

## **Minutes on Same-Gender Marriage or Committed Relationships from Meetings in New England Yearly Meeting**

**HARTFORD (CT), March 1986:** The Meeting affirms the goodness of committed, loving relationships and offers recognition and support to those who share this ideal and desire to enter into a permanent relationship based upon it. By tradition, the Meeting recognizes committed union in a celebration of marriage under the care of the Meeting. The same loving care and consideration should be given to both same-sex and heterosexual applicants as outlined in *Faith and Practice*.

**SOUTH BERKSHIRE (MA), fall 1986:** endorsed Hartford's minute

**MOUNT TOBY (MA), January 1987:** Endorsed Hartford's minute, suggesting that the word "should" in the final sentence be changed to "will." [NOTE: This change was made in the minute brought to Yearly Meeting in 1987 by Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting.]

Excerpt of minutes: "As we come closer to a shared vision of a future that extends all the same rights to homosexual couples as are now enjoyed by heterosexual couples under the law, we must be prepared to take even what seem to be small steps to achieve this end. Our acceptance of the Hartford minute is our first step. . . . Our vision of marriage will not be complete until the unification of the legal and the spiritual is complete and available to all."

### **MINUTE FORWARDED TO NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING 1987 by CONNECTICUT VALLEY QUARTERLY MEETING, approved at its session May 3, 1987**

At the direction of the Quarter, Meetings in Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting have given attention to a minute on same-gender marriage approved by Hartford Meeting in March, 1986:

The Meeting affirms the goodness of committed, loving relationships and offers recognition and support to those who share this ideal and desire to enter into a permanent relationship based upon it. By tradition, the Meeting recognizes committed union in a celebration of marriage under the care of the Meeting. The same loving care and consideration will be given to both same-sex and heterosexual applicants as outlined in *Faith and Practice*.

While some Meetings in the Quarter have endorsed the Hartford minute, the Quarter as a whole is not in unity on any minute concerning spiritual unions under the care of the Meeting for those who cannot have a legal marriage. We are in unity, however, that this consideration has led us to deep questioning of some important spiritual matters, and we wish to share our process with the Yearly Meeting, encouraging any other Meetings who feel so led to join us in our continuing seeking.

1. We have a concern for relationships of any status, whether officially under the care of the Meeting or not. How do we nurture commitment among us? How is it possible to recognize the spiritual union of souls at all?
2. We have separated *legal* union from *spiritual* union in our discussions, aware of early Friends practice of marriage under the care of Meetings which had no legal status. What is the Meeting's appropriate role in legal matters relating to marriage and divorce? Do we need to reexamine this role?
3. The larger question raised among us in considering this minute was: "What does marriage under the care of the Meeting mean?"
4. We are aware that there is an unequal legal practice which allows benefits to heterosexuals (whether or not they choose to be legally married) which are denied to homosexuals. We are aware that disabled persons and older persons may lose their social security benefits if they legally marry. Among the questions raised by these realities are:
  - How does the law nurture committed relationships and of what concern is this to us?
  - How are we prepared to recognize and support what we discern as spiritual commitment when that commitment cannot be legally recognized?
  - What is the relationship of the Spirit and the law in questions of marriage?
  - In what ways are we as Meetings comfortable being "agents of the State?"

*At the direction of New England Yearly Meeting session August 16, 1987, this minute is to be placed with the draft chapter on human sexuality for Living With Oneself and Others being sent by Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel to monthly meetings this year for their response.*

**PUTNEY (VT), March 1988:** We affirm our willingness as a Meeting to participate in celebrations of marriage, in accordance with our traditional procedures, for both opposite-sex and same-sex couples when one or both of the partners is a member of our Meeting. We intend to follow the same customary and careful process of arriving at clearness for all couples who wish to unite under our care. At every stage we intend to treat all couples with respect, care, and love.

**BEACON HILL (MA), April 1988:** We, the members and attenders of Beacon Hill Monthly Meeting, affirm our belief in that of God in every person. Furthermore, we attest that this belief embraces all persons regardless of sexual orientation.

Beacon Hill affirms that all couples, including those of the same sex, have equal opportunity to be married within the framework of the meeting process. The love between these couples, as it grows, will enrich their relationship, the Meeting, and the world at large. The Meeting is committed to supporting these couples according to their needs.

Beacon Hill acknowledges the Certificate of Marriage signed by the couple and those present at the ceremony as the witness of Friends to the couples' spiritual union. Mindful that only the heterosexual couples among us currently have the right to legally sanctioned marriage and its privileges, the Meeting asks Friends, and particularly couples preparing for marriage, to examine how best to respond and bear witness to the inequalities still present in the system.

**MIDDLEBURY (VT), June 1989:** We joyfully affirm our willingness as a Meeting to sanctify celebrations of marriage for both same and opposite gender couples. We intend to follow the good order of Friends in arriving at clearness for all couple who are led to unite under our loving care.

**NEW HAVEN (CT), July 1989:** endorsed Hartford minute (above)

**HANOVER (NH), November 1989:** Hanover Friends Meeting affirms our support of committed, loving relationships. We also affirm our willingness, as a Meeting, to celebrate marriages for all couples, whether same sex or opposite sex. We intend to follow the same customary and careful process of arriving at clearness for any couple who wishes to unite under our care in accordance with our traditional procedures. As always, we intend to consider all requests of marriage with respect, care, and love.

**CAMBRIDGE (MA), February 1990:** Friends Meeting at Cambridge affirms that relationships between persons of the same sex can be as committed and holy as the heterosexual relationships that Friends have called marriage can be. Friends intend to give the same loving care and consideration to both same-sex and heterosexual relationships. We therefore welcome the opportunity to celebrate God's love made manifest in the life of a couple at a meeting for worship appointed to celebrate their union, according to the good order of Friends, whether the couple is of the same or different sex. We are not yet clear whether same-sex unions should have a different name than heterosexual unions.

We recognize that our explorations of the nature of marriage have raised certain issues with respect to our clearness process, and to the Meeting's oversight for all couples under its care, including the care of a partnership's dissolution. We direct the Meeting on Ministry and Counsel and the Marriage and Family Life Committee, together with concerned Friends, to explore these issues, and as needed, to bring recommendations for action to this Meeting.

**CAMBRIDGE (MA), September 1994:** Friends Meeting at Cambridge approved the use of the word marriage in relationships of loving committed adult couples who have been found clear for marriage, and who desire to use that term.

**BURLINGTON (VT), May 1990:** We affirm our willingness as a Meeting to participate in celebrations of marriage for both opposite sex and same sex couples. We intend to follow the same customary and careful process of arriving at clearness for all couples who wish to unite under our care in accordance with our traditional procedures. At every stage we intend to treat all couples with respect, care, and love.

**PORTLAND (ME), December 1991:** A same-gender couple seeking to come under the care of the Meeting for marriage or a celebration of commitment will be considered in the same way a heterosexual couple is.

**YARMOUTH (MA) PREPARATIVE MEETING OF SANDWICH MONTHLY MEETING, May 1992:**

On fifth month, 1992, Yarmouth Friends reaffirmed the minute giving the same care and concern to homosexual couples who wish to marry as we give to heterosexuals.

