

A Minute of Record by Canadian Yearly Meeting

Canadian Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) has laboured for many years over the issue of the recognition of the marriage of same-sex couples. Friends have a long history of supporting human rights and witnessing against injustice. Individual Quakers have often provided leadership in movements for social change such as the abolition of slavery, civil rights movements, and equality for women. Many religious groups have already declared strong positions on this issue on both sides of the public debate.

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)]

In a Quaker Meeting, couples whose marriages have been approved by a local Meeting marry each other in the presence of the community without officiating clergy. Our usual practice is only to approve the marriage of those couples where at least one of the partners has membership in our Religious Society.

Whether or not to support same-sex marriages is decided at the local Meeting level. Some Meetings have chosen to recognize marriage as open to both opposite and same-sex couples, and several have taken same-sex marriages under their care, even when these relationships were not recognized in law as marriages.

Our experiences and discernment on this issue have been partly shaped by the presence in our community of wonderful, loving, committed same-sex relationships.

We have experience of couples in same-sex relationships that are bringing up children in the same loving way we would expect any family we know to do. "Love makes a family." We strongly object to statements by some religious groups that it is harmful to children to be brought up in same-sex families. Whether a family is a loving and supportive place, or is a harmful place to bring up children, does not depend upon the gender of the parents.

We support the right of religious groups (including individual Quaker Meetings) and clergy, to consent to or to refuse to perform same-sex marriages. We also support the right of same-sex couples to a civil marriage and the extension of the legal definition of marriage to include same-sex couples.

Approved by Canadian Yearly Meeting in session, August 8, 2003.