

PROCEDURES MANUAL

MARRIAGES AND UNIONS OF COMMITMENT

Marriage and Family Relations Committee
Friends Meeting of Washington

Final Draft, February 10, 2007

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I. OVERVIEW: MARRIAGE & UNION OF COMMITMENT UNDER THE CARE OF FRIENDS MEETING OF WASHINGTON

Our clearness process for marriage or commitment reflects our essential belief about the way in which Friends test the religious call of two persons into a lifelong relationship, as well as our belief about the meaning of spiritual commitment within a faith community.

Early Friends were clear that marriage was essentially a religious covenant. They saw this as quite different from marriage as a legal or social relationship; when a choice was necessary, they chose to have their marriages considered illegal rather than modify their religious witness....

So early Friends held the witness that no person had the legal (magistrate) or spiritual (priest) authority to "pronounce" two people married. Marriage was accomplished when a meeting witnessed two people exchanging vows, confirming a call to lifelong commitment.

However, the call to commitment is not limited to two individuals. It involves the meeting as well, since the couple's spiritual leading occurs in the context of a faith community, and is tested in that community as any other leading would be. The question for the couple is, "Are we called to a covenant relationship with each other?" The question for the meeting is, "Are we clear to take this marriage--this whole relationship--under our care?" (The question is not, "Are we clear to take the wedding or ceremony under our care?") The clarity reached when a meeting takes a marriage under its care is a double clarity--the couple and the meeting.

-- From *Grounded in God: Care and Nurture in Friends Meeting*,
Patricia McBee, Ed.

A. Marriage

The Friends' procedure for marriage is designed to extend to the couple the loving concern of the Meeting in this important venture, to determine so far as possible that there is nothing to interfere with the permanence and happiness of the union, and to enable them to have a meeting for marriage with dignity and simplicity. The couple's request for marriage under the care of the Meeting reflects their recognition of an ongoing relationship with the Society of Friends.

Marriage, undertaken with divine assistance and solemnized in God's presence with the support of the Meeting, is recognized at FMW as appropriate for committed couples regardless of gender.

While membership in FMW or the Religious Society of Friends is not a requirement for marriage under the Meeting's care, some relationship with this Meeting and the Society of Friends is a prerequisite.

The procedures are as follows.

B. Making the Request

- 1) Couples are encouraged to make their request to the meeting at least four months prior to the date of the meeting for marriage or commitment, and six months prior to it if possible.
- 2) A request should be made in writing, signed by both members of the couple, if possible, stating their intention to be united, and asking that the union be under the care of Friends Meeting of Washington. This letter should be addressed to the Meeting in care of the Clerk, who will then forward it to the Meeting's Marriage and Family Relations Committee.

C. Reaching Clearness

- 1) The Marriage and Family Relations Committee appoints two members to meet with the couple to learn of their clearness for union, usually through a series of queries and contemplation.
- 2) This clearness committee also explains to the couple the procedure for a Quaker union, the guidelines for holding a meeting for marriage at FMW, the timetable for approval and any legal requirements. Information resources are available to assist same-gender couples in achieving the protections, privileges, and responsibilities that are automatically conveyed by law to different-gender couples.
- 3) The clearness committee makes a recommendation to the Marriage and Family Relations Committee. If they support the proposed union, the full committee brings the request to the next Monthly Meeting for Business. The request must then be held over for one month before the marriage can be approved by the Meeting for Business.

D. Planning the Meeting

- 1) An oversight committee is appointed to help the couple plan the meeting for marriage. It includes at least one member from the Marriage and Family Relations Committee.
- 2) In the years to come, the oversight committee will continue to serve the couple as a resource for support, information, and clearness as needed.

E. The Meeting Itself

- 1) The meeting for marriage is essentially a meeting for worship. The couple walks together into the meeting in recognition of the fact that they are free to give themselves to each other. The custom of not "giving the bride away" was adopted in the early days of the Society of Friends, which recognized the status of women to be equal to that of men.
- 2) In an atmosphere of quiet and relative simplicity, after a suitable time they will rise and, taking each other by the hand, first one and then the other promise with divine assistance to be loving and faithful to one another for as long as they both shall live. No third person

pronounces them husband and wife, mates, or partners, because Friends believe that God alone can create such a union and give it significance.

3) Neither a bridal party nor an exchange of rings is necessary to Friends procedure, although both may be included.

4) A Friends marriage certificate is signed by the couple.

5) The meeting continues with a period of worship during which time friends and family may share their prayers and messages for the couple.

6) Afterward, all who have been present are asked to sign the marriage certificate as evidence of the fact that they are witnesses to the beginning of a new relationship.

7) Members of the Marriage and Family Relations Committee serve as legal witnesses for marriages under the care of the Meeting in the District of Columbia and Maryland. Several members of the Meeting have been empowered by the courts of Virginia to serve as legal witnesses for marriages held under the care of the Meeting in that state.