The Meeting affirms the goodness of committed, loving relationships and offers recognition and support to those who share this ideal and desire to enter into a permanent relationship based upon it. By tradition, the Meeting recognizes committed union in a celebration of marriage under the care of the Meeting. The same loving care and consideration should be given to both same-sex and heterosexual applicants.

We are led to this position not to coerce individuals into participating in the particular institution of marriage. Rather, we have come to this from our belief that all discrimination is contrary to the working of the divine and/or spirit within each of us. We affirm our belief that homosexuals are entitled to the same rights and privileges as heterosexuals. While we recognize that we cannot control the laws of the State, we can ensure that our spiritual practice does not reinforce the oppression. Realizing that approval of this concern is today unlikely, at this time we ask the other meetings of Sandwich Monthly Meeting to discuss and educate yourselves regarding this matter so that in the future we can achieve a sense of unity in our Monthly Meeting.

Further, we recommend that Friends consider the section on marriage in *Faith and Practice*, particularly the introduction on page 153, as well as the following quote: "Oppression in the extreme appears terrible; but oppression in more refined appearances remains to be oppression; and where the smallest degree of it is cherished it grows stronger and more extensive. To labour for a perfect redemption from this spirit of oppression is the great business of the whole family of Christ Jesus in this world." John Woolman (1763-1764)

**MINUTE FROM SALEM QUARTER TO NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING, August 1992:**

Some meetings within Salem Quarterly Meeting have labored with the question of same gender marriage or celebrations of commitment and the pastoral care of the partners in these unions. We believe this is an important question that should be considered by other Friends' meetings in New England Yearly Meeting. Salem Quarterly Meeting is not yet unified on the subject of same gender marriage, but encourages meetings to consider a search for unity on this issue. We forward this letter and history from Beacon Hill Monthly Meeting in the hope that it will be useful in further discernment. *[Note: history not included here]*

**LETTER FROM BEACON HILL MONTHLY MEETING**

We are writing to you in an effort to open a dialogue around the issue of same gender marriage. Our meeting began considering this issue about five years ago, and reached unity in support of same gender marriage after much corporate and individual searching. This process of discernment tremendously enriched our meeting by expanding our vision of community and equality. Subsequently, this unity enabled us to take under our care a marriage between two women. These experiences led us to the hope that Friends' testimony on equality would extend to the marriage of same gender couples throughout New England Yearly Meeting.

Now that we have taken this marriage under our care, we are concerned that should this couple move to another meeting within New England, they would be received and cared for as would any other married couple. We have reached unity on the following minute, which we offer to your meeting for your consideration.

*We acknowledge that same gender marriages and celebrations of commitment are taking place in the larger Quaker community. Should one of these couples move to our meeting, we will support their relationship as we would that of any other married couple.*

We bring our witness on same gender marriage to the wider Quaker community because we greatly desire that Friend unite with us in the support of these relationships. We would welcome the opportunity to provide you with more information, or visit with your meeting, should you so desire.

Polly Kmetz, Clerk

*Yearly Meeting approved having these minutes sent to monthly meetings for their consideration and also referred them to Yearly Meeting Ministry and Counsel for its consideration.*

**STORRS (CT), October 1992:** Ministry and Counsel presented a minute on same-gender relationships for consideration by the Meeting. The Meeting agreed at the outset of the discussion that it supported the basic thrust of the minute. The final version approved by the Meeting is:

Background: During the winter and spring of 1991-92, Ministry and Counsel initiated and supported a committee to organize discussions on the Meeting's spiritual relationship to gay men, lesbians, and bi-sexuals. Five

informational or worship sharing sessions attended by 25 to more than 30 were held at the rise of Meeting. These offered the Meeting community a rich opportunity to explore the issues and problems faced by individuals living in a homophobic society. As a result of this exploratory process we have come to understand that our concern should be for the quality of the relationship rather than for the sexual orientation of the partners.

The Meeting commits itself to promoting acceptance, dignity and respect for people of same-sex orientation. Any loving relationship that honors the sacredness of each partner's life and spirit should be embraced by the Meeting. We affirm that we should support all individuals in such relationships including, but not limited to, an offering of the benefits of a public celebration of mutual commitment. It is the privilege of the couple to call their union by any name they choose. The process for publicly recognizing this union shall follow the customary procedures as outlined in *Faith and Practice*.

**AMESBURY (MA), November 1992:** All loving relationships are sacred and should be accepted and honored by the Meeting. All couples are entitled to the ceremony of marriage following Friends' practices. The Meeting supports those marriages under its care.

**BELFAST (ME), February 1993:** Minute on Same-Sex Marriage and Commitment

Mindful that the spiritual growth of each member of a couple sometimes may best proceed, and the love between them may best ripen and mature, in the context of a marriage which takes place in a community of faith and with the support and tender regard of that community; mindful that Friends who prefer to establish lasting bonds with someone of the same gender are excluded from marriage by law and by custom; and mindful that such exclusion does violence to the spirit of those Friends, we are clear that applications by couples, whether of the same or opposite gender, to be married under the care of this meeting, shall all be given the same tender, careful consideration. Whether the couple calls their relationship a marriage or a commitment, we honor the covenant. Further, we look forward to the day when all couples who so wish can enjoy the full recognition and entitlements of marriage from the society at large.

**COBSCOOK (ME), July 1993:** The meeting addressed the issue of same gender marriages as New England Yearly Meeting requested we do. The meeting would apply the same guidelines and standards to such marriage as we would to a heterosexual marriage as outlined in New England Yearly Meeting *Faith and Practice*. We recognize that there are additional concerns (legal, economic, and social) involved in same gender marriages, but we have faith that the clearness committee overseeing such a marriage would thoughtfully address those both for the individuals involved and the meeting as a whole. This minute is the result of our beginning attempts to address this issue and we suspect it will evolve as we further pursue the matter.

**NORTH SHORE (MA), July 1993:** Minute On Same-Gender Unions

We at North Shore Meeting recognize that the Divine Light shines with equal brightness in all loving and committed relationships, whether straight or gay. We believe that we are called and ready to support, recognize and celebrate all such relationships, holding them in the Light and participating in the public celebration of such commitment.

We believe that marriage is fundamentally a spiritual union, brought about by the Inner Light in the hearts, minds, and lives of two people. A wedding or celebration of commitment is a public statement and recognition of such a spiritual union in which, in the presence of God and before assembled Friends, each promises, with divine assistance, to be loving and faithful unto the other for as long as they both shall live.

Therefore, we affirm that if a couple comes before us requesting such a ceremony, we will appoint a clearness committee for them, provided that at least one person in that couple be a member or regular attender at our meeting. If the couple is found to be clear for union, we will hold a celebration of loving commitment under our care, in accordance with traditional procedures.

We are aware of the diversity of attitudes towards the term "marriage" and leave to the couple the characterization of their relationship.

We note that one Friend was unable to accept the use of the term "marriage" for same-gender unions.

**SWANSEA (MA), received in NEYM office December 1992**

Swansea Monthly Meeting of Friends has labored for several months with the issue of the practice of homosexuality, including same gender marriages as accepted in some meetings within the New England Yearly Meeting.

It is our belief that the Holy Bible is the profound law and its restrictions on sexual behavior must be followed regardless of modern psychology or other theories.

It is the decision of this meeting that we can no longer participate in Quarterly or Yearly Meeting activities and hereby suspend all relationships until Quarterly and Yearly Meeting accept Biblical standards.

