

Marriage

Granted Preliminary Approval on 10 August 2022

For the right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priests' or magistrates'; for it is God's ordinance and not man's; and therefore Friends cannot consent that they should join them together: for we marry none; it is the Lord's work, and we are but witnesses. George Fox, 1669

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

What is Marriage?

- 1) For Friends, marriage is a leading, a joyous spiritual, emotional, and physically intimate union of two adults who promise, with Divine assistance, a lifetime together. They affirm this covenant in a meeting for worship, witnessed by a community that has tested that leading and is prepared to support it.
- 2) For those who follow this leading, marriage becomes a powerful spiritual framework for their lives, built with generosity, mutual love, equality, and attention to the Spirit. Such a marriage is an expression of God's love, a witness to the Inward Light and the fruits of its nourishment and guidance.
- 3) It is Friends' witness in New England Yearly Meeting that two people may be called to marriage regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identities.
- 4) When George Fox and Margaret Fell married in 1669, they announced that their union was a testimony to a new type of marriage, arising from their redemptive experience. They married as equals, without subjugation of Margaret to George in any way; George waived any claim to Margaret's considerable wealth and she continued her public ministry. They spoke of their sexual relationship as being, for them, an expression of their divine unity rather than for the purpose of procreation. The purpose of their marriage was to help each other be faithful to God. These were profoundly radical views for the time. Many Friends have found the way they approached marriage to be a compelling testimony to the spiritual leading and egalitarian partnership that form the basis of marriage for Quakers.

Considering Marriage

5) For adults of any age, responding to the leading to marry is a weighty and joyful step. Friends encourage the couple to examine their relationship in the light of how the Spirit is moving in each of their lives, making sure there is room to support each other's leadings, and to make their marriage a home for the Spirit. It is important that the couple come to marriage as equals, with mutual respect, each accepting the wholeness of the other.

6) A foundation of marriage is the ability to look clearly and honestly at oneself and to engage in open communication with one's partner. When disagreements arise, they need to be acknowledged and heard with respect, while taken as an opportunity to more fully understand the needs of one's partner. In these difficult moments couples may find sitting in prayer together allows for fresh openings in their communication, preventing the disagreement from falling into bitterness.

7) Different attitudes toward finances are often indicators of different values concerning how we are called to live our lives. Decisions about money are entwined with nearly every activity of married life, such as spending on housing and living expenses, parenting, socializing, gift-giving, vacationing and charitable giving. Unless a couple learns to navigate these financial decisions together, large expenditures and even small ones have the potential to be sources of discord.

8) Integrity requires premarital honesty about any debt or other financial obligation. It is also advisable to consider openly any circumstances that may potentially lead to a substantial change in the couple's financial expectations: perhaps one person is hoping to return to school for more training, to change careers or to follow a calling involving a very different lifestyle. It may be challenging for a couple to give each other grace while still being able to ask for the change they need, yet it is the experience of Friends that it is important to do so.

9) The physical aspect of a marriage is a powerful connector, and sometimes may be linked with a strong sense of spirituality. Mutual delight in physical intimacy is a gift that needs nurturing. While it may take some time for both partners to find balance and satisfaction in their sexual lives, it is important that they ask for and offer one another a tender path toward being free and honest in their sexual desires. Couples need to be clear and open with each other on their attitudes to and understandings of monogamy and fidelity. The sexual relationship is not

static and will change with alterations in health, with the advent of a family, with age, and in times of stress.

11) When considering the leading to marry, Friends encourage couples to discuss their personal hopes and assumptions about marriage, as well as the familial and cultural norms they may have taken for granted. Queries in Appendix 6B will help a couple explore underlying expectations for roles in the marriage, sexuality, the possibility of children, connections with family and friends, and approaches to finances. (*The references to appendices will be standardized during the final editing.*)

Changing understandings of marriage

10a) As social norms related to sexuality and marriage change over time, meetings may receive requests for marriage that fall outside those described in this *Faith and Practice*. Members of a meeting may be challenged by such requests upon first consideration. In some cases, the request for marriage is clearly beyond the bounds of acceptance (such as a marriage between an adult and a child). A meeting receiving a request for a non-traditional marriage under its care (such as commitment to multiple partners) has the responsibility to discern carefully whether the relationship arises from God's call in the lives of the individuals, enriches the life of the meeting, and amplifies God's love in the world. Special concern should be given both to power imbalances that could cause harm to individuals involved, and to any potential legal implications. In some cases, the meeting may consider other forms of support, such as a recognition of commitment.

