

Marriage Section of SAYMA Faith and Practice, original text and proposed revision, for review by meetings.

[original text]

C. Marriage

A person's spiritual development can be strengthened in a loving committed relationship. Friends have long recognized that some couples are called into such a relationship, a ministry of caring, which with Divine assistance may open the way to deep and unreserved love, to forgiveness, to trust, and to the nurture of each other's gifts. Early Friends recognized that the joining of two people in this covenant relationship "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)

In the joining of Friends, a couple commit themselves to a shared life, bringing into being a new family. During a meeting for worship, usually one especially called for the purpose of the marriage, they stand in the presence of God and of friends gathered and declare their commitment, with divine assistance, to remain loving and faithful for life.

In Friends tradition, marriage takes place in a community of faith. It is not only an act of two individuals, but the act of a community. The corporate signing of the marriage certificate testifies to this fact. The meeting's involvement with the couple begins with the appointment of a clearness committee, which meets with the couple in a spirit of worship and concern for the proposed marriage. This committee helps the couple affirm their clearness for marriage by examining, with them, not only their clearness from prior obligations of any kind but many other aspects of their relationship, including their strengths and potential differences. This process of clarifying, the task of the entire group gathered together, may in itself deepen their relationship and understanding of each other, or it may reveal

[proposed revision]

C. Marriage Among Friends

Friends have long recognized that some couples are called into a loving, committed relationship, a ministry of caring which with Divine assistance may open the way to deep and unreserved love, to forgiveness, to trust, and to the nurture of each other's gifts. Early Friends understood that the joining of two people in this covenant relationship "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)

In a Quaker marriage, two people commit themselves to a shared life, bringing into being a new family. During a meeting for worship, usually one especially called for the purpose of the marriage, they stand in the presence of God and of friends gathered and declare their commitment, with divine assistance, to remain loving and faithful for life.

In Friends tradition, marriage takes place in a community of faith. It is not only an act of two individuals, but the act of a community. The corporate signing of the marriage certificate testifies to this fact. Quaker marriage is distinct from legal marriage. In the earliest days of Quakerism, legal marriage was possible only within the Church of England; such social services as were available were also provided by the established church. Quaker marriages initially were not legal in Britain and Friends organized to provide for the needs of their communities through their monthly meetings and yearly meeting. Since development of the practice of civil legal marriage, Friends in

Marriage Section of SAYMA Faith and Practice, original text and proposed revision, for review by meetings.

[original text page 2]

problems that should preclude the marriage. The clearness process is complete only when the decision is clear to all.

A monthly meeting remains concerned for all the marriages within it. Recognizing that in a marriage people go through many changes and that difficulties can arise in any relationship, members of the meeting should be in touch with the couple, expressing their love and concern. A member of the ministry and oversight committee or the clearness committee for the marriage may take the initiative in offering to help the couple attain clearness when problems arise. A couple is encouraged to call on the meeting or a specially appointed clearness committee to help resolve difficulties. Friends also have found that marriage enrichment retreats and similar supports help foster strong and growing relationships. We live in a time when, for some people, individual fulfillment and growth in marriage seem mutually exclusive. The experience and faith of Friends is that, undertaken in faith, marriage can be both stable and creative, and that such a marriage may form the best environment for the nurture and fulfillment of each individual and any children they may have.

Each Monthly meeting receives and responds appropriately to requests for recognizing and supporting loving and committed relationships other than traditional legal marriage. Meetings are called to approach each request in the spirit of tenderness and openness to God's leading. Friends continue to affirm the value of an environment of commitment in fostering human growth.

1. Meeting approval

To secure meeting approval, the couple writes a letter to the meeting stating their intention to marry and their desire to

[proposed revision page 2]

Britain and elsewhere have relied more and more on the legal and social protections provided by governments and have assumed less responsibility for their mutual economic protection. At this time in SAYMA, Friends are again facing the challenge of taking under their care marriages that are not recognized by the state. Each Monthly meeting receives and responds to requests for recognizing and supporting loving and committed relationships other than traditional legal marriage. Meetings are called to approach each request in the spirit of tenderness and openness to God's leading.

1. Meeting approval

To secure meeting approval, the couple writes a letter to the meeting stating their intention to marry and their desire to marry under the care of the meeting. If only one, or neither, is a Friend, the meeting will want to take time to develop a communal bond with the couple before deciding to take the marriage under its care. If the couple maintains membership in different meetings, their letter should be sent to both meetings and approval obtained from each.

When the letter is brought to the monthly meeting for business, the meeting – or in some meetings the Ministry and Nurture Committee – appoints a committee for clearness to meet with the couple in a spirit of worship and concern for the proposed marriage. This committee helps the couple affirm their clearness for marriage by examining with them not only their clearness from prior obligations of any kind but many other aspects of their relationship, including their strengths

Marriage Section of SAYMA Faith and Practice, original text and proposed revision, for review by meetings.

