

Sexual identity and sexual orientation

Several Friends remember an episode in 1979 when a Friend offered to withdraw his membership in our Meeting because of his preference for homosexuality. The Meeting affirmed his membership and gave him our loving support. The Meeting resolved to have a further discussion of “problems of sexual relations”.

In 1981 Meeting sent a letter to Friends General Conference asking them to reverse the decision to allow gay and lesbian dormitories as well as rooming for other unmarried couples, at least until the central committee had reviewed the prior decision to allow these.

In 1992 several members of Meeting were involved with a Listening Project to dialogue with local ministers and others who had condemned homosexual behavior. Meeting approved and publicized the following minute.

The Asheville Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends holds the belief that all people are created with an equal measure of the Divine Light. We are all children of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

We reject the misuse of Scripture and theological or ideological arguments that drive wedges between people who are homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual. Loving relationships built upon tenderness, honesty, mutual respect and responsibility deserve the Meeting’s love and support.

We hold to the principle that sexuality is not a commodity but a powerful force that can transform life in ways we cannot predict. Exploitation and manipulation of others for selfish ends have no place in the lives of Friends.

Knowing that God dwells within each of us, Asheville Friends Meeting gives public witness to our stand against the fear and prejudice that allow the persecution of homosexual and bisexual people. We support the right of ALL persons to live free from fear of violence and discrimination. Further, we believe that ALL persons have the right to enjoy equal and civil rights. We are united in our call to create an atmosphere in our Meeting, in our community and within our hearts where homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual people can live together in peace, as children of God.

minute approved 9th month 1992

In 1995 Meeting approved the republication of the 1992 minute in area newspapers, but according to a Friend who was active at the time this was never carried out.

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Although we were clear at the time as to our acceptance of Friends of all different sexual identities and orientations, we continued to struggle with our understanding of the equality of all people in the community. In January of 2004, we acknowledged that we were in a quandary.

We are not in unity regarding either the use of the term “marriage” or the role of “membership” in defining who can apply for marriage under the care of the Meeting. We do unite in the belief that we are all equal in the eyes of the divine. We hold sacred the commitments made by couples who share a deep love with each other, regardless of whether the partners in such couples are of the same or opposite gender. We ask that Ministry and Counsel lead the Meeting in working out and seasoning the details of a procedure for marriage using these expressed beliefs and values as their guide.

Friends reaffirmed their intention to hold all requests for marriage under the care of the Meeting until a procedure for marriage is clarified and approved by the Meeting. Friends asked that, in the light of this restriction, Ministry and Counsel give full priority to this issue on behalf of the Meeting.

minute approved 1st month 2004

Our uncertainty about taking same-gender marriages under our care, coupled with our clear belief that people of all sexual orientations deserved the same rights as members of our community, led the Meeting to declare a moratorium on all marriages until the matter was settled.

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In the Fall of 2005, the Yearly Meeting asked us to consider a minute that had been approved at the Summer Gathering, concerning the spiritual equality of Friends of every gender identity and preference. We found that we could not in all honesty unite with the minute, and this led us to name our condition:

Asheville Friends Meeting is grateful for the work of FGC Central Committee and SAYMA in recognizing the truth as spoken regarding their experiences of and with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer Friends. As requested, our community took these minutes into our hearts and dwelled deep together in that which is eternal. As a result, we were able to honestly and humbly recognize that there is work we have to do as a community to truly become the beloved community we long to be. We are laboring with the question of whether we can unite to take under our care same-gender marriages and are now aware that we have more fundamental work to do in order to truthfully live as a community in the power that calls Friends to the testimony of equality. We ask that you hold us in the light as we embark on this act of love and faith together.

minute approved 11th month 2005

One Friend was moved to stand aside from the decision.

Finally, in the summer of 2006, we found we were able to unite in our understanding of the equality of all seekers, including in the equality of marriage relationships.

“There is that of God in every person.” This simple, powerful testimony lead us, the Asheville Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, to declare that all people, regardless of sexual orientation, gender presentation or gender identity, are welcome to dwell amongst us, enjoy our fellowship and share in our spiritual life. We are mindful of the Light within, a universal element of the sacred and divine nature of every person. We recognize the ability of all to exhibit and magnify that nature in all its divinely appointed variety and inclusiveness. We affirm that all those within our fellowship may participate fully on an equal basis in all aspects of our Meeting and worship, including without limitation the blessings of marriage under the care of our Meeting and marriage after the manner of Friends.

minute approved 8th month 2006

From there, we were able to proceed fairly swiftly (for Quakers), and in Second Month of 2008 adopted a procedure for marriage under the care of the Meeting that is completely non gender-specific, lifting the moratorium that had been imposed four years earlier.