10b) Friends' understanding of marriage is not static throughout time. In recent history, New England Friends struggled to approve same-gender marriages. Two centuries ago, Friends struggled to approve the marriage of a member to a non-Quaker. The fact that these are now settled matters among us should not obscure the fact that the discernment, with its unknown outcome, was long, hard, tender, and sometimes painful. The practice of New England Friends is to discern as a larger body those matters that arise from monthly meetings, where each person can be most truly heard and known, and where we are always invited to broaden our understanding of ways to embody the love to which God calls us.

Marriage under the Care of the Meeting

12) Friends use the term “marriage under the care of the meeting” to refer to a couple's preparation for marriage and their wedding through a series of steps that begin with a written request to a meeting’s clerk and continue with:

- a clearness process reporting to Ministry & Counsel or other appropriate committee of the meeting (*see the chapter on Ministry & Counsel for a discussion of the various ways different meetings allocate this work to committees. In this chapter, we will refer simply to Ministry & Counsel.*);
- the business meeting’s approval of a recommendation that the marriage proceed;
- the work of the wedding committee (traditionally called an oversight committee);
- the business meeting’s approval of a called meeting for worship for the wedding;
- the wedding itself, including the signing of the Quaker wedding certificate by all present;
- the signing of the marriage license by the clerk or other member designated as the representative of the meeting.

It is important for couples to allow the clearness process to take its due time. Any logistical arrangements for the wedding and reception should remain tentative until after the business meeting has approved the recommendation of Ministry and Counsel. (*See Appendix 6A for more detail on the process of taking a marriage under the care of the meeting.*)

After the wedding, continued care of the couple married under the care of the meeting becomes part of the pastoral care the meeting offers to all its couples. (*see chapters on Ministry & Counsel and on Pastoral Care.*)

The Clearness Process

13) When a couple asks the meeting for clearness for marriage under its care, the guiding concern of the meeting is the nature of the couple’s spiritual relationship to each other and to the meeting, and of their life together under the guidance of the Spirit. To that end, Ministry and Counsel appoints a clearness committee that also helps the couple explore their expectations for the marriage relationship, the responsibilities they will be bringing to the relationship, and their hopes for their future together. It is a time for everyone present to explore together what marriage promises and entails and how it can be guided by the Spirit. If the couple does not intend the marriage to be legally

recognized, this is discussed within the clearness committee and is named when the marriage is brought to the business meeting for approval.

14) While the clearness process is often an opportunity for enrichment of the couple's relationship, its primary purpose is to discern on behalf of the meeting whether it is rightly ordered that the meeting take the requested marriage under its care. In situations in which the clearness committee finds unity that marriage under the care of the meeting is not rightly ordered, either because the couple is not ready for marriage, or because a Quaker marriage is not right for them, the committee must have the tender courage to report its discernment to the couple and to Ministry and Counsel.

15) The clearness process provides an opportunity for the couple to reflect upon what they are called to express in their vows, and for the clearness committee to ensure the vows reflect an understanding of the religious basis of a Quaker marriage. This preparation enables both the couple and the meeting to participate in the wedding ceremony with integrity. Couples often comment that they look forward to this careful discernment in the presence of others who are there to support and guide them. The experience may result in friendships within the group that last long after the wedding day.

16) Some monthly meetings appoint two separate clearness committees, one for each member of the couple. In addition to their separate meetings, the committees meet jointly with the couple before making their report to the meeting. Other meetings appoint a committee that meets together with the couple, then meets separately with each member of the couple, before coming back together for final discernment.

17) If only one of the couple asking to be married under the care of the meeting is a Friend, it remains the responsibility of the committee to be sure the religious basis of a Quaker marriage is understood and appreciated so the integrity of the ceremony is upheld. The marriage vows may be changed, in part, to reflect the spiritual traditions of each member of the couple.