[original text page 3]

marry under the care of the meeting. If only one, or neither, is a Friend, the meeting will want to take time to develop a communal bond with the couple before deciding to take the marriage under its care. If the couple maintains membership in different meetings, their letter should be sent to both meetings and approval obtained from each.

When the letter is brought to the monthly meeting for business, the meeting - or in some meetings the ministry and oversight committee - appoints a committee for clearness. After the clearness committee has met with both intended partners (see above) and has reviewed with them the promises they intend to exchange, it brings a recommendation back to the monthly meeting, usually the following month. If the meeting allows the wedding under its care, it appoints a committee of oversight for the wedding. Only at this point can invitations and final plans be made.

2. Planning for the wedding

The oversight committee, together with the couple, arranges to meet legal requirements and to accomplish the marriage with simplicity and reverence. The reception, if any, is also part of their responsibility.

The oversight committee must know the legal requirements where the marriage will occur. It is the couple's responsibility to secure the marriage license or other legal form to be filed, by the committee, with the county clerk or similar officer after the marriage has taken place. Some localities have a special form for the Religious Society of Friends, but if not the committee can usually change the standard wording to comply with Friends' procedures. An approved meeting member must sign

[proposed revision page 3]

and potential differences. Discussion of wills and other legal arrangements needed to secure the relationship the couple desires should occur at this stage. This process of clarification is the task of the entire group gathered together. It may deepen the couple's relationship and understanding of each other or it may reveal problems that should preclude the marriage at this time. The clearness process is complete only when the decision is clear to all. Once clearness is reached, either the clearness committee or the Ministry and Nurture Committee makes a recommendation to the next business meeting. If the meeting approves the marriage under its care, it appoints a wedding planning committee. To avoid possible embarrassment and unnecessary expense, couples should refrain from issuing invitations and making reservations until the meeting has agreed to take the marriage under its care.

2. Planning for the wedding

SAYMA meetings follow the historic Quaker belief that marriage is a matter between God and the couple, witnessed by the meeting. Quaker marriage is distinct from legal marriage. If there is to be a legal marriage, it will be accomplished separately from the Quaker meeting for worship for marriage.

The wedding planning committee, together with the couple, reviews the vows which the couple will exchange, plans to accomplish the wedding with simplicity and reverence, and may help plan the reception. There is no standard formula for Quaker marriage vows. The wording of the vows is discerned

Marriage Section of SAYMA Faith and Practice, original text and proposed revision, for review by meetings.

[original text page 4]

to represent the meeting, and others sign to fill the required number of witnesses.

The marriage certificate shall be prepared, well in advance, in a form similar to the following but carefully worded to incorporate the particular declarations that will be spoken by the couple and have been previously agreed upon with the committee for clearness:

Whereas, A.B., of _____, child/son/daughter of C.B. and HB., of _____, and D.E., of _____, child/son/daughter of F.E. and M.E., of _____, having declared their intentions of marriage with each other to _____ Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends held at _____, their proposed marriage was allowed by the meeting.

Now this is to certify to whom it may concern, that for the accomplishment of their intentions, this ____ day of the ____ month, in the year _____, they, A.B. and D.E., appeared in a meeting for worship of the Religious Society of Friends, held at _____, A.B. and D.E., taking each other by the hand, did on this solemn occasion declare that they promise with divine assistance to be unto each other loving and faithful wife/husband/ partners so long as they both shall live. And moreover they, A.B. and D.E.*, did, as further confirmation thereof, then and there, to this certificate set their hands.

A.B. _____
D.E. _____

And we, having been present at the marriage, have as witnesses hereunto set our hands.

*A phrase may be added here when one or both of a couple chooses to change his and/or her name.

Many choose to hand-letter their certificates on parchment or fine paper.

[proposed revision page 4]

by the couple and reviewed by the committee. Similar words, translated from first person to third person, are also stated in the marriage certificate. The following is a sample of a Quaker marriage vow: “In the presence of God and these our friends I take thee _____ to be my wife/husband/partner, promising with Divine assistance to be unto thee a loving and faithful wife/husband/partner so long as we both shall live.” The couple may be led to alter or add to this wording. The wedding planning committee and the couple designate in advance persons to carry out the following responsibilities: greeting, explaining meeting for worship and Friends’ wedding procedures; reading the certificate after the couple signs; closing the meeting; inviting all those present to sign the certificate as witnesses. If a reception will follow the meeting for worship for marriage, the wedding planning committee may help in arranging and providing for the reception, and it should be made clear that wedding and reception are separate events.