F. Commitments

Couples who do not wish to legally formalize their unions, or those engaged in other types of family formations, may choose to request commitment under the care of the Meeting. Like marriage, commitment is undertaken with divine assistance and solemnized in God's presence with the support of the Meeting. The procedures for making the request, reaching clearness, planning the meeting for commitment, and the meeting itself, are virtually identical to those for marriage.

G. Other Marriage Arrangements Possible at FMW

The Marriage and Family Relations Committee occasionally arranges a meeting for worship to hold in Divine Light a new union between members of the Meeting community which is not, for one reason or another, under the care of the Meeting. This is called a "marriage in the manner of Friends." This can be arranged through the Clerk of the Marriage and Family Relations Committee.

The Meeting House is available for other marriage ceremonies for a fee. Please contact the Meeting office for information about this.

For more information on both marriage and commitment under the care of FMW, a detailed handbook is available.

II. COORDINATING WITH OFFICE STAFF AND MEETING CLERK

A. Event Scheduling

The FMW staff maintains the calendar for events taking place in the Meeting House and Quaker House. The clearness committee contacts the office staff to schedule a wedding date well in advance of the event. It is advised to schedule the rehearsal at the same time. Rehearsals usually take place in the early evening on the day before the wedding. Staff office hours are 8-4 PM, Monday-Friday.

B. Newsletter Items and Announcements

The wedding or union of commitment will be listed in the newsletter calendar. The Meeting community is invited to all such worship events held under the care of the Meeting. It is not, however, assumed that everyone is invited to the reception. If the couple wants an additional announcement in the newsletter, please contact the staff via e-mail at FMW.DCFriends@verizon.net. The administrative secretary and the assistant secretary both receive e-mail at that address. Please try to give newsletter items to the office well in advance of the deadline. The newsletter deadline is on the Wednesday after Monthly Meeting for Business, which is held on the second Sunday of the month. The deadline time is 4 PM. (There is no newsletter mailing in July. The deadline for the September newsletter is in August on the Wednesday after the second Sunday.)

The staff will put an announcement of the upcoming wedding in the Sunday announcements. The deadline for the Sunday announcements is on Thursday at 10 AM for any special wording.

C. Friendly Presence to Oversee the Building for the Rehearsal and Wedding

The FMW staff schedules a trained friendly presence to unlock and oversee the building during the event and to lock up after the building has been vacated. The friendly presence oversees the building for security and should have no participation in or responsibilities for the event they are covering. If an event is held in the Meeting Room on Saturday, the friendly presence also sets up that space for Sunday worship after the wedding with announcements, donation boxes and other materials. Check with the staff about the current fee for the friendly presence. The couple will be asked to reimburse the Meeting for this expense. (See Section VIII, C)

D. Access to the Meeting House

Inform the friendly presence and staff in advance whenever access to the Meeting House is required. (See Section VIII, B)

E. Reception

Inform the office staff of all details. (See Section VIII, F)

II. INITIAL CONTACT

Initial contact with a couple takes place either through the Meeting office or the Clerk of the Marriage and Family Relations Committee. If a couple approaches a member of the committee they should be referred to the committee Clerk.

A. Gathering Important Information

Talk carefully with the couple to understand their plans, intentions, and affiliation with Friends Meeting of Washington. Respond with the following as appropriate:

- 1) If a couple or new family has no affiliation with FMW, they cannot be married or united under the care of the Meeting. However, they can rent the space and make arrangements for conducting the ceremony on their own.
- 2) If a couple or new family is affiliated with FMW, they may be married or united under the care of the Meeting. Explain the Clearness and Oversight process. Emphasize the length of time required (3-4 months minimum) and the commitment to work collaboratively and thoroughly with the oversight committee.

At this point the couple or new family can choose to: (1) simply rent the space and conduct ceremony on their own or (2) begin the process of initiating a union under the care of the Meeting.

B. Request for Marriage or Commitment Under the Care of the Meeting

A request for marriage or commitment under the care of the Meeting should be made in writing and signed by both persons with their full legal names. It should state their intention to be united, and request that the marriage/union be under the care of Friends Meeting of Washington. This letter should be addressed to the Meeting in care of the Meeting Clerk, who will then forward it to the Meeting's Committee on Marriage and Family Relations.

C. Unusual Situations

Questions may arise in the initial conversation about the possibility of non-traditional elements to a wedding/union that is under the care of the Meeting. Here are a few examples that committees have encountered.

1) Weddings away from FMW

This is up to the committee to decide. It has been done in the past. Members of the oversight committee must be willing to travel. The procedures for a legal signing of the marriage license in jurisdictions outside of DC must also be determined.

2) Marriages of FMW members under the care of another Meeting

A member of this Meeting who wishes to hold a Meeting for Worship for Marriage or Commitment under the care of another Friends Meeting, or the Meeting under whose care the couple is to be placed, may request a traditional letter or certificate of clearness from this Meeting. The Committee will give such requests for clearness the same care as that given for clearness under the care of this Meeting. If satisfied that there is no obstruction, the Committee will send a letter of clearness to the Meeting having oversight. If sufficient knowledge cannot be obtained, the Meeting may write a letter stating that we know of no obstruction.