18) Occasionally a meeting is asked to take a marriage under its care in which neither person in the couple is a Friend. This may be a couple searching for a spiritual home who in the future may become committed members of the meeting. It may be a couple simply looking for a venue, or a wedding format. In each case, care should be taken to listen with an open heart and help the couple discern the way forward with integrity. The meeting may choose to support the couple in creating a ceremony "after the manner of Friends" where the marriage is made legal by a justice of the peace or other public official. (*See Appendices 6C & 6D for queries for the marriage clearness process.*)

The Wedding Committee

19) If the request to be married under the care of the meeting is approved by the business meeting, a wedding committee is appointed to help the couple with their wedding plans and to have care of the meeting for worship in which the wedding takes place. This committee, traditionally called the Committee of Oversight, assists the couple as they finalize their marriage vows and make wedding arrangements. The committee also makes sure that any legal documents are requested in time and returned, signed, as required by the state. Many meetings have developed a list of responsibilities for the committee that are specific to their meetinghouse and its facilities. (See Appendix 6E for more details on the wedding committee's responsibilities. See the chapter on Ministry & Counsel for a discussion of the word "oversight".)

The Wedding Ceremony

20) The Quaker marriage ceremony is distinctive, having arisen in the seventeenth century as the Quaker movement was becoming organized. Since Friends understood the union of a couple in marriage to be the Lord's work only, and their marriages were not established by a priest or a magistrate, Friends' marriages were not legally recognized.

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

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

22) Today, a Friends' wedding ceremony usually occurs during a specially called meeting for worship at a time and place approved by the monthly meeting. Family, friends, and members of the meeting gather in waiting worship. The couple comes into the meeting room together, signifying their unity in taking this step together and that they are freely giving themselves to each other. They seat themselves and settle into worship.

23) Because the format of a Quaker wedding differs from what non-Friends might anticipate, a member of the meeting may rise and give brief reflections on the nature of a Quaker wedding and explain the order of the ceremony. In some cases, a printed program is provided. In unprogrammed meetings, after a time of gathered worship, the couple rises and exchanges their vows. They then sign the certificate, after which it is read aloud. The ceremony continues in waiting worship where those who are moved to speak may do so. In New England's semi-programmed meetings there will usually be readings, music and spoken prayers, in addition to the exchange of vows and a period of open worship. In the traditional Quaker vows, each person promises with Divine assistance to be a loving and faithful partner as long as they both shall live. The commitment is to each other, understanding that the commitment is made in the presence of God, and their families and friends. Other words may be chosen for the vows, but the intent is the same. (*See Appendix 6G.*) Whether or not there is a pastor facilitating the ceremony, there is no one "performing" the marriage. Some couples experience being joined by the Spirit before the time of their wedding. For them, the wedding ceremony is the public acknowledgement of a spiritual reality. For some, the public exchange of vows brings about a shift in the relationship as together they enter into this covenant with God and the community.

24) Friends and family members attending a Quaker wedding may be unacquainted with Friends' ways. Care should be taken in weddings that include many non-Friends to explain the wedding ceremony so that all may fully participate. (*See Appendix 6F.*)

Sustaining a Marriage

25) No ceremony can create a marriage. A couple is joined in marriage by the Spirit and maintains the marriage over time through love and patience, each supporting the other while appreciating their differences. Those differences can be a strength in dealing with the complexities of life, and the gifts of one person can provide the support that allows the other's to flourish. Just as a couple learns to appreciate one another's gifts, they learn to accept each other's vulnerabilities with generosity of spirit. The marriage grows in the love that is fostered by this creative balance of support. Relationships grow and

strengthen when each person is committed to considering how their own words and actions--small and large--impact the other. It is important not only to have the right marriage partner but also to *be* the right marriage partner.

26) Committed, intimate relationships are built on a foundation of truthfulness and 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 gratitude and joy. Sensitively and honestly naming one's sense of the condition of the relationship is an essential practice for sustaining intimate relationships. Being willing to work together accomplishes more than working alone. Humor can often ease the way. Treating one another courteously, with kindness and gratitude, nourishes the relationship. Marriage is not just about learning to be life companions, but about actively building trust and cherishing one another. At the same time, each partner must also be mindful to retain their own spiritual center.