The marriage certificate shall be prepared, well in advance, in a form similar to the following but carefully worded to incorporate the particular declarations that will be spoken by the couple and have been previously agreed upon with the committee for clearness:

Whereas, A.B., of _____, child/son/daughter of C.B. and HB., of _____, and D.E., of _____, child/son/daughter of F.E. and M.E., of _____, having declared their intentions of marriage with each other to _____ Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends held at _____, their proposed marriage was allowed by the meeting.

Marriage Section of SAYMA Faith and Practice, original text and proposed revision, for review by meetings.

[original text page 5]

The wedding planning committee and the couple to be married should designate in advance persons to carry out the following responsibilities: explaining meeting for worship and Friends' wedding procedures; reading the certificate after the couple signs; closing the meeting; inviting those present to sign the certificate as witnesses.

3. The wedding itself

At the time appointed, the meeting for worship on the occasion of marriage gathers in silence. For the benefit of non-Friends, the person appointed explains the meaning of the worship and the procedure to follow, unless the invitations have already done so. After a suitable time, as they are moved, the couple will rise and, taking each other by the hand, declare in words to this effect:

In the presence of God and these our friends I take thee _____ to be my wife/husband/partner, promising with Divine assistance to be unto thee a loving and faithful wife/husband/partner so long as we both shall live.

The couple will then sign the marriage certificate, and the appointed Friend will read it aloud.

In the period of worship to follow, any may speak as they are moved. After the rise of the meeting, everyone present is invited to sign the marriage certificate.

[proposed revision page 5]

Now this is to certify to whom it may concern, that for the accomplishment of their intentions, this _____ day of the _____ month, in the year _____, they, A.B. and D.E., appeared in a meeting for worship of the Religious Society of Friends, held at _____, A.B. and D.E., taking each other by the hand, did on this solemn occasion declare that they promise with divine assistance to be unto each other loving and faithful wife/husband/ partners so long as they both shall live. And moreover they, A.B. and D.E. *, did, as further confirmation thereof, then and there, to this certificate set their hands.

A.B. _____

D.E. _____

And we, having been present at the marriage, have as witnesses hereunto set our hands.

*A phrase may be added here when one or both individuals chooses to change names.

Many choose to hand-letter their certificates on parchment or fine paper.

3. The wedding itself

At the time appointed, the meeting for worship for marriage gathers in silence. For the benefit of non-Friends, the person appointed explains the meaning of the worship and the procedure to follow. Out of the silence, as they are moved, the couple will rise and, taking each other by the hand, declare their vows. The couple will then sign the marriage certificate, and the appointed Friend will read it aloud. In the period of worship to follow, guests may speak out of the silence as they

Marriage Section of SAYMA Faith and Practice, original text and proposed revision, for review by meetings.

[proposed revision page 6]

are moved. After the rise of the meeting, all present are invited to sign the marriage certificate.

4. Legal Considerations

Meetings within SAYMA differ in their approach to legal aspects of marriages under their care. Underlying these differences is the fact that we live in states that deny the institution of marriage to same-gender couples. In addition, states from time to time change the laws affecting Quaker marriage; thus Quaker meetings need to stay informed about the current legal status of marriages for all couples within their jurisdictions.

Some meetings will help eligible couples complete state-approved forms that give legal status to marriage. In these cases, it is the couple's responsibility to secure the license. The wedding planning committee will arrange to have it signed after the meeting for worship for marriage, and the couple must then file it. Other meetings offer to heterosexual couples only what may be legally offered to their same gender counterparts: a Quaker marriage. In these meetings, eligible couples desiring a state-recognized marriage must go before a state-approved official to obtain it.

5. Nurturing Marriage Under the Care of the Meeting

The meeting's involvement with the couple begins with the application for marriage under the care of the meeting, and continues indefinitely. A monthly meeting remains concerned

Marriage Section of SAYMA Faith and Practice, original text and proposed revision, for review by meetings.

[proposed revision page 7]

for all the marriages within it. Friends have found that marriage enrichment retreats and similar supports help foster strong and growing relationships. The couple and its committee for clearness may meet on a mutually agreed timetable to allow airing of joys and concerns that manifest in the marriage.

Recognizing that in a marriage people go through many changes and that difficulties can arise in any relationship, members of the meeting should be sensitive to the health of marriages under their care, expressing their love and concern. If problems arise and help from the meeting might assist in their resolution, a member of the Ministry and Nurture Committee or the clearness committee for the marriage may initiate an effort to help the couple attain clearness. Any couple is encouraged to call on the meeting or a specially appointed clearness committee to help resolve difficulties. The experience and faith of Friends is that, undertaken in faith, marriage may be both fulfilling and enduring, and forms the best environment for the nurture of each individual in the family.