3) Marriages of Friends from other Meetings

When a member of another Friends Meeting would like to be married at FMW under its care, the Marriage and Family Relations Committee may consider this marriage under the care of the Meeting in collaboration with the individual's "home" meeting. It is advisable for the couple to go through the clearness process with the "home" meeting. The request is then presented to meeting for business for approval. The oversight process needs to be a collaborative one between the two meetings. The wedding may be clerked by an individual from the "home" meeting with the license being signed by an authorized member of FMW's Marriage and Family Relations Committee.

4) Marriages co-sponsored with other Meetings

Occasionally a member of another Friends Meeting or the Marriage Committee of another Friends Meeting requests that FMW co-sponsor a wedding that is being held in the District of Columbia and needs one of our authorized signers to sign the marriage license. It is FMW's policy to automatically approve these requests in the spirit of Meeting-to-Meeting support and collaboration when the following procedures are followed:

- a) The marriage must be under the care of the guest Meeting, and the FMW Marriage and Family Relations Committee is certain that a clearness process has occurred and an oversight committee is in place.
- b) The request to co-sponsor the marriage is made in writing by the Marriage committee of the guest Meeting to FMW's Marriage and Family Relations committee. The letter needs to contain an introduction to the couple, a confirmation that the couple has been through a clearness process and an oversight committee appointed, and a confirmation that one of Marriage and Family Relation's committee members can be on the oversight committee.
- c) When the request is approved by the Marriage and Family Relations Committee it is presented at Meeting for Business where it is automatically approved without being held over.
- d) A member of FMW's Marriage and Family Relations committee becomes a member of the guest Meetings oversight committee for the expressed responsibility

of signing the marriage license and helping the couple with the marriage license process.

5) Interfaith marriages

FMW welcomes interfaith marriages and works hard to blend wedding traditions. There are six aspects of the traditional Quaker wedding that must be preserved in order to have the wedding under the care of the Meeting. These are:

- a) Going through the clearness and oversight process. Clergy from the other tradition should be included on the oversight committee
- b) The wedding can only be clerked (as opposed to officiated over by the clergy from another tradition.) Collaborating clergy may have parts in the program, however cannot officiate. This is an important aspect that allows us to conduct legal weddings.
- c) The couple must take their vows unattended by clergy.
- d) The couple must sign a wedding certificate.
- e) There must be an appropriate period of silent worship.
- f) A DC-government-approved member of the committee must sign the marriage license.

6) Can parents walk their children into the service?

Yes, however, they cannot say, "I give this bride/groom away."

7) Can there be attendants?

Yes.

8) Can there be music?

Yes.

IV. FOLLOW-UP LETTER OUTLINING THE PROCEDURE

After the initial meeting, a follow-up letter is sent to the couple or new family. A sample letter for a couple requesting marriage:

Dear _____ ,

We welcome your request to be married under the care of Friends Meeting of Washington. Enclosed is a brief overview of the marriage process from start to finish as well as a copy of the queries we recommend couples contemplate before the clearness meeting.

I would also like to confirm the time frame for this process.

1. Presentation of your request letter to the M&FR committee by_____.
2. Meet with the clearness committee by_____.
3. Request is presented to the M&FR committee by_____.
4. First presentation of your request at Meeting for Business by_____.
5. Second presentation of your request at Meeting for Business by_____.
6. Meet with committee of oversight during_____.
7. Wedding date_____.

Please contact me as you have questions.

Sincerely,
Clerk of the committee

V. BRINGING THE REQUEST TO THE MARRIAGE AND FAMILY RELATIONS COMMITTEE

When the committee Clerk receives the couples' written request for a marriage or union under the care of the Meeting, it is presented to the Marriage and Family Relations Committee. If the committee approves it, two members are appointed to take the couple through the clearness process.

VI. THE CLEARNESS PROCESS

A. Overview of the Clearness Process in the Quaker Tradition

In the Quaker tradition queries and listening are the heart of the clearness process. Reaching clearness to enter into marriage or a union commitment is facilitated by the contemplation and discussion of questions that help the couple or new family think and communicate about essential aspects of their relationship.

B. Selecting the Clearness Committee

After the couple's or new family's letter is presented to the Marriage and Family Readiness Committee and is approved, two members of the committee who are members of the Meeting are appointed to meet with the couple or new family.

"Clearness committee members must be committed to the spiritual and temporal energy needed to test a call to marriage (or union commitment). It is less than caring to fail in honoring the importance of the couple's decision by proceeding with a shallow or superficial clearness process. A clearness process carried out with integrity, under the leading of the Spirit, must draw from us a careful probing, undergirded with loving concern; a genuine desire to help, accompanied by a light touch; and a firm understanding of the seriousness of the joint effort we are undertaking, coupled with a relaxed nonjudgmental atmosphere."