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

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

Challenges in a Marriage

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

30) Problems that arise need not come between a couple if they are committed to facing them together rather than feeling themselves to be on opposing sides. A couple that addresses challenges openly, listening to one another's concerns, may find clarity in addressing their difficulties. Couples may find support for balancing the demands of a shared life through marriage enrichment programs and couples' workshops. They may turn to the meeting community for a support or clearness committee if the need arises.

Professional counseling may be helpful during particularly challenging seasons. Over time, the love that brought a couple together may continue to grow and transform in ever richer ways, although not all marriages will be lifelong.

31) Friends encourage a struggling couple to ask the meeting for support. If a meeting finds it is unable to fully meet the needs of the couple, the meeting may help the couple find additional resources. (*See Pastoral Care chapter and the chapter on Separation and Divorce.*)

Conclusion

32) For Friends the essence of marriage is a spiritual union expressed through vows made in wholehearted response to a Divine calling. All other matters are subordinate to this essential reality. The role of the meeting is to test, confirm, bear witness to, and support, the couple's faithful response to the leading to be married. With Divine assistance, our marriages may become a testimony to the love of God in the world.

Extracts

Note: Concerns were raised about the extract from Susan B. Anthony. We considered several alternative extracts by women, but we didn't feel we had sufficient time to discern on this matter. We therefore intend to bring the entire set of extracts back to the yearly meeting in 2023 for preliminary approval.

1) Friends believe that the marriage ceremony is far more than the mere fulfillment of legal or social obligations. It is rather the consummation of a period of searching for God's will and purpose in two lives and therefore should be entered into joyfully, reverently and soberly. In the midst of a specially called meeting for worship, in the presence of God, surrounded by a loving community of family and friends, two individuals take each other freely and equally, asking for God's help in realizing their high hopes for a creative and lifelong partnership. We feel that it is an awareness of the Light within each person that gives this new and deepening relationship the special grace of steadfastness and trust, no matter what the future may hold. As we grow in love, constancy and forgiveness in response to God's presence in our lives, we find our marriages raised to new levels of courage and creativity. Within marriage it is in the promise to love, rather than in the external form of the relationship, that the potential for spiritual growth lies. What is required of us is our commitment, because whatever comes, will be change, often totally unexpected.

Living with Oneself and Others, 2001

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

Elise Boulding, 1978

3) Never marry but for love; but see that thou lovest what is lovely. ... Between a Man and his Wife nothing ought to rule but love. ... As love ought to bring them together, so it is the best way to keep them well together.

William Penn, 1693

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

David Mace, 2016

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

Family Life Subcommittee of New England Yearly Meeting, 1978

6) I have casually referred to my second marriage in 1902, as though it were merely one event among the many events which came in succession. But it was very far from an "ordinary" happening. Every aspect of my life was touched and transformed by that initiation into a new and sacred fellowship. We promised in simple Quaker marriage custom to be "faithful and loving," but we little knew what a wealth of tacit commitments lay hidden under those three explicit words of promise. How little of life, especially of married life, can be pattern-stamped and groomed into line by explicit

agreements in advance. Every crisis of life brings situations which could not be anticipated or planned for beforehand, and for which there could be no contractual arrangements. Every occasion of our lives has brought into play the unformulated and tacit commitments which only love can supply.

Rufus M. Jones, 1934

7) Marriage, to women as to men, must be a luxury, not a necessity; an incident of life, not all of it.

Susan B. Anthony, 1875

8) *Job Scott writes to Eunice Anthony in 1780, shortly before their marriage:*

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

Job Scott, 1797

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

what we share, which enables us to understand; and for the infinite variety in which each marriage stands alone.

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

London Yearly Meeting Revision Committee, 1959

10) God's love is ministered to most people through the love of our fellow human beings. Sometimes that love is expressed physically or sexually. For me and my lover, John, God's love is given through our homosexual relationship. In common with other people who do not have children to raise, we are free from those demands to nurture other vital things. This includes our meeting and the wider Society of Friends. We both draw on our love a great deal to give us the strength and courage to do the things to which God calls us. ... Our spiritual journey is a shared one. Sometimes the pitcher needs to be taken back to the fountain. In order to grow, I need my church to bless and uphold not just me as an individual, but also our relationship.

