

Quakers & gender diversity



Some Quaker history

The Religious Society of Friends (commonly known as Quakers) originated in the 17th century as a movement to return to the original spiritual basis of Christianity, free of ritual and hierarchy. With their belief in 'that of God' in every person, Quakers quickly became known for their equal treatment of all people, especially those who were disadvantaged or persecuted. Early concerns about the equal treatment of women and children and about prison conditions have continued to this day. A strong commitment to pacifism was followed by conscientious objection to military service. In the 19th century, Quakers were involved in the movement to abolish slavery. In Australia, Quakers were and still are concerned for the right treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Our life is love and peace and tenderness; and bearing one with another and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another and helping one another up with a tender hand.

Isaac Penington, 1667

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Quaker views of sexual and gender diversity

In 1963 a group of British Friends published *Towards a Quaker View of Sex*. Much of the publicity surrounding its publication focussed on what it had to say about homosexuality. 'An act which expresses true affection between two individuals and gives pleasure to them both does not seem to us to be sinful by reason alone of the fact that it is homosexual. Rather, it should be judged by the same criterion as any heterosexual relationship.' The text provided perhaps the very first faith-based affirmation of gay equality and went on to be hugely influential, selling some 500,000 copies world-wide.

With this background, Quakers supported the establishment of Queensland's first openly homosexual organisation, C.A.M.P. Inc., in 1971. In 1975, Quakers officially stated:

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia calls for a change in the laws ... to eliminate discrimination against homosexuals. This statement is made in the light of the Society's desire to remove discrimination and persecution in the community. The Society also calls on all people to seek more knowledge and understanding of the diversity of human relationships and to affirm the worth of love in all of them.

Yearly Meeting 1975, Minute 23

Quakers and relationships

By 1994 Quakers were ready to clarify their attitude to committed relationships:

At the centre of Friends' religious experience is the consistently held belief in the equal worth of all people. Our common humanity transcends our differences. The Religious Society of Friends has always recognised that the Spirit of God dwells in every person, and we believe that this is regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

The 2010 Australian Yearly Meeting issued this press statement:

Australian Quakers celebrated our first same-sex marriage in 2007, and seeking legal recognition for such unions is consistent with our long-held spiritual belief in the equality of all people. ... Quakers agreed today to practise full marriage equality within Quaker Meetings around Australia, including celebrating the spiritual aspects of same-sex weddings, and expressed their hope that the Marriage Act will be amended as soon as possible to allow Quakers to support such couples to full legal recognition.

In 2016 the Presiding Clerk wrote to the Prime Minister stating that Australian Quakers believe that all people have the right to be treated equally under the law, and that includes the law on marriage.

Today Quakers welcome the celebration of marriage in the manner of Friends by committed

couples in our meetings, regardless of their gender or sexuality. The clerk of the meeting will be able to discuss with couples what arrangements may be necessary for such a celebration.

Quaker experience

Friends' spiritual experience has led us to a concern for personal integrity, social justice and for peace. We try to bring our lives and actions into conformity with our beliefs. Quakers believe that there is 'that of God' in everyone and that all people have the same privileges and responsibilities regardless of race, age, creed, gender or sexual orientation.

We value all people and affirm the power and joy of all truly loving relationships. We hope that all people who are searching for truth, whatever their sexuality or gender identity, will continue to find a spiritual home in the Religious Society of Friends. We also hope that our whole community will outgrow its intolerance and understand that we are all loved by God.

Quaker meetings

All people who seek to grow spiritually are welcome to participate in the Quaker community. The Friends' Meeting for Worship provides an opportunity for all people to nurture their spiritual experience and also to seek the guidance of the Inward Light.

Within a local Friends' meeting participants can find a spiritual community where our common humanity transcends our differences. Our Meeting for Worship is based on silent worship, rather than outward religious forms and hierarchies. Vocal contributions may arise out of the silence when someone feels moved by the Spirit.

The Meeting for Worship can be profoundly uplifting, a time of spiritual renewal and growth. Business Meetings of Friends are also conducted in a spirit of worship.

PUBLISHED BY

Australia Yearly Meeting (2019)
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
in Australia Inc.

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