

Minute 25 Britain Yearly Meeting 31 July 2009

Further to minute 17, (attached) a session was held on Tuesday afternoon at which speakers shared personal experiences of the celebration and recognition of their committed relationships. These Friends had felt upheld by their meetings in these relationships but regretted that whereas there was a clear, visible path to celebration and recognition for opposite sex couples, the options available for couples of the same sex were not clear and could vary widely between meetings. Friends who feel theirs to be an ordinary and private rather than an exotic and public relationship have had to be visible pioneers to get their relationship acknowledged and recorded.

This open sharing of personal experience has moved us and added to our clear sense that, 22 years after the prospect was first raised at Meeting for Sufferings we are being led to treat same sex committed relationships in the same way as opposite sex marriages, reaffirming our central insight that marriage is the Lord's work and we are but witnesses. The question of legal recognition by the state is secondary.

We therefore ask Meeting for Sufferings to take steps to put this leading into practice and to arrange for a draft revision of the relevant sections of Quaker faith and practice, so that same sex marriages can be prepared, celebrated, witnessed, recorded and reported to the state, as opposite sex marriages are. We also ask Meeting for Sufferings to engage with our governments to seek a change in the relevant laws so that same sex marriages notified in this way can be recognised as legally valid, without further process, in the same way as opposite sex marriages celebrated in our meetings. We will not at this time require our registering officers to act contrary to the law, but understand that the law does not preclude them from playing a central role in the celebration and recording of same sex marriages.

We have heard dissenting voices during the threshing process which has led to us this decision, and we have been reminded of the need for tenderness to those who are not with us who will find this change difficult. We also need to remember, including in our revision of Quaker faith and practice, those Friends who live singly, whether or not by choice.

We will need to explain our decision to other Christian bodies, other faith communities, and, indeed to other Yearly Meetings, and pray for a continuing loving dialogue, even with those who might disagree strongly with what we affirm as our discernment of God's will for us at this time.