

# Procedure for MARRIAGE

under the care of



*The Sandy Spring Friends Meeting House*



**Sandy Spring  
Monthly Meeting of the Religious  
Society of Friends  
Revised Fifth Month, 2011**

*In the Presence of God,*



*and these*

*Our Friends...*

**PROCEDURE FOR MARIAGE UNDER THE  
CARE OF SANDY SPRING MONTHLY  
MEETNG OF FRIENDS**

**INTRODUCTION**

Marriage has always been regarded by Friends as religious in nature, being a solemn covenant made between two people in the presence of God; it is more than a civil contract.<sup>1</sup> Some couples are led to request approval of a Ceremony of Commitment or re-affirmation of a marriage or vows. It is therefore earnestly advised that those contemplating this important step ask for Divine guidance in making their decision and carrying out their intentions.

The wedding vows exchanged at the Meeting for Worship for Marriage or Ceremony of Commitment signify the formal beginning of a life long process of building a marriage, a family, and a home.

As marriage affects all the relations of life, families and trusted friends should be consulted early so that unity and harmony may be preserved and hasty and unwise commitments avoided. Toward this end, under the care of the Meeting, these procedures provide for a period of thoughtful consideration and planning which normally takes at least five to six months.

<sup>1</sup> Fifth month, 2011, the meeting approved applying these procedures for marriage to all couples, regardless of sex or gender.

It is earnestly advised that the Meeting for Worship for Marriage be accomplished reverently and thoughtfully, and that the parties themselves and others concerned take care that moderation be observed and that the occasion be characterized by the dignity becoming a group of religious people gathered for a serious purpose. Simplicity should be observed in the marriage procedure and all the other proceedings of the day.

Marriage established and nurtured in love should lay the foundation for happy and useful lives. Such difficulties as will inevitably arise from differences in ideas and in temperaments should be met with patience, mutual forbearance, open communication and a common will to build the marriage and a true home.

## **QUESTIONS FOR THE COUPLE**

The covenant of marriage is solemn in its obligation and fundamental in its social significance. Therefore the Meeting asks *before* the Meeting's approval for marriage is sought, that the couple considering marriage discuss honestly and frankly with one another each of the following questions:

1. Have we considered the distinction between marriage as commitment rather than marriage as experiment?

2. What are the duties and responsibilities assumed in marriage and establishing a home?
3. Have we considered the roles of husband and wife as they apply to each of us? Are we aware of the differing expectations we may have of each other?
4. Do we know each other's habits, likes and dislikes? Are we ready to make adjustments in our living to meet these with kindness and understanding?
5. Do we have the willingness to listen to each other, to share our thoughts and seek an openness of communication?
6. Are our attitudes and expectations toward sex compatible?
7. Do we want children? What is our attitude towards contraception?
8. Do we have respect for, if not harmony with, one another's religious convictions?
9. How have we addressed differences in each other's economic and cultural backgrounds?

10. How do we relate to each other's parents, friends and relatives? How supportive are they of our relationship and marriage?
11. Have we faced the fact that disputes over money may cause much unhappiness in marriage? Do we know each other's attitudes on earning, spending and saving?
12. How do we feel about the use of leisure time? Do we have interests that can be shared and enjoyed together, and do we respect one another's individual interests?
13. Have we considered how we will resolve our differences when they arise? What outside resources would we be willing to utilize in this process, including our Marriage Care Committee? Do we know one another's attitude about divorce?
14. Do we know each other well enough to frankly consider the above questions? Should we wait – perhaps six months or a year – before we proceed with marriage?
15. Are we secure in the knowledge of the loving interest of our Meeting and of guidance on the Inner Light?

After serious consideration of the above questions and of others which may stem from these, the two persons may agree to ask the Meeting to have oversight of their marriage. Then these additional questions will aid their further thinking:

16. Why are we seeking the approval of the Meeting? Why do we wish the Meeting to have oversight of our wedding and our marriage as it develops? Do we value the on going loving concern of the Meeting?
17. How significant are the promises we make in the presence of God and family and friends as stated during the Meeting for Worship?