-- From *Grounded in God*, p.74

C. Goals of the Clearness Process

The Marriage and Family Relations Committee will appoint two of its members (who must be members of the Meeting) to meet with the couple or new family to learn of their clearness for union and to:

1) Discuss...

...their attitude toward union and the creation of a home

...in the case of couples, what it means to be married under the care of the Meeting at FMW, for instance, the mutual commitment between the Meeting and the couple, expectations, time frame, etc.

...the questions raised at the end of this section. Any additional questions appropriate to the circumstances should be raised here, and the couple or new family should be made aware of available literature and other resources.

2) Inform them what Quakers believe is the purpose of marriage or commitment...

...give them detailed information of the procedure in a Quaker union, the order of the meeting for worship, and the wording of the promises they will exchange.

...tell them the date of the Monthly Meeting when the report of the Marriage and Family Relations Committee will probably be made and that they should specify before then the

time and date they desire for their union. The committee will ascertain if the Meeting House is available on that date and will tentatively reserve it, along with a possible rehearsal date, on the Meeting calendar.

3) Ascertain from the couple or new family the names of four or more Meeting members whom they would like to serve on the oversight committee for the meeting for worship. If no request is made, the Meeting will appoint members to serve. The oversight committee may include others who are not members of the Meeting, but should include the interviewing committee if they are willing to serve.

4) Make clear that they should not, out of courtesy to the Meeting, proceed with mailing of invitations until after the Monthly Meeting has approved the requested union.

5) Discuss the certificate, its purpose, workings, and how to procure it. Tell them that they can have it prepared on their own, or may order it. Arrange to have them see copies of certificates on file in the Meeting if they wish to do so.

6) If the union is a marriage, ascertain if they have the necessary knowledge of the legal requirements for couples of different genders, such as blood tests and time required. For same gender couples, determine if they are aware of the legal resources available to them for securing as many legal protections and responsibilities as possible. Caution different gender couples to be sure to obtain a marriage license in plenty of time, specifically the one used for Friends' unions, which is a special form in the District of Columbia. The regular marriage license is used in Virginia and Maryland. Because the law changes from time to time, all couples should consult with someone in the Marriage License Bureau in the District of Columbia or the county in which the wedding is to take place long before the date of the union. Same-gender couples should be given the option of not notifying the marriage bureau, as it may put them at risk of job or other harassment.

7) Remind them to consult with their oversight committee after it has been appointed, concerning plans for the rehearsal, the meeting for marriage or commitment itself, and any reception following it.

D. Before the Meeting for Clearness

1) In advance of the first meeting the couple or new family should be told that more than one meeting might be required. Emphasize that this is not a test, but an honored and sacred Quaker process that helps determine clarity on the part of the committee and the couple or new family that this marriage/union of commitment is ready to take place. Clarity is reached through respectful asking of questions in an atmosphere of mutuality and respect.

2) Before the meeting, the couple or new family should be given...
...a written statement outlining the meaning of being married under the care of the meeting and the importance of mutuality of coordination and cooperation
...a copy of the queries that have been approved by the committee
...a handout explaining the complete marriage/union of commitment process.

3) Once the two committee members "are clear to serve on a given clearness committee, they may wish to discern whether to meet together first without the couple. This may be especially useful where some members of the committee have not previously served on a clearness committee, and when there are questions about the functioning of the committee. Such a meeting provides the opportunity for members of the committee to come to common understanding of how they will work together." -- From *Grounded in God*, pg.75

E. The Meeting for Clearness

- 1) Set aside 1 1/2 to 2 hours for this process. If it looks like it needs to last more than 2 hours it may be best to schedule another meeting.
- 2) Create a comfortable, friendly environment for the meeting. The meeting can be in homes or at the Meeting House. Serving simple food is always welcome and comforting.
- 3) Take time to introduce each other and reiterate the purpose of the clearness process. Communicate to the couple or new family that this is not a test; however the Marriage and Family Relations Committee must be clear about supporting the marriage/union of commitment and the members of the clearness committee may ask for more than one meeting.
- 4) Take time to get to know the couple or new family. How and when did they meet? How and when did they decide to marry/have a union of commitment? What are their jobs? Their affiliation with FMW?
- 5) Discuss the queries. Not all queries are appropriate. Decide which ones are relevant to the couple or new family. It is important for the committee members to focus on asking questions and listening, rather than giving advice or talking about one's personal experiences. This is better saved for the planning stages of the wedding/union of commitment. Focusing on the couple or new family will assist them in deepening their understanding of themselves and their clearness to take this step in their lives.
- 6) After the queries, go over the approval process and time frame again. Make sure there is time to answer the questions of the couple or new family.