**SWANSEA (MA), October 1993**

**TO ALL FRIENDS IN NEW ENGLAND**

A year ago Swansea Monthly Meeting drafted a minute suspending ties with New England Yearly Meeting and with Sandwich Quarterly Meeting until they turn back to Biblical standards including the Biblical requirement for sexual purity. We have received several responses to that Minute, some in support and others opposed.

We find no room for discussion or study on the issue of homosexual activity, as it is perfectly clear what God says in Holy Scripture. At Swansea it is our firm resolve to be obedient to his Word regardless of what other Friends say or do.

Those who approve what God forbids become God's enemies. We plead with all Friends to submit to His revealed will and not to rebel against Him.

We draw your attention to the attached Declaration of Southwest Yearly Meeting [dated January 24, 1992, not attached here], which we heartily endorse as an excellent presentation of Truth on this issue.

**NORTH FAIRFIELD (ME), September 1993:** The most recent marriage under the care of North Fairfield Meeting was sixteen years ago. Before the marriage the procedure set forth in *Faith and Practice* was carefully fulfilled. This family is now four plus a foster child (from a single parent home) whose mother is mentally ill. Other members of the community have been married in the meeting house. It seems that in all these instances our support of the newly married has not been strong and probably we should be more aware and supportive for those who have thus shared a tender moment in their lives with us.

Regarding the establishment of a policy in allowing homosexual marriages under the care of this meeting: We as a meeting do believe that there is authority to be found in the Bible. This specific matter is not considered in so many words, but the thrust of the spirit of the Scriptures in both the Old and New Testament is that homosexuality is a violation of God's will for His children. We of North Fairfield, therefore, have approved that our response to any such request will be a denial. We do feel that it is very important for those making the request to be caringly and carefully informed of the bases of the denial.

**SMITHFIELD (RI), October 1993:** The Committee on Ministry and Counsel received a request from Beacon Hill Monthly Meeting and Salem Quarter [see above, p. 3] to examine how we would respond to same-gender couples married under the care of another meeting who might move from that meeting to ours. Ministry and Counsel brought this concern before Smithfield Friends at an open meeting on March 21, 1993. There were many tender feelings expressed at this meeting. The sense was that one of our strengths at Smithfield Meeting is our willingness to welcome people from a variety of backgrounds and personal histories. We wish to provide all a place to seek God's will in their lives and to find a community which seeks God together in love.

Out of the sense of this gathering, Ministry and Counsel has brought forth our own version of the Beacon Hill minute, and we unite in supporting the following statement:

We acknowledge that same-gender marriages and celebrations of commitment are taking place in the larger Quaker community. Should one of these couples move to our meeting, we will support their relationship as we would that of any other couple. It is our hope that as a community and as individuals we might continue to grow in our understanding of the meaning of marriage and committed relationships.

**FARMINGTON (ME), December 1993:** Farmington Friends Meeting supports heterosexual and homosexual couples who commit themselves, in the presence of God, to a loving and faithful relationship. (Explanatory note: The word "marriage" was not included in this minute because those present did not want the support to be limited to only those couples who go through a marriage ceremony.) [*The explanatory note is part of the minute.*]

**FRESH POND (MA), January 1994:** A couple marries in response to their love for each other and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. True marriage represents the spiritual union of two hearts and is not dependent upon outward forms or legal recognition. The meeting cares for and celebrates the marriage relationship but it is God who sanctifies the marriage. We believe that the Divine Light illuminates all loving and committed relationships. We therefore affirm that we will take under our care the marriage of gay and lesbian couples in the same manner that we do for heterosexual couples. We further undertake to support and nurture all families within our meeting,

whatever form they may take. We realize that this support will entail educating ourselves about the diverse needs of the families that comprise our community.

We recognize that the unity we have found on this issue is not shared by Friends everywhere. We cherish God's spirit in others even if they are not in unity with us on this matter. We hope that Friends' continued search for guidance on this issue will not be a source of division but will lead to a deeper unity and love among all of us.

**NORTHAMPTON (MA), February 1994:** Northampton Meeting affirms the goodness of committed, loving relationships and offers recognition and support to those who share this ideal and desire to enter into a permanent relationship based upon it. By tradition, the Meeting recognizes committed union in a celebration of marriage under the care of the Meeting. The same loving care and consideration will be given to both same-sex and heterosexual couples as outlined in *Faith and Practice*.

The Meeting shares a vision of a future that extends all the same blessings and legal rights to homosexual couples as are now enjoyed by heterosexual couples. The Meeting's vision of marriage will not be complete until the unification of the legal and the spiritual is complete and available to all.

**ACADIA (ME), March 1994:** Minute on marriages and committed relationships under the care of Acadia Friends Meeting: We believe that couples, regardless of gender, can make the spiritual and social commitments necessary to found a family. We consider the commitments undertaken in these relationships by both the couple and the meetings to be those of marriage.

As individuals we are not united as to whether such a union should be called a "marriage."

As a meeting, we welcome applications from couples who unite with Quaker faith and practice, and choose to go through our usual process of clearness for marriage.

We also believe the law should recognize same-gender relationships as having the same legal status as heterosexual marriages.

**NARRAMISSIC VALLEY (ME), April 1994:** Friends at Narramissic Valley Meeting believe that marriage, and particularly marriage under the care of a Quaker Meeting, is not a commitment to be taken lightly. The Meeting, and especially its duly appointed committee on clearness, bears a responsibility to assure itself that the couple is entering into marriage not only lovingly but wisely as well. We believe that a Quaker Meeting must exercise the same care whether the couple is homosexual or heterosexual.

**ORONO (ME), June 1994:** Orono Monthly Meeting offers guidance and support to all couples whether they be of the same or opposite gender, who desire spiritual recognition of their commitment to each other according to God's will. Orono Friends intend to follow the same careful practice of holding clearness committee meetings with each couple, using Friends' traditions and concerns and the written guidance of *Faith and Practice of New England Yearly Meeting*. When a Meeting participates in a marriage, certain obligations are assumed for nurturing the relationship. For this reason, Orono Friend Meeting wishes to establish an ongoing spiritual relationship with one or both people before the clearness process begins.

**EGGEMOGGIN REACH (ME), August 1994:** As Friends we are lead to acknowledge and respect That of God within each individual and we have historically been lead to take action in support of the basic dignity and equality of all people.

Recently New England Yearly Meeting has asked us to consider our response to the issue of same-gender marriage. Following careful consideration we approve the following:

Upon request by a couple, Eggemoggin Reach Friends Meeting will recognize same-gender relationships through the same careful process we would use to arrive at clearness for all couples who wish to unite under our care, following Friends traditions and practices. Similarly, we recognize our responsibility to provide continuing nurture to such couples in the same manner as that accorded to heterosexual couples.

Acknowledging that there is as yet no legal recognition of marriage for same-gender couples and that there are many unique difficulties that such couples will face in society, it is our feeling that this action affirms the spiritual nature of a life-long commitment between partners. Further, we wish to affirm and celebrate the integrity and inner light of couples who make such a commitment, and to act lovingly, holding open our spiritual community in offering nurture and support to those who may have felt oppression by the prejudices of larger society.

We are aware that taking this step also calls us to deepen our understanding of marriage under the care of meeting and of support for all married and committed couples within our meeting.