### **REQUEST FOR MARRIAGE UNDER THE CARE OF THE MEETING**

In order to be married under the care of the Sandy Spring Monthly Meeting, it is necessary to have approval of that body. This should be requested at least five to six months prior to the date desired for marriage. The request should be in writing, signed by both persons intending marriage, stating their intention to be married, and asking that their marriage be under the care of Sandy Spring Monthly Meeting of Friends. The letter of request should be addressed to the Meeting

in care of its Clerk, who will promptly forward it to the Meeting's Marriage and Family Relations Committee.

The Marriage and Family Relations Committee is responsible for the right ordering of marriages under the care of the Meeting. This includes interviewing the couple to determine their clearness for marriage, identifying people to serve on their Marriage Care Committee and presenting the request to Monthly Meeting. The Monthly Meeting will hold over the request until the following Meeting for them to give this request thoughtful consideration. If the Meeting approves, the Marriage Care Committee will begin working with the couple to see that the wedding is conducted after the manner of Friends. If it is necessary, in exceptional cases the committee may request a shortened waiting period in a regular or called Meeting for Business.

Either members or non-member can be married under the care of the Meeting. In either case, the couple should be made aware that the Meeting has a loving concern for their marriage, which continues beyond the wedding itself.

All weddings under the care of Sandy Spring Monthly Meeting should be handled in the steps outlined here. The Marriage Care Committee should

be concerned that the wedding be carried out in a dignified and spiritual way in keeping with the manner of Friends.

## **STEPS TOWARD MARRIAGE UNDER THE CARE OF THE MEETING**

**A.** *Marriage and Family Relations Committee* meets with the couple without others present, in a spirit of loving concern, to discuss the following:

**1.** To learn (a) of their clearness for marriage; (b) of their attitude toward marriage and the creation of a home; (c) if they have considered the questions in the earlier part of this booklet.

**2.** To give them detailed information of the procedure in a Quaker wedding.

**3.** Adapting these procedures if a couple is desiring a Ceremony of Commitment, Affirmation of their marriage vows, or Re-commitment of their marriage vows.

**4.** To discuss with the couple the Meeting for Worship during which the wedding will take place and the wording of the promises they will exchange, which usually is: "In the presence of God and these our Friends, I take thee ..... to be my husband (wife), promising with Divine assistance to be unto thee a loving and faithful husband (wife), as long as we both shall live." If the vows are to be other than

the usual, they need to be discussed with and approved by the Marriage Care Committee.

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**5.** To discuss the marriage certificate, its purpose and wording, and how to procure it. To tell them that they can have it prepared, or else it can be ordered.

**6.** To tell them the date of the Monthly Meeting when the report of this committee will be made and they should specify before then the time that they desire for their wedding. They should suggest the names for the Marriage Care Committee, including the convener of that committee, normally consisting of four people, of which at least two should be members of Meeting, to be presented to the Monthly Meeting.

**7.** To encourage them to attend the first or second Meeting for Business at which their request for marriage will be considered.

**8.** To have them understand that they should not proceed with mailing of invitations and formal plans until after the Monthly Meeting has approved the requested marriage after the second reading.

**9.** To tell them how to reserve the Meeting House (and Community House if needed).

**10.** To remind them to be sure to obtain a marriage license from the county in which the wedding will take place.

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**11.** To tell them to consult with their Marriage Care Committee, after it has been appointed, concerning plans for the wedding itself and for any reception following it.

**B.** *Marriage Care Committee* for the marriage should obtain and review the responsibilities of the Committee in the booklet given to the couples when their request is presented to the Meeting for Worship for a Concern for Business (MFWFCB). The Marriage Care Committee attends to the following:

**1.** As soon as appointed, this committee should explain to the couple that it is available to help them as needed or desired – before, during, and after the wedding. In addition, it is always available as an ongoing group for clearness and caring.

**2.** Learns from the couple:

a. If they have preference as to which members of the Marriage Care Committee will open and close the Meeting. If they have no preference, the Committee will arrange this among themselves.

- b. What person they are asking to read the Certificate. This person need not be a member of the Marriage Care Committee or the Meeting.

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- c. Whether they desire additional occupants on the facing benches besides the Marriage Care Committee for the marriage. If so, learn whether the couple will ask them or whether they wish the Marriage Care Committee to do so.