Gordon Macphail, 1988

Advices and Queries

Advices for the individual:

1. Share your spiritual needs with your spouse and support their spiritual journey. Make time for spiritual refreshment together.
2. Make space in your life to nurture the relationship with your partner so it may grow and unfold. Respect your spouse's interests and set aside time for enjoyment of each other.
3. Accept your partner as a whole, recognizing and accepting their vulnerabilities as well as their strengths. Remember that a loving relationship is built on respect, trust, and allowances for differences, and it requires time, flexibility, generosity of spirit and a commitment to remaining anchored in love.
4. Regard one another as equally important when considering the decisions of your lives.

5. Remember that all marriages have rough spots. Be willing to seek loving support from trusted Friends in troubled times, as many have done before you.
6. Remember there are times when a couple can maintain a mutually supportive, loving and intimate marriage without it being a sexual relationship.
7. Remember that your marriage, and any marriage, has an impact on those around you, on children and on other people in the meeting. Realize that in living out your spiritual values as a couple, you and your spouse will support others in doing the same. If you lose touch with the Inward Guide, it will also affect those around you.

Queries for the individual:

1. Do my partner and I have a sense of spiritual connection? Are we able to seek spiritual solace together, through prayer or other means? What part do our individual spiritual journeys play in our relationship and is there mutual respect for the direction of those journeys? How do I keep my own spiritual center as I participate in this journey with another?
2. Have I considered the possibility that my partner or I may receive a leading that takes us away from our family, puts us in harm's way, or causes financial strain? Am I open to seeking divine guidance in such situations?
3. Do I seek Divine guidance together with my spouse in our life together? Are we open enough to that guidance and to each other to face in love those things that challenge us?
4. Have my spouse and I reflected on traditional roles in marriage, our attitudes toward them and toward modern variations? Are we aware that one can impose a role or expectation on the other without realizing one is doing so?
5. How does my faith inform my perception of sexuality within marriage? Do my partner and I understand each other's attitudes towards fidelity?
6. Am I ready to make adjustments to my personal life to meet my partner's needs with kindness and understanding? How?
7. Do my spouse and I share interests we can enjoy together? How do we show respect for each other's individual interests? What dreams do we each have? What dreams do we share? Do we allow time for enjoyment of each other, and of a variety of ways of nurturing one another and the relationship?
8. Do my partner and I have the willingness to listen and to be open and honest in our communication with one another, especially at times of unexpected life changes? Can we bear the consequences together of such changes? Have we discussed aging and the changes it brings?
9. How do I relate to my spouse's friends, parents and other relatives? How do I balance care of my marriage with maintaining close, supportive relationships with family members or close friends who may live far away (especially in case of illness or old age)?

10. Am I comfortable in my gender and sexual identity? If I am finding that my identity is shifting, am I able to share honestly with my partner? If my partner shares such reflections with me, can I listen with compassionate openness to God's direction for them and for our relationship?

(Queries for couples to consider before marriage are in Appendix 6B.)

Advices for the meeting:

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

Queries for the meeting:

1. Does the meeting offer pastoral care in support of relationships, and resources such as marriage enrichment opportunities, clearness committees, discussion groups, and resource materials?
2. Has the meeting a full understanding of the expectations of the Quaker marriage process, and can the meeting gently lead a couple who is not ready for this process in another direction?
3. Has the meeting done the work necessary to wholeheartedly support a marriage without regard to sexual orientation or gender identity?

Appendix 6

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

It is important to note that the process from first requesting marriage under the care of the meeting until a recommendation is brought to the meeting for business can take as

long as four or five months. Couples are encouraged to begin the process well in advance of their intended wedding date. Wedding arrangements should remain tentative until after the marriage has been approved.