**POND TOWN (ME), March 1995:** As Friends, we seek to affirm the many facets of a committed relationship, whether it is heterosexual or homosexual. A committed relationship between two persons involves not only physical acts of love, but also emotional nurturing, spiritual journeying, and intellectual sharing, as well as an understanding of mutual support and a sense of shared values.

Same-gender marriages are not legally recognized by today's society. However, according to sources, such as John Boswell's *Same-sex Unions in Premodern Europe*, people have had same-sex relationships for centuries, though not always recognized by the laws of the day. We cannot offer legal status to a same-sex union under the care of our meeting, but it is our hope and expectation that, in offering spiritual recognition, this minute will be one small voice for change such that one day there will be legal recognition. There are enough difficulties inherent in simply maintaining a loving and caring relationship for heterosexual couples, yet same-sex couples must endure the prejudices of our society when they choose to make the same commitment. Our own inner leadings of the Divine prompt us to seek to erase such prejudice by reaching out in love to all couples who wish to share their lives together.

We would offer our support and love to any same-sex couple seeking recognition of their love in a ceremony of marriage under the care of Pond Town Friends Meeting.

**MONADNOCK (NH), October 1995:** Monadnock Monthly Meeting will set up a clearness committee for marriage for any couple which requests it, as long as at least one of the couple is a member or regular attender of this meeting. We will not discriminate on the basis of age, race, or sexual orientation.

**DOVER (NH), January 1996:** Dover Friends Meeting commits itself to promoting acceptance and respect for the dignity of all loving couples (heterosexual and homosexual) whose relationship honors the sacredness of each partner's life and spirit as important to the life of the Meeting. We wish to support all individuals in such relationships and stand ready to take such relationships within our Meeting under our care.

Upon receiving an application, Dover Friends Meeting will provide a clearness process. If the couple is found clear, and if Meeting approves, members of the meeting will be invited to witness prayerfully to the couple's speaking their vows to each other in a designated meeting for worship, provide oversight for putting that relationship into as secure a legal foundation as possible, and seek to provide encouragement and guidance throughout the life of this couple.

*In the case of a heterosexual couple, the legal foundation is provided through the state by the marriage license. In the case of a gay or lesbian couple, or a heterosexual couple not desiring a state license,* Dover Friends Meeting will appoint an oversight committee to work with the couple to put into place the legal documents regarding the care of children, sharing and stewardship of material resources, separation agreement and wills, that approximate as much as possible the legal responsibilities and privileges of a heterosexual marriage.

The naming of the celebration will be left up to the couple with the help of the clearness committee appointed by the meeting. A couple may choose to call it a celebration of commitment, a celebration of union, or a celebration of marriage, keeping in mind that some members may not be comfortable with using the term "marriage" in this way.

We recognize that within our own meeting and within the larger Religious Society of Friends there are differences, even after many years of sincere search and prayer, in how each of us perceives the Truth. We have wrestled long and hard on this issue, holding fast to patience, good will, and a love for each other. We give thanks for the care and guidance of the Holy Spirit, for it is the Presence of Divine Love which transcends our differences to hold us in a deeper unity.

**In April 1998,** Dover Meeting approved removing the words in *italics* above from the minute. The remainder of the minute stands as approved in 1996.

**FRAMINGHAM (MA), February 1996:** After several years of careful consideration and discernment, Framingham Friends Meeting, on Second Month, Eighteenth Day, 1996, approved the following minute:

Framingham Monthly Meeting affirms our belief in that of God in every person. Furthermore, we attest that this belief embraces all persons regardless of sexual orientation.

Framingham affirms that all couples, including those of the same gender, have equal opportunity to be married in the manner of Friends under the care of the Meeting. The love between these couples, as it grows, will enrich their relationship, the Meeting and the world at large. The Meeting is committed to supporting these couples according to their need.

Framingham Meeting acknowledges the Certificate of Marriage signed by the couple and those present at the

ceremony as the witness of Friends to the couple's spiritual union. Mindful that only mixed gender couples among us currently have the rights to legally-sanctioned marriage and its privileges, the Meeting asks Friends, and particularly couples preparing for marriage, to examine how best to respond and bear witness to the inequalities still present in the legal system.

**MIDCOAST (ME), April 1996:** Midcoast Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends rejoices in the love between two people as one of the greatest gifts of God. The religious life of the Meeting offers continuing tender support to all couples in our Quaker community who wish to express their love and commitment to one another in a permanent relationship.

The same loving care and consideration will be given both to same-gender and heterosexual couples who request marriage under the care of the Meeting. The process for approval will follow the good order of Friends as described in *Faith and Practice*.

**NORTHAMPTON (MA), June 1996:** Northampton Friends Meeting wishes to affirm that we extend to all members of our community, whatever their sexual orientation, the same quality of love and support. We are one community of faith; we experience the varieties of love in our community as gifts of God. We affirm that we are all children of God and that we all have the same potential to reflect the Divine Light in our lives.

Our faith underlies these affirmations:

First, concerning the spiritual basis of our beliefs, as a group our hearts resonate deeply with the biblical injunctions to "love God" and to "love your neighbor as yourself." We experience all forms of loving relationships as manifestations of God's love on earth.

Second, we believe that Friends' testimony on equality is central to our Quaker faith. Just as Friends have historically witnessed for equality among all races and both sexes, so do we now witness for equality among people of all sexual orientations. We understand equality not as sameness but as equality of respect.

Third, we affirm that our sexuality and sexual identity are integral components of who we are, not separate from who we are as spiritual beings. For lesbian, gay and bisexual members of the community, this allows for a wholeness of being, a feeling of personal unity within the context of the community. We bring our whole selves to our relationship with the Divine and find that sexuality within a loving relationship, whether homosexual or heterosexual, has the potential to bring us closer to God.

We as a Meeting feel we have been blessed by the presence and participation of lesbians, gays and bisexuals as individuals and, for some, as partners in same sex couples. We are committed to providing spiritual care and acceptance to all these individuals, believing that the spiritual growth of each person best ripens in the context of a community of faith and with the support and loving regard of that community. Furthermore, we are committed to seeking out ways to actively provide that love and support, being mindful of the oppression lesbians, gays and bisexuals face in our society.

At the first Meeting for business of the newly formed Northampton Friends Meeting in February, 1994, the minute [printed above] was joyfully adopted. . .

We recognize the additional difficulties faced by same sex couples in our society and commit ourselves to remaining vigilant and informed in our care of these couples. We further acknowledge that same sex marriages and celebrations of commitment are taking place in the wider Quaker community. Should one of these couples move to our Meeting, we will support their relationship as we would any other couple married under our care.

The Meeting is committed to nurturing all of the families within its community. We recognize that families composed of gay, lesbian or bisexual parents and their children face additional difficulties in our society. The Meeting hopes to be a safe haven for these families and commits itself to providing special support to both the children and the parents. We strive to help all the Meeting's children learn to value and respect all individuals whatever their sexual orientation. For children who grow to question their own sexual orientation or who believe themselves to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual, the Meeting wishes to offer support and affirmation.