**3.** Verifies to the Marriage and Family Relations Committee that the couple are following the information given them by the Committee in regard to obtaining (a) a marriage license and (b) the marriage Certificate. Confirms prior to the wedding that these requirements have been met.

**4.** States to the couple and their families the Quaker regard for reverence, dignity, and simplicity, which bars the taking of pictures during the wedding. Families can so inform the guests before the day of the wedding. Inquires as to plans for the reception, and states again the Quaker desire for simplicity.

**5.** Informs the couple that smoking and alcohol are not permitted on Meeting House property.

**6.** Encourages the couple to plan a meeting of all concerned at which the entire wedding procedure is explained and rehearsed.

**7.** Reminds the couple that any Meeting in the Meeting House is an open Meeting for Worship for all members and attenders.

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**8.** The Marriage Care Committee also:

- a. Verifies the availability of the Meeting House for the selected time of rehearsal.
- b. Verifies that the person who will read the Certificate has seen and read it before the wedding.
- c. Attends the rehearsal.
- d. Checks with the couple as to the suitability of any proposed decorations, special arrangements, reception refreshments and suitability of selection of music, if desired.
- e. Ensures that the weights to hold the Certificate flat, with several fountain or ball point pens with permanent (India) ink are available for the use of the couple during the wedding, and for those in charge of signing of the Certificate after the service.

**9.** Immediately following the wedding, the Clerk of the Marriage Care Committee obtains the signatures of the couple on the marriage license and signs the license on behalf of the Marriage Care Committee. The Clerk or another member of the Committee will also deliver or mail the license to the proper authorities, with a copy to the Meeting Office.

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**10.** Takes possession of the Certificate and arranges for a photo static copy to be made and given to the Meeting Office. After this is accomplished, transmits the Certificate to the couple at the address given.

**11.** Reports to the Monthly Meeting as to whether the Meeting for Worship for Marriage has been suitably accomplished with good order, reverence and moderation, the legal requirements satisfied, and the Certificate properly recorded. Reports also the name assumed by each individual after the wedding, for proper recording in the Monthly Meeting Minutes.

## APPENDIX

### Form of Certificate

The form of the Certificate shall be substantially as follows:

Whereas, A.B. of ....., son of C.B. of .....,  
 And H., his wife; and D.E., daughter of F.E., of  
 ....., and M., his wife, having declared their  
 intentions of marriage with each other before  
 ..... Monthly Meeting of the Religious  
 Society of Friends, held at .....,  
 According to the good order used among them,\*  
 their proposed marriage was allowed by that  
 Meeting.

Now these are to certify to whom it may  
 concern, that, for the accomplishment of their  
 intentions, this .....day of the ..... month, in  
 the year of our Lord ....., they the said A.B. and  
 D.E. appeared in a public Meeting\*\* of the  
 Religious Society of Friends, held at .....,  
 And A.B., taking D.E. by the hand, did on this  
 solemn occasion, declare that he took her D.E. to be  
 his wife, promising with Divine assistance, to be a

loving and faithful husband, as long as they both should live; and then, in the same assembly, D.E. did in like manner declare that she took A.B. to be her husband, promising with Divine assistance to be unto him a loving and faithful wife as long as they

both should live. And, moreover, they, the said A.B. and D.E., she, assuming the surname of her husband,\*\*\* did, as a further confirmation thereof, then and there, to these presents, set their hands.

A.B

D.B

\*Where the parties are under the care of the parents or guardians, add: “and having the consent of parents” or “guardians,” as the case may be.

\*\*When the marriage is accomplished at a private house, instead of the words, “in a public Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held at .....,” say, “at a Meeting at the house of ..... in the ..... of .....

\*\*\*According to wishes of the couple.

We, whose names are hereunto subscribed, being present at the said marriage and subscription, have, as witness thereunto, set our hands the day and year above written.

**A Simpler Form of Certificate** is preferred by some couples, and must be prepared specially. An example of a simpler Certificate follows:

May it be proclaimed to all concerned that on this twenty-first day of the sixth month in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and seventy five, under

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the care of the Meeting of the Sandy Spring Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends held at the Meeting House, Sandy Spring, Maryland, John James Green, son of Peter Paul Green and Patricia Brown his wife, of Cleveland, Ohio, and Mary Martha White, Daughter of Stephen Stanley White and Sarah Black his wife, of Ashton, Joined in Marriage.