F. The Queries

The Friends Meeting of Washington welcomes the oversight of marriage or commitment of its members and attenders. Assistance in this religious union is a privilege. It is asked, however, that before the Meeting's approval for marriage or commitment is sought, that couples considering marriage or commitment discuss honestly and frankly with each other the following questions that apply to their situation:

- 1) What duties and responsibilities are we assuming in our union and in establishing a home, whether it be in a house, apartment, or one room?
- 2) Do we know each other's habits, likes and dislikes, value systems? Are we ready to make adjustments to these with kindness and understanding? Do we understand each other's opinions on questions important to both, such as personal goals and ambitions?
- 3) Do we want children? How many, and how soon? What is our attitude toward planned parenthood? Could we be happy without children?
- 4) Have we faced the fact that money, its earning and spending, may cause more unhappiness in marriage or commitment than any other factor? How will we attempt to ensure the happiness of our union against disagreements over the use of money? Do we know each other's attitude on earning, spending, and saving? Are we willing to plan a budget knowing that later we may agree on changes in the way we handle money?
- 5) How do we feel about the use of leisure time? Do we have similar interests that can be shared and enjoyed together?
- 6) How do we feel about each other's economic, religious and cultural backgrounds? How do we react to each other's parents, friends, and relatives?
- 7) Do we know each other well enough to frankly consider the above questions? Should we wait -- six months, a year -- before we proceed with the union? Or are we ready now, secure in the knowledge of the loving interest of our Meeting and of the guidance of a Higher Power?
- 8) Have we fully and realistically considered our ability to handle new emotional, physical, and financial obligations?
- 9) Do either of us already have children from a previous relationship? Have we thought through and frankly discussed how this commitment will affect our relationship with our own children, the children of the other partner, and each other? What are our financial, moral, disciplinary, and emotional obligations to these children? Do we want to include these children as participants in the clearness process?
- 10) Have we told members of our family, including our adult children, about our forthcoming marriage? Have we given ourselves ample time and space to listen to one another so that we can be aware of each other's needs and expectations?
- 11) What can we do to help relatives and ex-relatives adapt to our new family?
- 12) Have we discussed what our relationship(s) with our ex-spouse(s) will be? How will this affect daily life?
- 13) What is our ex-spouse(s)' relationship to our children, including adult children?

14) How do we establish good boundaries while at the same time maintaining important family connections? For example, who has keys to the family home?

15) Is our relationship with the other parent of the child or children of our intended new spouse clear, even if that parent is deceased?

16) What new procedures or traditions do we want to establish with our new family?

After serious consideration of the above questions, and of others that these may bring to mind, if the couple agree to ask the Monthly Meeting to have oversight of their marriage or commitment, these additional questions should be considered:

17) Do we understand the religious significance of the Friends Meeting for Marriage or Commitment? Do we value the loving concern of the Meeting in helping us plan our union? Do we feel a commitment to this particular Meeting? Do we understand that marriage under the care of FMW is a mutual relationship between the couple and the Meeting?

18) Have we reflected on the meaning of the promises we are going to make in the presence of God and family and friends?

G. After the Meeting(s) for Clearness

If the Marriage and Family Relations Committee supports the proposed union, it brings the request to the next Monthly Meeting with its recommendation for approval. This recommendation is held over for one month before the marriage or commitment can be approved by the meeting for business. At the time of approval, the meeting for business presents the date of the event and names of the oversight committee which includes at least one member of the Marriage and Family Relations Committee and someone who is eligible to sign a legal marriage license in the relevant jurisdiction.

VII. PRESENTING THE APPROVED REQUEST TO MEETING FOR BUSINESS

The two members of the Marriage and Family Relations Committee who have conducted the clearness process present the couple to the committee for approval when the clearness process is complete. If the committee approves the marriage or union under its care, the request must be presented at the next meeting for business.

Contact the Clerk of the Meeting to ask that Marriage and Family Relations Committee be placed on the agenda for a marriage or union of commitment request.

Ask the couple to attend the meeting for business so that they can be introduced.

At the meeting for business, either the Clerk of Marriage and Family or another member of the committee will read the letter from the couple to the Meeting requesting that they would like to be married or joined under the Meeting's care. If the letter is long, or if there is information in the letter that is not appropriate to be read in public, take time to edit it as appropriate.

If the meeting for business approves the marriage or union of commitment under its care, the request is laid over for a month until the next meeting for business. The member of the Marriage and Family Relations Committee who presented the original request should be present at this meeting as well.

VIII. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

The oversight committee is responsible for guiding the couple through the planning stage; conducting the wedding rehearsal; clerking the wedding (or cooperating with a clerk the couple chooses); signing the legal marriage license; collecting the wedding certificate and bringing it safely to the Meeting office.

In addition, the committee is responsible for reporting to the next Monthly Meeting for Business that the marriage or commitment has been accomplished with good order, reverence, and moderation; that the certificate has been properly recorded and, if appropriate, the legal requirements satisfied or suggested legal arrangements made.

As far in advance as possible, the committee:

- * Arranges an occasion to meet in friendly fellowship with the couple or new family to discuss plans for the union and makes known to them that this committee is available to help them as needed or desired.
- * Keeps the FMW staff and other persons involved and informed as the plans progress.

A. Committee Selection

The oversight committee is selected as far in advance as possible. It should consist of the couple and the appointed members of the Marriage and Family Relations Committee. Other possible members could be friends who are helping with the wedding, wedding planners, or clergy if this is an interfaith wedding.