1. The couple writes a letter of intention to the clerk of the meeting. The letter may be as short as a simple statement of the couple's wish to be married under the care of the meeting. The clerk shares the request at the next business meeting and refers it to Ministry and Counsel.
2. Ministry and Counsel appoints a clearness committee or two separate clearness committees, one for each member of the couple.
3. The couple and the clearness committee(s) meet one or more times to discern together whether all are clear that such a marriage may proceed.
4. The clearness committee reports its discernment to Ministry and Counsel.
5. Ministry and Counsel receives the report of the clearness committee and determines if the committee has carried out its charge faithfully. If Ministry and Counsel and the clearness committee are in unity that the marriage come under the care of the meeting, M&C makes that recommendation to the meeting for business. If Ministry and Counsel and the clearness committee are in unity that the marriage should not proceed, that information is not necessarily shared in the business meeting.
6. Meeting for business reviews the recommendation.
7. If the meeting's decision is to proceed, it appoints a wedding committee to have care of the wedding. Either at that same meeting for business or at a subsequent one, the meeting approves a called meeting for worship for the purpose of marriage at a date and location agreed upon with the couple.
8. The couple and the wedding committee make plans and arrangements for the wedding ceremony.

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

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

Each question is here because someone found it useful. There may be questions which make one of you uncomfortable. If there is a worry or a discomfort that you have been pushing away, now is the time to look at it. It is the unrecognized issues which most

often cause problems. Try to take enough time to allow yourselves to enjoy addressing these questions, and others that may occur to you.

1. Why do we want to be married? What do we hope the commitment of marriage will bring to our relationship? Why are we asking for marriage under the care of the meeting?
2. Are we seeking a spiritual union, a legal union, or both? If we cannot have or do not want a legally recognized union, are we aware of the many legal contracts that can be drawn up to provide rights similar to those that are part of a legally recognized union? How open are we willing to be, beyond the meeting, about the fact that our marriage is not one that will be legally recognized?
3. Can we with integrity be married under the care of the meeting with the traditional vow that references the importance of Divine assistance?
4. Have we discussed continuing friendships outside of our marriage? Do either of us have emotional or other commitments to another person that could constitute a challenge to our marriage?
5. Have we been transparent about our personal financial situations? How are differences in our financial backgrounds likely to influence our plans for handling our finances?
6. How compatible are our attitudes on earning, spending, saving, and donating money? Will we share responsibility for our routine financial maintenance? Even if our earnings or wealth differ, do we expect to be equal partners in our financial decision-making?
7. Have we discussed whether either or both of us will change our names, and have we discussed what last name any children may have?
8. Does anything in my partner's behavior make me uneasy when I think about marrying them? Have I ever brought it up for discussion?
9. What are sources of potential conflicts between us? When conflicts arise, what tools do we have to deal with them? Are we able to disagree with respect, love, and concern for one another? Do we have experience of being able to reconcile and forgive each other?
10. Have we explored our attitudes and visions for family life including: Do we want children? If so, how many? How soon? Might we consider adoption or foster care?
11. If either of us already has children, what might be the impact of this marriage on them and of them on our marriage? How will we incorporate the children into the new marriage? How will we work with the children's other parent/s?
12. How might we raise, discipline, and educate children if we choose to be parents?
13. How would caring for children impact our jobs and our careers? How do we envision sharing family responsibilities?

14. What might be the relationship of the family we are forming to our families of origin and to the meeting?
15. How well do we understand each other's economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds? How do our family backgrounds affect how we feel about marriage and having a family? How do our extended families feel about our marriage, and what expectations do they have for how we will interact with them? How do these factors impact us as individuals and as a couple?
16. Are we in agreement on the role of sexuality in our marriage? Are we able to be honest with each other in our sexual desires? How do we maintain the trust needed to navigate times when our sexual desires or preferences for intimacy differ?
17. Do each of us envision our marriage as an exclusive sexual relationship? If not, what other possibilities have we discussed?
18. Have we considered that a couple can maintain a mutually supportive, loving and intimate marriage without it being a sexual relationship?
19. Do we know each other well enough to have considered the above questions frankly, openly, and without hurry? If not, should we wait—six months, a year—before proceeding with marriage?