The Meeting commits itself to promoting acceptance, dignity and respect for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Lesbian, gay and bisexual people are still struggling to be granted full civil and human rights in this and in other societies. We stand together in this struggle for justice. We oppose social, economic, and legal discrimination and all forms of violence against anyone based on sexual orientation. Heterosexual Friends will thus share with lesbian, gay and bisexual Friends the responsibility of protecting their safety and their rights. We are committed to carrying out the spirit of this Minute within our own Meeting, within the larger Quaker community and in the world at large. As a Meeting and as individuals, we seek to heed the movement of the Spirit leading us to both recognize and act to redress the array of affronts, injustices and violence encountered by lesbians, gays and bisexuals.

Through our collective struggle with issues related to gender and sexual orientation, our Meeting has experienced much joy, much pain, and important community and individual growth. In adopting this Minute, we affirm our commitment to continue this important work. We trust that in proceeding faithfully we will receive the gifts that all our ways of loving bring and the clarity and strength to carry out our leadings.

**WATERBORO (ME), March 1997:** It is fundamental to Friends' faith and practice that we affirm the equality and integrity of all human beings. Equally, we hold that the purpose of recognizing and affirming committed relationships is to strengthen our families and communities.

Therefore, it is our belief that it is consistent with Friends' historical faith and testimonies that we practice a single standard of treatment for all committed relationships.

Given that the State offers legal recognition of opposite-gender marriage and extends significant privilege to couples who legally marry, we believe that a commitment to equality requires that same-gender couples be granted the same rights and privileges.

Therefore, we believe that the State should permit gay and lesbian couples to marry and share fully and equally in the rights and responsibilities of marriage.

*[Note: Waterboro's minute is one approved by Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns in 1995 and sent to North American yearly meetings asking them to forward it to their constituent monthly meetings for consideration. In February 1997, NEYM Ministry and Counsel did so with a cover letter affirming there was no unity on same-gender marriage in NEYM as a whole and that forwarding the letter as requested did not imply a Ministry and Counsel endorsement of the minute.]*

**BRUNSWICK (ME), April 1997:** We joyfully affirm our willingness as a Meeting to sanctify celebrations of marriage for both same and opposite gender couples. We intend to follow the good order of Friends in arriving at clearness for all couples who are led to unite under our loving care. We call upon the state to give the same legal recognition to same and opposite gender marriages.

**WESTERLY (RI), June 1997:** Westerly Friends affirm our belief that "there is that of God in every person." Furthermore, we attest that this principle embraces all individuals regardless of sexual orientation.

We rejoice in the love shared between two people as one of the greatest gifts of God. It is our hope that the religious life of the Meeting offers continuing tender support for all families in our Quaker community and we encourage and uphold all couples who wish to express their love, their spiritual union, and their commitment to one another in a permanent relationship.

The same loving care and considerations will be given to all couples, both of same-gender and of opposite-gender, who request marriage under the care of the Meeting. The process for approval will follow the good order of Friends as described in *Faith and Practice of the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends*.

**BARTON-GLOVER (VT), September 1998:** Minute on Marriages and Weddings.

Barton-Glover Friends Meeting affirms the equality and integrity of all human beings, and that which is God in every person. We intend to support and nurture every couple who are committed to a long-term, respected and loving relationship and give their pledge in wedding before our Meeting.

We recognize that the legal rights and responsibilities of conventional marriage are denied to some unions: same-gender couples, elderly partners and unmarried opposite-gender couples. We agree that laws should permit such couples to wed and share fully in the legal rights, responsibilities and protections now only available to opposite-gender married couples.

Recognizing and affirming committed relationships strengthens our families and society, and our intention is to treat all committed relationships by a single standard. A "Certificate of Domestic Partnership" bestowed on the occasion of weddings and marriages validates these unions.

We will use the word "marriage" for the joining of husband and wife specifically. We will use the word "wedding" in other unions. We honor the bond of all uniting in love.

**QUAKER CITY UNITY (NH), March 2000:** As our faith is based on love, inclusiveness, and equality, we commit ourselves to participate in the celebration of marriage for both opposite sex and same sex couples. We will follow the same customary and careful process of clearness for all couples who wish to unite in marriage under our care, in accordance with our traditional procedures. We believe that a Friends Meeting has a responsibility to sustain and enrich marriages under its care.

**WELLESLEY (MA), March 2000:** Acknowledging that we are individually at different points in accepting extending the term marriage to same-gender couples but recognizing the need for spiritual commitment within our community, we affirm the following minute:

Wellesley Friends Meeting is an open and affirming faith community. We welcome all seekers. We believe that marriage within the meeting is a spiritual and communal commitment. Any couple affiliated with our meeting, regardless of gender, may request a clearness committee for marriage. If found clear, they may be married under the care of our meeting.

**NEW BEDFORD (MA), April 2000:** New Bedford Friends are an open and affirming Christian community. In the spirit of Jesus of Nazareth, we offer fellowship to all religious seekers, diverse as they may be. Consequently, we approve of same-gender marriage.

We believe that marriage within the Meeting is a spiritual and communal commitment. Any couple affiliated with our Meeting, whether heterosexual or homosexual, may request a clearness committee for marriage. If approved by the committee and the Meeting, the couple may be married under our care.

*[On December 20, 1999, the Vermont Supreme Court ruled that gay and lesbian couples were entitled to the same legal rights and benefits of marriage as heterosexual couples and ordered the Vermont legislature to craft a law that would satisfy the ruling. On April 26, 2000, Governor Howard Dean signed into law a civil unions bill passed by the legislature permitting eligible couples of the same sex to be joined in civil union.]*

**MIDDLETOWN (CT), September 2001:** The Middletown Friends Meeting endorses the 1992 Storrs Meeting minute as follows:

The Meeting commits itself to promoting acceptance, dignity and respect for people of same-sex orientation. Any loving relationship that honors the sacredness of each partner's life and spirit should be embraced by the Meeting. We affirm that we should support all individuals in such relationships including, but not limited to, an offering of the benefits of a public celebration of mutual commitment. It is the privilege of the couple to call their union by any name they choose. The process for publicly recognizing this union shall follow the customary procedures as outlined in *Faith and Practice*.

**NEW HAVEN (CT), April 2002:** New Haven Friends Meeting reaffirms its minute on same-gender marriage or committed relationships from July 1989, "The Meeting affirms the goodness of committed, loving relationships and offers recognition and support to those who share this ideal and desire to enter into a permanent relationship based upon it. By tradition, the Meeting recognizes committed union in a celebration of marriage under the care of the Meeting. The same loving care and consideration should be given to both same-sex and heterosexual applicants as outlined in *Faith and Practice*."

New Haven Friends Meeting endorses the right to civil marriage as it has already recognized religious marriage. This is with the understanding that even after civil marriage becomes available to same-gender couples, religious organizations will retain the right to decide for themselves whether to perform or recognize any marriage, just as they already do for every couple.

**CONCORD (NH) April 2002: Minute of Support for Gay, Lesbian & Transgendered Seekers:**

Friends Meeting welcomes all seekers of God's Truth and Will. We recognize that of God in each person and cherish each person who joins our faith community. Diversity in experience and orientation enriches and strengthens us. We extend the hand of friendship to all those who desire to share in our worship. We are united as a faith community in welcoming individual seekers, whether heterosexual, homosexual or transgender. We will celebrate marriage for all couples after the manner of Friends if we find them clear in their commitment to be faithful to each other.

