

Quaker marriage and committed relationships



Quaker marriage

Friends regard marriage as both a civil contract and a religious commitment. Marriage involves a solemn agreement between two people to love and share, within a faithful and lasting relationship guided by the divine Spirit. In its physical, intellectual and spiritual aspects, marriage gives opportunities for growth by each partner, and interdependence without the loss of personal identity. This relationship constitutes an adventure, with all its consequent uncertainties and possibilities. It requires forbearance and love, flexibility and humour. Through shared experiences, including caring for children, and supporting each other's faith and work, the married couple can achieve harmony of spirit and action and thereby contribute to the stability and creativity of the wider community. Friends who accept the challenge of marriage do so in the confidence that their meeting will nurture and encourage their relationship sympathetically.

*In a true marriage relation
the independence of the hus-
band and the wife is equal,
their dependence mutual, and
their obligations reciprocal.*

Lucetta Mott.

1879.

Quaker meetings

The Meeting for Worship is central to the Quaker way of life. Quakers come together, normally on a Sunday, for Meeting for Worship, which is based on silence: a silence of waiting and listening. A Quaker meeting creates a space of gathered stillness where we can listen to the promptings of truth and love in our hearts, which we understand as arising from God. There may be extended periods of silence. When moved by the Spirit, someone may give spoken ministry, which could take the form of a statement, a prayer, a quotation, a poem or a short scriptural reading. This spoken ministry is seen as a fulfilment of the silence rather than an interruption. This active, listening silence has been practised by Friends for over 350 years. Special-purpose meetings, such as meetings for marriages and funerals, are also held in a spirit of worship.

For the location of Quaker meetings in Australia see:
www.quakers.org.au



A Quaker wedding meeting

At the beginning of the Meeting, out of the silence, the Registering Officer or another Friend will welcome those gathered for the wedding meeting and explain, for the benefit of those present who are unfamiliar with Quaker Meetings, the form that the Meeting will take. There is no set time-frame or program for the Meeting for Worship; however, the following events will occur within the meeting. Those present, including the couple who are to be married, gather for silent worship. Ministry may occur during this time, in the same manner as described in the paragraph on Quaker Meetings. Out of the silence, the couple will exchange the Marriage Declaration, in which they state their lifelong faithful commitment to each other.

The couple and two witnesses will subsequently sign the Friends' Certificate of Marriage, and the Registering Officer will read it aloud.

If the couple wishes to give or exchange rings, this occurs at an appropriate time, for example while the marriage certificate is being read.

Usually, the Registering Officer will welcome those gathered for the wedding meeting and explain that all are invited to give ministry in the gathered meeting as they feel led.

After the close of the meeting, all others present who have heard the declaration are invited to add their names to the Friends' Certificate of Marriage as further witnesses.

*'For the right joining in marriage
is the work of the Lord only ...
and we are but witnesses.'*

George Fox, 1669

Committed relationships

Quakers have always recognised that the Spirit of God dwells in every person, and we believe that this is so regardless of gender or sexual orientation. We affirm all people as equal participants in our meetings. We value committed same-gender relationships as we value all relationships that are committed and loving.

Until late 2017 legal definitions of marriage, both within the common law and since 2004 in statute law, viewed it as an exclusively heterosexual institution. In 1994, Australian Quakers affirmed that homosexual relationships were as valid as heterosexual ones, and in 2009 stated that equally loving, committed relationships between two people of the same gender should be recognised as marriage. The Society of Friends therefore supported moves towards legal changes broadening the definition of marriage in this inclusive way.

Two people, one or both of whom have a significant contact with the Society, may wish to celebrate their commitment to each other during a special meeting called for this purpose.

More about Quakers

Quakers believe that there is 'that of God' in everyone. Words cannot adequately convey the essence of spiritual experience, and individual Quakers express their understanding in different ways. Quakers often speak of the 'Inner Light' and 'the Spirit': by these phrases we mean the divine stirrings which it is possible for anyone to experience, the promptings of God which illuminate our lives and lead us to make good and loving choices. We share and test our promptings with others because we find that the prayerful reflection of a group is more discerning than that of an individual. Valuable guidance often comes from the pooled wisdom of the group – in fact, a Society of Friends.

SOURCES

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PUBLISHED BY

Australia Yearly Meeting (2018)
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