6C. Possible Queries to be Considered by the Couple with Their Marriage Clearness Committee

1. What does marriage mean to you? Why do you want to be married?
2. Why do you want to be married “under the care of the meeting”?
3. What do you expect your relationship as a married couple to be with the meeting?
4. If your marriage is going to be a spiritual union but not a legally recognized one, have you been open about that yet with the meeting?
5. Are you free enough from prior relationships to enter fully into this marriage?
6. Have you discussed the possibility of raising children together?
7. If applicable, how will you bring children from a prior relationship into this marriage?
8. Have you shared enough information about your past and your present situation to enter into your marriage with integrity?
9. What are the strengths in your relationship that will support you as you deal with the inevitable changes and difficulties you will experience as a couple?
10. Which of the queries you considered together prompted the richest sharing? Which prompted the most discomfort?

11. Will you be using the traditional language of the Friends' marriage ceremony when you exchange your vows? If not, what changes have you considered?
12. Have you considered what Friends mean by the "dignity, reverence, and simplicity" of a Quaker wedding?

6D. Possible Queries for the Marriage Clearness Committee to Ask Itself

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

6E. Wedding Committee Checklist

1. Meet with the couple to discuss plans for the wedding, and for the wedding reception if it is to be held at the meeting house. Include the choice of individuals to open the worship, to read the certificate, and to close the meeting. Inquire if the couple wishes to have a printed program that introduces the wedding ceremony to the guests.
2. Bring a recommendation to the monthly meeting for business for the date and place of a meeting for worship for the wedding if this was not done at the time of approving the marriage.
3. Review the vows with the couple. See that the wedding is accomplished with dignity, reverence, and simplicity according to the practices of the monthly meeting.
4. For a union that will be legally recognized, ensure the legal requirements of the state where the wedding will take place have been met, including:
 - the proper license has been obtained;
 - the meeting has designated a specific member to attend the wedding and sign the license;
 - the completed license has been filed in good time.
5. Arrange for the care of the certificate following the meeting for worship and see that it is signed by all who are present as witnesses.
6. Deliver a high-resolution digital image or print copy of the signed certificate to the recording clerk or statistical recorder of the meeting.
7. Report to the monthly meeting that the marriage has been suitably accomplished, that any applicable legal requirements have been satisfied, and that the certificate

has been properly recorded. Also, report any name changes resulting from the marriage.

6F. Sample Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

After the ceremony, everyone present, including children, is asked to sign the traditional Friends' wedding certificate, creating a cherished record of all who are present today as witnesses to this marriage.

6G. Traditional Vows

Below are samples of the vows and the certificate. Any changes the couple wishes to make should be reviewed with the wedding committee.

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

6H. The Quaker Marriage Certificate

The certificate needs to include:

1. Names of the individuals being married.
 2. Date and location of the wedding.
 3. Meeting under whose care it is held.
 4. The vows.
 5. Space for signatures of the couple, pastor (if appropriate), and those attending.
- Sufficient identification should be used to unambiguously identify the couple and the meeting.

6I. Traditional Quaker Certificate of Marriage

(Below is a traditional certificate. Any changes the couple wishes to make should be reviewed with the wedding committee.)

Whereas (Name), of [city or town], County of [county], and State of [state], [son, daughter, child] of (Name) and (Name) of [city or town]; and (Name), of [city or town], County of [county] and State of [state], [son, daughter, child] of (Name) and (Name) of [city or town], having declared their intentions of marriage with each other to [monthly meeting name] of the Religious Society of Friends held at [city or town], [state], according to the good order used among them, their proposed marriage was allowed by that Meeting.

NOW THESE ARE TO CERTIFY that for the accomplishment of their marriage, this [day in words] of the [word for month number] month, in the year [year in words] they, the said (Name) and (Name), appeared in a duly appointed meeting held at [city or town], [state], under the oversight of [monthly meeting name] of the Religious Society of Friends. Taking one another by the hand, (Name) and (Name) did on this solemn occasion declare that they took each other as [wife/husband/spouse/partner], promising, with divine assistance, to be unto each other a loving and faithful

[wife/husband/spouse/partner] as long as they both should live. *(Some certificates run through the vows as said by each member of the couple.)*

And in further confirmation thereof, they, the said (Name) and (Name), [taking the surname of G*] did then and there to these presents set their hands.

(New name) *

(New name) *

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

(Witness)

(Witness)

(Witness)

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

Extract References

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