Concord Meeting has studied and prayed over this issue for a long time. Many have watched in gratitude as other meetings in the Quarter and the Yearly meeting struggled with this and concluded that they must support same gender relationships as lovingly and tenderly as those between a man and a woman. Others have struggled to understand how this could accord with their own understanding of scripture and the leadings of the Holy Spirit. While deeply concerned about the divisions that this issue is causing in the world-wide body of the Society of Friends, Concord Meeting feels drawn by the Spirit to move forward.

We have come to this leading through study of Scripture and Quaker writings as well as through spiritual experiences of many among us. Friends have never accepted the primacy of the written word over religious experience and, while the weight of tradition cannot be ignored, it cannot rule. Profound experiences of divine love

moved early Friends to oppose slavery and the subjugation of women to their husbands, even though these practices were supported by Scripture and ancient tradition. This same divine love shared with our gay, lesbian and transgendered Friends moves us to declare this Truth.

We are in agreement that sexuality is a gift from God that should not be used for exploitation. We acknowledge that, for many, homosexuality is an unacceptable perversion. But our experience tells us otherwise. We have watched our brothers and sisters and children and ourselves blossom into fruitful lives only after accepting that being gay, lesbian or transgendered is the way some of us were created. We cannot cut these precious members of our congregation out of our hearts. We are concerned about the agonies caused to them, as they are unable to change their sexual attraction or gender identity. The lack of acceptance by our beloved Society, as well as by the society at large, contributes to their pain. This bias has caused some to pretend to be who they are not and caused immense pain and grief for themselves and others. Friends can no longer remain silent on this issue.

We recognize and lament that the wider society does not accord our sisters and brothers this same acceptance. We pray that we can find ways to help overcome these prejudices. As we work towards acceptance and celebration of gay, lesbian and transgendered individuals in the wider society, we will continue to pray and labor within the Religious Society of Friends to ensure that our loved ones are welcomed as whole and contributing members in our spiritual communities.

**STORRS (CT), June 2002:** Members of Storrs Friends Meeting believe that the legal rights and obligations of marriage should be available to all adult couples regardless of gender identity. We have come to understand that our concern should be for the quality of a relationship rather than for the sexual orientation of the partners. Over the past decade our own spiritual community has been enriched by celebrations of same-sex marriage and commitment, as well as by full participation of same-sex couples and their families in our community. We believe that our government should assure equal rights for all couples, including same-gender couples. Based on the Society of Friends' long-standing testimony on equality, we recommit ourselves to witness to the need for civil equality for all people.

**ACTON (MA), November 2003:** Given the importance of long-term committed relationships to the lives of the individuals involved and to society in general, and given Acton Monthly Meeting's 1982 affirmation that the overall quality of a relationship is more important than the genders of those involved, we support marriage under the care of the meeting for all couples, irrespective of gender. Same-gender marriages, lacking the support of civil law and custom, are in particular need of the meeting's ongoing, loving support.

*[On November 18, 2003, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that same- and opposite-sex couples must be given equal marriage rights under the state constitution. On May 17, 2004, marriages of same-sex couples begin in Massachusetts.]*

**BEACON HILL (MA), March 2004: A Minute in Support of Same-Sex Marriage**

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) have celebrated weddings in Massachusetts for more than 300 years. Our form is different, for we have no clergy. But Massachusetts has acknowledged the marriages celebrated and witnessed by Friends Meetings (i.e., congregations), nonetheless.

Friends see weddings as the affirmation and celebration of a permanent spiritual union between two adults. When a couple asks to be married under the care of a Friends Meeting, the Meeting, as a community, considers whether the couple is truly spiritually united and ready to be a married couple within the Meeting community and the world at large. A Meeting that celebrates a couple's marriage commits to the spiritual and practical support of that marriage.

Believing that there is that of God in everyone, Beacon Hill Monthly Meeting has since 1988 considered all couples who come to us asking to be married under our care regardless of sexual orientation. The gift of spiritual union is as strong and valuable to our community in same-sex couples as it is in opposite-sex couples.

We are not comfortable seeing rights denied to some of our families, which are freely granted to others. This challenges our long-term witness to equality. It also places a burden on the affected couples and on our community as a whole as we support them, especially with end of life and parenting issues.

We feel that the state should leave the question of determining which couples are spiritually united to each denomination or religion, as it is a religious issue. Respecting our right as a religious institution to discern which couples should be married under our care, we are led by the Spirit to witness that the state should extend marriage with all its privileges, rights, and responsibilities to all those couples.

**FRESH POND (MA), April 2004:**

**Minute In Response To The Current Dialogue About Same-Gender Marriage**

God dwells within and speaks to every individual, and enlivens every relationship. A resting place in the Spirit is both a feature and a requirement for all committed relationships. The love shared in such true relationships is a gift from God, and cannot be legislated.

We are deeply saddened as some of our lawmakers attempt to define marriage as a union only of a man and a woman. Equally, the public debate on the civil rights of gay and lesbian individuals and couples, which is important and necessary, feels deeply hurtful to all of us. It is especially painful to those among us whose rights, equality, and very humanity are being questioned so widely.

We pray that God will awaken in all of us an awareness of the privileges and responsibilities of God's love. We are cognizant of the work to be done among Christians and the wider world to support and ensure that the rights taken for granted among heterosexual couples are provided to same-gender couples. We are challenged to speak up clearly to counter the language and assumptions of those who would limit these rights.

We acknowledge that there are those in our community who are feeling marginalized and hurt, and give them our love, prayers, and support to them.

We also extend our prayers, too, to those who have been speaking and working against same-gender marriage. We have faith that an earnest seeking of Divine Guidance will yield a closer experience of God and the love therein.

Our community has been deeply enriched by our process of discernment about same gender marriage. We continue to be enriched by openness to all individuals and couples: gay, lesbian, and heterosexual. Our 1994 minute (see above) supporting same-gender marriage speaks to us now as it did then.

**NORTHAMPTON (MA), April 2004:**

**Minute on Marriage**

As a Quaker Meeting compelled by the Spirit to nurture and support those who are clear for marriage under our care, we welcome the recent developments in Massachusetts that diminish the discrimination against same gender couples and afford them equal access to legal marriage. This opening for the advancement of social justice for gay and lesbian couples is now in jeopardy at the state and federal levels. We report that on the fourteenth day of Third Month, a message in Meeting for Worship arose from one Friend calling upon us to fulfill more effectively our pastoral responsibility to couples already married, or seeking marriage, under our care. From this gathered meeting comes the following minute:

Northampton Friends Meeting calls on the help and discernment of our Quaker brethren in all states of New England Yearly Meeting to affirm our Meeting's leading to have same gender marriage recognized by law, and to heed and celebrate their loving ministry and its fruit in our heart where the Spirit dwells.

We are compelled to ask the Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting and New England Yearly Meeting to unite with us in our corporate sense that we are following Divine Guidance:

- as we do all that we can do to help the Massachusetts courts, legislature and electorate to expedite the proceedings required by the Massachusetts Supreme Court decision,
- as we labor to persuade the legislature and the electorate in Massachusetts to refrain from amending its Constitution to insert any explicit denial of civil rights restricting the right to marry,
- as we labor to dissuade the U.S. federal authorities from pursuing any nation-wide restriction on the right to marry,
- as we travel through the Yearly Meeting to testify on this concern, and as we invite the Yearly Meeting to come among us to hear and see and feel what we experience as we struggle to be faithful to this leading.