B. Wedding Planning

There is no charge for space use for weddings and memorial meetings or accompanying receptions held under our care, although donations to defray costs are welcome. When the committee meets it is helpful to discuss the following items to learn from the couple or new family:

- 1) In the case of marriages, is the couple following the guidelines provided by the Marriage and Family Relations Committee to obtain a marriage license or make suggested legal arrangements? Remind them to give the license to one of the members of the oversight committee in advance of the date of the meeting for worship.
- 2) Would the couple or new family like to have an announcement made about the planned meeting for worship in the Meeting newsletter and/or after the regular meetings for worship the proceeding Sunday? Keep in mind that any meeting for worship with a concern for marriage or commitment under the care of the Meeting is open to all members. (See Section II, B)

3) Will child care be needed? Based on the needs of the family and expected attendees, child care during the meeting for worship may be appropriate. If child care is desired, the oversight committee should promptly contact the Child Care Committee for advice. The couple or new family should be informed that they will be asked to pay for this expense. Check with the office staff for the current fee.

4) Will flowers, music, or catering be included?

a) Arrangements for the delivery and placement of flowers, and how they will be disposed of afterward, should be made by the couple or new family with the assistance of the oversight committee.

b) FMW office staff need to be informed of any preliminary visits by florists, caterers, or any other related arrangements, as well as schedules for deliveries and pick-ups. Office hours are 8 AM to 4 PM weekdays.

c) The friendly presence and staff also need to know what time family, caterers, friends, or participants in the meeting for worship will actually arrive at the Meeting House and how long the cleanup will take afterward, so they can plan properly for space usage and building coverage.

d) Sharp objects will damage the cork floor in the Meeting Room. Musicians should be informed that large instruments must be wheeled across the floor and not dragged, and that rubber tips must be used for instruments such as cellos.

e) Avoid moving any benches. They are old and fragile.

f) Drippings from candles have caused damage to furniture, and then had to be scraped off the cork floor. One or two candles can be used with plates underneath to catch the drippings.

g) Be aware that using two power-hungry appliances in the same room can cause a circuit breaker to blow. There is one electrical outlet for use in the Meeting Room. That outlet is in the floor behind the facing benches with a brass cover over it, which can be removed with a coin. Someone helping with the wedding should bring extension cords if they are needed. A second outlet is only for the hearing assistance equipment and cannot be used. The hearing assistance devices can be provided for weddings held under the care of the Meeting. Please notify the staff if these will be needed. The friendly presence will unlock the cabinet in the Meeting Room where the devices are located.

h) No alcoholic beverages, recreational drugs or weapons, ceremonial or otherwise, are allowed on the property, and no smoking may occur in the buildings. No food or beverages are allowed in the Meeting Room, Library or Parlor.

i) The buildings must be empty by 10 PM. Check with staff with any questions.

5) Where will people park and enter the building?

a) On street parking is available (with some restrictions during rush hour) as way may open. Parking regulations are strictly enforced.

b) There are two commercial parking garages nearby:

c) The Universal building at 2005 Florida Ave. NW, just across Connecticut Ave. on the left when heading east from the Meeting House, between the drug store and the Post Office, open 7 AM to midnight, Monday through Saturday, and 4 PM to midnight on Sunday. The door says "Permit Parking Only" but one-day parking is OK.

d) If that garage is full, take the next left onto T Street. Almost immediately on the left is Universal North Public Parking, just across from the side entrance to the Washington Hilton, open 7 AM until 11 PM weekdays and closed on weekends. No vans or trucks allowed -- 5' 7" clearance.

e) For guests who wish to take public transportation, the Metro stop is Dupont Circle.

f) Plan for those attending meeting for worship to arrive via the terrace through the Phelps Place and Decatur Place gates, and not through the lower hall of the Meeting House. Emphasize the Phelps Place gate is the best entry for those with physical disabilities.

6) Are ushers desired at the doors to greet guests and direct them to seating? Shall particular benches be reserved for family members?

a) A suggested plan is to arrange for four people to serve as greeters and ushers, with one serving as head usher.

b) Ushers usually serve (1) one at the door to the Meeting Room at the top of the stairs; (2) one each at the Phelps Place and Decatur Place gates to direct guests to the Meeting Room; and (3) one to act as a back-up wherever needed, to be responsible for storing gifts brought to the Meeting in a safe place, and to manage the unexpected.

c) Ushers may also be asked to bring glasses and a pitcher of water to the parlor adjacent to the Meeting Room well before the meeting for worship, to place leaflets on the benches, and to reserve benches for family members by placing white cords (available in the FMW office) or leaflets.

d) At the beginning of the meeting for worship, ushers should close at least the inner doors to the Meeting Room to help curtail street noise.

7) Is there a preference as to which member of the oversight committee will sit at the head of meeting to open and close it? If not, the committee will arrange this among themselves.

