeting.

616 NOW THESE ARE TO CERTIFY that for the accomplishment of their marriage, this
617 [day in words] of the [word for month number] month, in the year [year in words] they,
618 the said A.B. and F.E., appeared in a duly appointed meeting held at [city or town],
619 [state], under the oversight of [monthly meeting name] of the Religious Society of
620 Friends. Taking one another by the hand, A.B. and F.E. did on this solemn occasion
621 declare that they took each other as [wife/husband/spouse/partner], promising, with
622 divine assistance, to be unto each other a loving and faithful
623 [wife/husband/spouse/partner] as long as they both should live. *(Some certificates run*
624 *through the vows as said by each member of the couple)*

625 And in further confirmation thereof, they, the said A.B. and F.E., [taking the surname of
626 G*] did then and there to these presents set their hands.

627 A.B.[G*] F.E.[G*]

628 AND WE, having been present at the solemnization of the said marriage, have as
629 witnesses thereto, set our hands.

630 (Witness)

631 (Witness)

632 (Witness)

633 **Couples vary widely in the names that they take after they are married. In all cases their*
634 *signatures on this certificate are the first place that their married names are used, these*
635 *signatures being their final step in their wedding.*

636

637

638

Extract References

639

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