**MOUNT TOBY (MA), May 23, 2004:** Minute 3. On January 16, 1993, Friends gathered in the presence of God to witness the marriage of W B and L F at the Mt. Toby meetinghouse [21 January 1993, minute 5]. Mt. Toby Meeting approved taking this marriage under our care in accordance with the usage of our Society. Our customary practices of clearness and oversight were duly minuted in meetings for business on the following dates: 16 July, 1992, minute 6; 23 August, 1992, minute 2; 17 September, 1992, minute 2. At the time of this marriage the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts did not permit WB and LF, a same-sex couple, to be legally married. Effective May 17, 2004, same-sex couples can be married under the laws of the Commonwealth. WB and LF have requested that Mt. Toby Meeting now solemnize their marriage for purposes of its legal recognition.

We approve affirming this marriage for purposes of its legal recognition. This affirmation will be conducted within the next month at a regular meeting for worship at the Mt. Toby meetinghouse and will constitute our solemnization of this marriage. We authorize the Clerk of the Meeting to sign the marriage license at the conclusion of the solemnization.

**SANDWICH MONTHLY MEETING (MA), October 2004:** Sandwich Monthly Meeting, which consists of three historic preparative meetings, affirms that any adult couples, regardless of gender, who wish to marry under the care of the meeting or after the manner of Friends, will be considered in the usual way as detailed in New England Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice*.

**SALEM QUARTERLY MEETING (eastern MA), October 2004: Support of Same Gender Marriage**

The Salem Quarterly Meeting of New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) supports the right of all adult couples to join in legal marriage and to enjoy the full legal benefits of that state. We base our stand in our long held testimony of equality, that there is "that of God in every person", and in our understanding of marriage, that marriage is a spiritual union not imposed or defined by us. "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; ... for we marry none; it is the Lord's work, and we are but witnesses.", as George Fox, one of the first generation of Friends, wrote in 1669. [Quoted in Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith & Practice* 1995, section 16.01]

We oppose any law or constitutional amendment which restricts the right of gay and lesbian couples to legally marry. We support the extension of marriage with all its legal rights and responsibilities to adult couples who are willing to accept those responsibilities. We encourage our constituent meetings and all their members to make this stand known to their elected representatives.

**MOUNT TOBY (MA), November 2004: Minute of Happiness**

Historically, Friends have affirmed that marriage is not primarily a social or legal event, but a spiritual one. George Fox wrote "For the right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priests or magistrates; so it is God's ordinance and not Man's."

In 1987 Mt. Toby affirmed "the goodness of committed, loving relationships," and desired to extend to same-gender couples among us the possibility of taking their relationships under the care of the meeting. We offered "recognition and support to those who share this ideal and desire to enter into a permanent relationship based upon it. The same loving care and consideration will be given to both same-sex and heterosexual applicants as outlined in Faith and Practice." Since that time we have taken three same-gender marriages under our care.

All residents of Massachusetts can now be married under the law, and a number of same-gender couples within our meeting have taken this step.

We are happy for all those among us who have wished to be legally married or take other steps in their commitment as couples who may now do so.

We are glad there may be openings for changes in other crucial issues that deeply impact gay and lesbian people and their families. This affects all of our lives and our community.

We encourage members of our community to continue working to preserve this important right and extend it to other areas not yet covered

**WINTHROP (ME), January 2005: Minute on Same-Gender Marriage or Committed Relationships**

Winthrop Center Friends Church is committed to the testimony of equality of all people in the eyes of the law and of God. We feel called to practice a single standard of treatment for all committed relationships. We will deal with requests for same-gender unions in the same way as we deal with those between heterosexual couples. We believe such a practice to be in accordance with the Spirit which speaks through the scriptures and which continues to guide us today. We affirm the spiritual nature of a life-long commitment between partners whatever the combination of genders, and it is our intention to support such commitments. The couple involved may refer to their union by whatever name they choose. Maine law does not at this time provide a legal foundation for the marriage of a same gender couple. We will encourage such couples to put into place the legal documents that approximate as much as possible the legal responsibilities and privileges of a civil marriage.

*[On April 20, 2005, Governor Jodi Rell signed into law a bill passed by the Connecticut legislature making civil unions for same-sex couples legal in that state.]*

**CONNECTICUT VALLEY QUARTERLY MEETING, May 1, 2005**

On May 1, 2005, Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting approved the following minute for forwarding to New England Yearly Meeting sessions as our witness, inviting Friends to endorse it or use it as they find helpful. We asked the clerk of the Quarter to send this minute to the governors and legislatures of Connecticut and Massachusetts. We invite Monthly Meetings of the Quarter to distribute the minute as they are led.

### **Minute in Support of Same-Gender Marriage**

The Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting of New England Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) supports the right of all adult couples to join in marriage and to enjoy its full legal benefits. We base our stand on our long held testimony of equality, that there is “that of God in every one” and in our understanding of marriage, that marriage is a spiritual union not imposed or defined by us. “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; ... for we marry none; it is the Lord’s work, and we are but witnesses,” as George Fox, one of the first generation of Friends, wrote in 1669.

Six of the Quarter’s nine Monthly Meetings have seen many gay and lesbian couples among them live out their commitment to one another in ways that have enriched the Meeting. Four Meetings have had the opportunity to take ten marriages under their care in the same manner as for heterosexual couples. It has been a gift to us to see how love is evident in the strength of these unions and families, despite the lack of legal support until recently. Indeed, such discrimination places a burden on the affected couples and on our community as a whole as we support them, especially in adoption, parenting, and end-of-life issues.

We will continue to work for equal rights, and strongly oppose denying rights to some of our families that are freely granted to others. We are heartened by the current existence of same-gender legal marriage in Massachusetts and by the state of Connecticut’s decision to recognize civil unions. We oppose any law or constitutional amendment that restricts the right of gay and lesbian couples to legally marry. We feel the institution of marriage can only be strengthened when states extend the privileges, rights, and responsibilities of marriage to same-gender couples.

#### **NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING, August 10, 2005**

**Minute 2005-55.** Bonner McAllester, clerk of Connecticut Valley QM, read a minute in support of same gender marriage that grew out of twenty years of seasoning in their Quarter. This is their carefully discerned witness and Friends are asked to take it home to share with their own monthly meetings to enrich their own discernment process.  
*the above May 1, 2005 Minute in Support of Same-Gender Marriage is then printed*

#### **NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING, August 2007**

**Minute 07–67.** The Ministry & Counsel working group returned to us with a revised Minute of Commitment. Bill How, Clerk of M&C shared comments from gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer Friends in NEYM who spoke eloquently of their pain. They are not always safe in their Quaker communities. They ask if we can sit in painful places with each other that are still safe. He also reported the strongly expressed desire and belief, on the part of Friends meeting with the working group, that we can find a way to come together. We also heard of our strengths in this YM as a community of Friends working together unconstrained by differences in sexual orientation. Understanding that for some of us, some of the words in the minute are not the way we would write them and taking care to recognize and be tender with the pain on all sides of this issue, we struggled with the deep discomfort some felt with the use of the word homophobia in the revised minute, while others believe that homophobia is among us and must be named. Acknowledging our faith that we have love enough to cover the pain we both inflict and feel, we found unity in the body to approve the following minute:

#### **Minute of Commitment**

We commit ourselves as individuals and as a yearly meeting to work with one another in witnessing God’s movement among us by doing the following:

- Engage in conversation about the deepest meanings of family, marriage and committed relationships and explore what it means to have all of these under the care of meeting.
- Support the work of our M&C working party on Sexuality and Ethics. We need to articulate our sexual ethics and the spirituality of sex.
- Re-distribute NEYM Minute 2005-55, Connecticut Valley Quarter Minute in Support of Same Gender Marriages, and ask MM to season and test this issue and forward the results to their QMs in preparation for bringing them to YM Sessions in 2008 for discernment.