8) Are additional occupants desired on the facing benches besides the oversight committee? If so, the couple or new family should arrange to have them asked.

9) Shall a member of the oversight committee explain at the beginning of the worship the nature of a Quaker meeting for marriage or commitment, so that non-friends in attendance will know what to expect? Or shall leaflets explaining a Quaker meeting for worship distributed on the benches?

10) The Quaker regard for reverence, dignity, and simplicity bars the taking of pictures or use of electronic recording devices during the meeting for worship. Families may wish to inform the guests of this before the day of the meeting for worship. In certain instances, such as if poor health prevents a loved one from attending, a recording *may* be permitted via the existing microphones that are already in place for the hearing impaired. Couples and new families are advised to carefully consider how the simple act of recording may impact potential speakers and their messages. Those in attendance must be informed that a recording is being made, preferably by including a written statement on any handouts distributed at the meeting for worship itself. Advance notification is discouraged as it may result in prepared messages, which are not in keeping with Friends' worship practice.

11) Who will read the certificate? This person need not be an overseer or a Meeting member.

12) Who will be asked to carry the table holding the certificate to the couple for their signature? Or if the couple wants to walk to the table themselves?

13) The Meeting asks that the couple or new family send a photograph of themselves for the Meeting archives.

C. Other duties

1) Immediately following the planning meeting the committee makes arrangements with FMW staff for use of the space, friendly presence coverage, necessary keys for related events (the rehearsal, the meeting, the reception), and the return of the spaces used to their original condition. (See the document "Guidelines for Users of Meeting Facilities". The office staff can provide copies.)

2) Nearer to the day of the meeting, the committee also:

a) Arranges with the office staff for a friendly presence (someone who is not already involved in the ceremony) who knows how to lock and unlock the building, and to open, watch, and close the building. A friendly presence is required while the Meeting House is in use for both the rehearsal and the meeting for worship and

reception. The friendly presence should not have any other responsibilities for the event they are covering. If an experienced FMW member or attender volunteers to serve as the friendly presence for the rehearsal and/or meeting for worship and reception, have the volunteer notify the FMW office staff promptly, and to arrange well in advance to pick up and return the keys. The Friendly Presence will open the gates, adjust the temperature in the Meeting Room, and open the Meeting Room outside doors. The Meeting Room inner doors are kept closed. Written procedures for closing the Meeting House can be supplied in advance by staff and are found in the "Sunday Friendly Office Presence" binder in the office. Alternatively, ask the FMW staff to schedule a friendly presence. The couple or the family will be asked to reimburse the Meeting for this expense (the current fee is \$9.00 per hour.) (See also Section II, C)

b) Verify that the person who will read the certificate has seen and read it before the service.

c) If a marriage, arranges to have a Meeting member who is authorized to sign marriage licenses attend the meeting for worship.

D. The Rehearsal

The members of the oversight committee attend the rehearsal and arrange to have the building open for it when not held during normal business hours. It has been found most helpful for the appointed head of meeting to lead all persons involved through each step of the procedure, including:

- 1) Planning the placement of flowers and musical instruments. Any need for extension cords should be noted and responsibility assigned for providing them.
- 2) Instructions to ushers as to where they will stand, any special seating arrangements for family, and where to place white cords (available in the office) for reserving seats.
- 3) If gifts are brought to the Meeting House, one usher should be assigned to take the gifts to a safe location for storage during the meeting for worship.
- 4) Walk through the sequence of seating for the oversight committee, the seating of the couple or new family, any announcements at the beginning, the saying of vows, the signing of the certificate, the closing of the meeting for worship, and any announcements at the close.
- 5) Put the certificate and license in the top drawer of the slant top desk in the office after the rehearsal, or prior to the day of the Meeting for Worship, to remain there until the time of the Meeting.
- 6) Ensure that paper weights to hold the rolled certificate flat, and ball point pens with permanent India ink are available for use or the couple or new family during the meeting for

worship, and for those in charge of the signing of the certificate after the meeting for worship. These are in the slant-top desk in the office.

E. Meeting for Worship

The head of meeting, or a designated member of the committee, are responsible for the following:

- 1) Just before the meeting for worship, make sure the certificate and pens are on the table in the Meeting Room. If this is the marriage of a different gender couple, secure the license from the slant-top desk in the office.
- 2) Open and close the meeting for worship, and provide a welcoming and comforting presence to those unfamiliar with the Quaker form of worship.
- 3) Immediately following the meeting for worship, encourage those who have attended to sign the certificate, and make any necessary announcements.
- 4) If this is the marriage of a different gender couple, obtain on the marriage license the signature of the Clerk of the Meeting or other Meeting member authorized to sign marriage licenses, and return the lower portion of the license to the couple.
- 5) If the meeting for worship is held in DC, the middle portion of the marriage license is mailed to the US District Court, and the Meeting retains the top portion.
- 6) Give the top portion of the marriage license and/or certificate promptly to the Administrative Secretary.
- 7) A photocopy is made of the certificate for the records, after which it is transmitted to the couple or new family at the address they have given.
- 8) Return the white cords, pens, and paperweights to the slant-top desk in the office.