On this joyous occasion, John taking Mary by the hand, declared that he took her to be his wife, promising, with Divine assistance to be unto her a loving and faithful husband as long as they both shall live; and then, in like manner, Mary declared that she took John to be her husband, promising, with Divine assistance to be unto her a loving and faithful husband as long as they both shall live; and then, in like manner, Mary declared that she took John to be her husband, promising, with Divine assistance to be unto him a loving and faithful wife as long as they both shall live.

Mary assumed the surname of her husband (or Mary and John took a new surname or leave this off if each keeps current surnames); and they, as a further confirmation of their marriage, signed the certificate.

We, being present on this occasion, signed our names as a witness of the marriage.

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## **CERTIFICATE PROCUREMENT**

To order a marriage certificate from Friends General Conference, contact the Publications Program at;

Friends General Conference  
1216 Arch Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
215-561-1700 or 800-966-4556  
[www.Quakerbooks.org](http://www.Quakerbooks.org) (search under  
marriage)

Some options for ordering are:

pre-printed certificate  
The Quaker Marriage (PYM) .35 cents  
Friends Weddings (FGC) .60 cents

**RECOMMENDED READING\***

Deakin, Michelle Bates, Gay Marriage, Real Life: Ten Stories of Love and Family, 2005, FGC Books.  
*This intimate account of ten same-sex couples brings to life how the decision to marry has affected them and their extended families.*

Gottman, J. (1999) The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work, New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.  
*One of the major researchers in the US shares basic concepts that are essential to healthy marriage learned from research with thousands of couples over 40 years.*

L'engle, Madeleine, Two-Part Invention: The Story of a Marriage, 1988, Harper Collins Publishers, New York.  
*A touching and beautifully written story about the long term marriage of Madelaine L'engle, a well known author of children's books (e.g. A Wrinkle in Time) and her husband's illness and death.*

Mullen, Tom (2001), A Very Good Marriage, Friends United Press, Richmond, Indiana.

*Friend Tom Mullen shares his story of his forty-one year marriage and his own grieving process after his wife's death through stories, conversations, personal notes and poems.*

New England Yearly Meeting, Ministry and Counsel, Living with Oneself and Others, January, 2001

*A compilation of queries well written and thoughtful for all life stages. See Chapters on Contemplating Marriage and/or Remarriage.*

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Newman, Daisy, I Take Thee Serenity, 1975, Friends United Press, Richmond, Indiana.

*A novel about a young Quaker couple who learn what it means to be "married under the care of a meeting" and to seek clearness with the meeting regarding their leading to make a life-long commitment.*

Parrott, Les and Leslie, (2006) Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts, Zondervan Publishing.

*Meeting the needs of a generation overwhelmed by divorce odds, relationship experts Les & Leslie Parrott share seven key questions to help couples identify and overcome stumbling blocks to a building a healthy, lifelong marriage.*

Stanley, Scott (2005), The Power of Commitment: a Guide to Active, Lifelong Love, Jossey-Bass Publishers.

*Scott Stanley draws upon wisdom from his experience working with couples, from research, and from scripture to help understand and appreciate active life-long commitment.*

\*Available in the Sandy Spring Meeting Library

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Better Marriages, formerly the Association for Couples in Marriage Enrichment  
[www.bettermarriages.org](http://www.bettermarriages.org)

(336) 724-1526 or (800) 634-8325

*Enrichment programs for couples in Washington, DC area as well as books, articles, newsletters, etc.*

Friends General Conference – Couple Enrichment Program  
[www.fgcquaker.org/couple-enrichment](http://www.fgcquaker.org/couple-enrichment)

(800) 966-4556 or (215) 561-1700

*Enrichment programs for couples of all ages and stages of relationship; leader training; same gender couples welcome*

Gottman Institute      [www.gottman.com](http://www.gottman.com)

*Information on couples and relationships. For same gender relationships go to research/projects/gay lesbian.*

Life Innovations, Inc.      [www.lifeinnovations.com](http://www.lifeinnovations.com)

(800) 331-1661

*Inventories and resources for couples dating, engaged or married that help to identify relationship strengths and areas of growth.*

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**Notes/Questions**