We commit ourselves to undertake this work in love and forbearance, caring tenderly for one another. We acknowledge that there is great pain in our community felt by the people who are affected at the deepest levels of their identity and relationships by the homophobia that exists within New England Yearly Meeting. We also acknowledge the great pain felt by those for whom this issue has challenged their deepest beliefs about marriage and rightly ordered sexual behavior according to their understanding of God’s will. We recognize that these actions ask all of us to re-examine our most deeply held beliefs. It is hard for us to challenge each other. We need our behavior and words to be tender as we explore hard topics. We commit ourselves to undertake this work by educating

ourselves, by exploring these issues within our monthly and quarterly meetings and by undertaking intervisitation within NEYM. We seek healing, wholeness and God's blessing as we move forward.

**Minute 07-77.** Upon reading back Minute 67, approval of the Minute of Commitment, two Friends asked to be minuted as being in opposition to the use of the word homophobia. We also heard a concern about use of the phrase, "rightly ordered sexual behavior," in the same minute.

*[On October 10, 2008 the Connecticut Supreme Court struck down the state's ban on same-sex marriage. On November 12, 2008 marriages of same-sex couples begin in Connecticut.]*

**NORTHAMPTON (MA), February 2009**

#### **Minute on Marriage and Sexual Identity**

Since its formation, Northampton Friends Meeting has extended to all members of our community the same quality of love and support. We experience the varieties of love in our community as gifts of God. We are all children of God and we all have the same potential to reflect the Divine Light in our lives. Our hearts resonate deeply with the biblical injunctions to "love God" and to "love your neighbor as yourself." We experience all forms of loving relationships as manifestations of God's love on earth.

Just as Friends have historically witnessed to the Light present among all races and genders, we witness that the Light is present among people of all sexual orientations. Our sexuality and sexual identity are integral components of who we are as spiritual beings. We bring our whole selves to our relationship with the Divine. Sexuality within a loving relationship, whether homosexual or heterosexual, has the potential to bring us closer to God.

Northampton Friends Meeting has been blessed with the presence and ministry of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Friends. Being mindful of the oppression they face, the Meeting feels a special commitment to lovingly support these Friends.

As regards marriage, the same loving care and consideration outlined in Faith and Practice is given to both same-sex and heterosexual applicants.

Northampton Friends Meeting recognizes that families composed of gay, lesbian or bisexual parents and their children face additional difficulties in our society. We commit ourselves to remaining vigilant and informed in our care of these couples and their children.

The Meeting supports children as they grow to question their own sexual orientation or gender and we affirm their right to own and live by whatever sexual identity the Spirit leads them to.

We are committed to carrying out the spirit of this Minute within the larger Quaker community and in the world at large.

*[ On April 7, 2009 the Vermont legislature become the first state to legalize same-sex marriage by a legislative vote by overriding the governor's veto.]*

**CONNECTICUT VALLEY QUARTERLY MEETING, May 3, 2009 approved for forwarding to NEYM**

#### **Minute on continuing revelation concerning marriage and sexual identity 1983-2009**

We experience the varieties of love in our community as gifts of God. We are children of God and we all have the same potential to reflect the Divine Light in our lives. Our hearts resonate deeply with the biblical injunctions to "love God" and to "love your neighbor as yourself." We experience all forms of loving relationships as manifestations of God's love on earth.

Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting Friends know from experience that families composed of gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered parents and their children face additional difficulties in our society. We hope to remain sensitive to those difficulties and respond together with love and integrity, and advocacy when needed.

We recognize from our experience the need to support children questioning their own sexual orientation or gender. We support their living out the sexual identity the Spirit leads them to.

We are aware that God's gifts come through every individual – straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered – and that, when we do recognize the gifts offered, we enrich ourselves and our meetings.

Connecticut Valley Quarterly Meeting has threshed these issues for many years. In 1983 the Quarter brought a Minute on Homosexuality to New England Yearly Meeting affirming "that our belief in that of God in every person embraces all persons regardless of sexual orientation [and] that we welcome to our meetings for worship and to all occasions for fellowship attenders who are gay and lesbian." The Yearly Meeting encouraged Monthly Meetings to give the subject consideration.

We then turned our attention to questions of committed relationships, especially same-gender relationships, and brought a Minute on Marriage to the 1987 session of New England Yearly Meeting. NEYM asked that this minute be included with the draft of a chapter on human sexuality for Living With Oneself and Others being sent to Monthly Meetings for comment by a NEYM Ministry and Counsel Working Party.

Our continuing concern to nurture the same-gender couples among us led to our bringing a Minute in support of legal same-gender marriage to New England Yearly Meeting in 2005. We offered it as “our witness, inviting Friends to endorse it or use it as they find helpful. We are heartened by the current existence of same-gender legal marriage in Massachusetts and by the state of Connecticut’s decision to recognize civil unions.” Connecticut has subsequently legalized same sex marriage.

Our 2005 Minute contributed to NEYM’s 2007 Minute of Commitment addressing NEYM’s response to concerns raised by Friends United Meeting’s personnel policy, and this opportunity for further discernment allowed us to discover that our focus has broadened beyond marriage.

#### **FALMOUTH QUARTERLY MEETING AND VASSALBORO QUARTERLY MEETING, May 3, 2009**

At the All-Maine Gathering of Friends the following minute was approved by both Falmouth and Vassalboro Quarterly Meetings:

Reflecting our Quaker tradition of valuing all individuals with equal respect, care and love, and the preciousness of the separation of church and state, we support the action of the Maine Legislature in removing the state as a barrier to same-gender marriage. This allows many faith and religious institutions of our state to choose whether or not to endorse and/or conduct same-gender marriage ceremonies as they wish.

*On May 6, 2009 the Governor signed a same-sex marriage law in Maine.*

*On June 3, 2009 the Governor signed a same-sex marriage law in New Hampshire.*

#### **DOVER QUARTERLY MEETING, May 31, 2009**

Monthly meetings within Dover Quarter have been discussing same-gender marriages for many years. Dover Quarter has also supported the New Hampshire Gathering of Friends, which used its 2009 meeting to examine sexual ethics and same-gender relationships. After a great deal of careful discernment, all of the meetings have moved to the place where they have adopted minutes describing the processes they would follow for same gender couples to celebrate marriages under their care. Dover Quarter encourages monthly meetings to continue exploring sexual ethics and the meaning of committed, loving relationships, regardless of gender, and to be patterns of love and integrity in all of our behavior. We understand that love and sensitivity are still required to achieve greater unity within the larger community as we grow into greater understanding of what it means to be sexually ethical.

#### **NORTHWEST QUARTERLY MEETING, June 7, 2009**

Northwest Quarterly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends finds unity among its Monthly Meetings to support the marriage process for all couples regardless of gender.

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