F. Reception

If the reception takes place in the Meeting House, please contact the staff to discuss the details.

- 1) If the Meeting takes an active role in the reception, the oversight committee should arrange for several people to assist in setting up, serving, and cleaning up. The staff can provide information about the number of tables (with dimensions) and number of folding chairs available.
- 2) Keep in mind that smoking and the use of alcoholic beverages are not allowed.
- 3) Trash must be put in garbage bags, tied securely and placed in the garbage cans with the lid secure on the can. Garbage bags left outside the cans attract rats and other animals.

4) If the reception is planned for outdoors, also make alternative plans in case of bad weather.

G. Report to Monthly Meeting

At the next Monthly Meeting, the head of meeting or a member of the oversight committee reports as to whether the marriage or commitment has been suitably accomplished in good order, reverence, and moderation, with the certificate properly recorded or any Meeting-approved letter sent to the jurisdiction in which the event was held. If a marriage, report whether the legal requirements have been satisfied or suggested legal arrangements made or begun.

H. Ongoing Responsibilities

In the years to come, the oversight committee acts as an ongoing resource for support, information, and clearness for the couple or new family, especially if difficulties or challenges arise. The oversight committee may wish to consider arranging a one-year anniversary dinner, sending a postcard, or otherwise reaching out to remain in contact.

The Meeting recognizes the special needs of members and their families affected by separation and divorce. It cherishes each individual in every circumstance and relationship. The Marriage and Family Relations Committee will inform the Meeting for Business of marriages or commitments under the care of the Meeting which have ended.

IX. LEGAL SIGNERS AND ENDORSERS

A. Registration of legal signers of marriage licenses for marriages celebrated in Washington, DC

As of January 1998 the Meeting has registered 8 positions with the DC Marriage Bureau for Friends legally entitled to sign marriage licenses in the city. This applies only to weddings held in the city itself. Weddings in Virginia and Maryland have a different set of recognized signers and this is described in a separate document in the office file. The arrangement with the Marriage Bureau was formalized by court decree in October 1997 and copies are included in the Meeting's office.

B. Number and Type of Positions

The total number of positions is eight: one "legal endorser" (the committee Clerk) and seven others. If we want to increase this number we must make a further formal request to the court to approve more. This is done by letter to the Marriage Bureau, which will forward it to the presiding judge for consideration.

C. Adding and Removing Names

Each position has been registered and paid for, but there are no permanent names attached. We can change names by sending a letter on Meeting letterhead that reads, "Please remove XXX and add YYY," and provides a summary of registered names as indicated in our records. This letter is best signed by the committee Clerk, but if this is not possible, then by the Administrative Secretary acting on behalf of the Clerk. Each new name must be accompanied by a completed "Application for Authorization" form (found in the office file -- photocopies are allowed) completed by the applicant and endorsed by the Friend recorded at the Marriage Bureau as the recognized endorser (the committee Clerk). Both parts of the application must be notarized as indicated on the form. As shown on the "Sample Application" the applicant checks the second of the two boxes ("appointed for the purpose....") and shows the term as "Indefinite." Please do not quibble about this word -- it was agreed to by both sides and we do not want to open any other cans of worms.

D. The Endorser

There is only one "endorser" recorded by the Marriage Bureau, and this will be the committee Clerk (or one of the co-clerks). The name of the endorser can be changed at the Bureau by formal letter informing them of the substitution, and signed preferably by the outgoing Clerk, but otherwise by the Administrative Secretary. Only this Friend can endorse applications for the others.

E. A Cautionary Note

Approved signers can only sign for weddings under the care of Friends Meeting of Washington. We hold strictly to this rule. If we are found to sign for any other marriage our rights to sign marriage licenses will be suspended.

F. Contact

Branch Chief, Marriage Bureau
Superior Court of the District of Columbia
#4485
500 Indiana Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001-2131
202-879-4804
fax: 202-434-9580

X. RESOURCES

Many of these books and booklets are available at www.quakerbooks.org.

Legal Affairs: Essential Advice for Same-Sex Couples, Frederick Hertz, Henry Holt and Company, 1998.

"Life Planning: Legal Documents for Lesbians and Gay Men," Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund booklet, 1998. (If not available at your bookstore, contact Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, 120 Wall Street, Suite 1500, New York NY 10005-3904, 212.809.8585)

Marriage from the Heart: Eight Commitments of a Spiritually Fulfilling Life Together, Lois Kellerman and Nelly Bly, Penguin, 2002.

"Marriage in the Light: Reflections on Marriage and the Clearness Process", Elizabeth Watson, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1993.

"Resource Guide to be Used by a Same Sex Couple", accompanying guide to "Marriage In the Light," Family Relations Committee, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1988.

"Quaker Marriage", a history of the ceremony by Edward Milligan, 1994.

"A Quaker Marriage", Philadelphia Yearly Meeting booklet, suitable for distributing in invitations and at weddings.