Faith and Practice of
Northern Yearly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends

Chapter on Marriage
Approved, May 2008

and

Guidelines for Marriage
Under the Care of Madison Monthly Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends

Care Committee, February 2014
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Part I: Chapter on Marriage from NYM’s Faith and Practice

“In the true married relationship, the independence of husband and wife will be equal, their dependence mutual, and their obligations reciprocal.” - Lucretia Mott, 1849.

“A man and [woman] whose love for each other is part of their love for God, discover a more splendid love and a more exuberant life than those who love each other only. The romantic molasses on which our [popular cultures] feed is a poor substitute for the nourishing food of God’s love.” - Kenneth Boulding, 1942

Marriage joins two people in Divine care and an on-going relationship to fully share their lives. We believe this union is something not lightly entered into, as it is a planned lifelong commitment. Marriage brings two unique individuals into a new entity, one of joy, grace, respect and care for the other. The challenges of marriage, and sometimes the pains of it, provide the opportunity to grow into wholeness of life together, with Divine guidance.

Several individual monthly meetings within NYM have prepared minutes affirming marriage regardless of sexual orientation. One of the earliest is: “Twin Cities Friends Meeting, joyfully recognizing the diversity of sexual orientation within our religious community, affirms the goodness of committed, loving relationships that endure, are unselfish, and that provide mutual support and tenderness… We intend to follow the same customary and careful process of arriving at clearness for any couple, regardless of sexual orientation, who should wish to unite under our care....” – Twin Cities Friends Meeting of Friends, October 1986.

Our yearly meeting comes together in this affirmation with the following minute: “Our experience confirms that all people are equal before God and equally loved by God. In witnessing the truth of God’s love to the wider community, we support full and equal inclusion of gays and lesbians in enjoying the rights and privileges afforded any citizen.” – Northern Yearly Meeting, May 2006

Only monthly meetings have the authority to conduct marriage under the care of the meeting. Worship groups and preparative meetings may participate in the clearness process and planning for a marriage as members of their monthly meeting committee. Marriage under the care of a meeting celebrates publically the couples’ commitment to God, each other and the meeting. Decisions regarding marriage are unique to each monthly meeting. Most monthly meetings do not accept care of a marriage unless one of the couple is already a member or an associate member of that monthly meeting.
The Clearness Process
This process begins when the couple sends a letter to the monthly meeting to request marriage under the care of that meeting. The letter is read at the next monthly meeting for worship for business and a clearness committee is appointed to meet with the couple. Clearness committees explore the meeting’s willingness to take on the care of the marriage. They also enhance a couple’s preparation for marriage by helping them think about their commitment to each other at a deep level as well as the many practical issues they face. Some meetings have prepared materials for the clearness committee to use, which include care for the readiness of both individuals to be married and their clearness about being married within the Friends Meeting for Worship. (guidelines in our appendix)

The same clearness process would be followed for all committed couples that have requested marriage under the care of a meeting. Now, and historically, legal and religious definitions of the marriage relationship are not always one and the same. A meeting clearness committee may help a couple more carefully determine the characterization of their relationship, as part of the preparations for marriage.

The Wedding
The clearness committee brings its report to a meeting for worship for business. After meeting approves, an arrangements committee is appointed to work with the couple on the details of the wedding. Arrangement committees should be cognizant of their state laws regarding marriage and provide clear information to the couple, so that all legal requirements, if applicable, are met in a timely manner. In keeping with our testimony of simplicity, arrangement committees are encouraged to help couples focus the wedding plans on the deep spiritual nature of this union and the real lifelong commitment being made. This may include consideration of the differing beliefs and special needs of some families.

The wedding itself is a Called Meeting for Worship which has the purpose and joy of supporting and witnessing the couple as they join their lives. No third person officiates at the wedding because we believe it is the Divine Spirit that gives this relationship life and permanence. During worship, the couple rise and speak their vows to each other. The traditional vow is: “In the presence of God and these our friends, I take thee, __________, to be my wife/husband/partner, promising with Divine assistance to be unto thee a loving and faithful wife/husband/partner as long as we both shall live.” Other wordings may also be used. The vows should be words the couple truly are able to commit to one another and desire to make. Clearness committees may assist couples in selecting the words they will say. Some couples choose to exchange rings.
The marriage certificate is an integral part of a Quaker wedding. Many couples experience the presence of their certificate in their family as a wonderful affirmation of the Divine blessing that brought them together and a reminder of the vows they said. Historically, Quaker weddings were not recognized by civil authorities. So Friends developed the marriage certificate to provide the complete record of this event. (Some sample wording for marriage certificates is provided in the appendix.)

The marriage certificate must be fully lettered before the wedding so that it may be signed by the couple during the wedding after they have said their vows. The certificate includes the words of the vows. Each should sign with the full name they plan to use from that date forward. A designated person then reads the entire certificate aloud during the wedding. All present are requested to sign the certificate as witnesses, at the rise of meeting for worship.

Historically, after the wedding, the entire wording of the marriage certificate and all of the witnesses names were copied into a record book of the monthly meeting. Both the meeting and the couple retained this document. Today, it is more common for the meeting to record the event, but not the entire certificate.

**Continuing Care**

The meeting interest in a couple does not cease when the wedding event is concluded. The meeting is also to provide on-going nurture and celebration of couples and families. This community can be the fertile spiritually nourishing ground where a marriage relationship can continue to unfold in the Light. The interested community may welcome the observation of special anniversaries by assisting with a meeting for worship for an anniversary. Meeting couples who were not married in the manner of Friends might even request a meeting for worship for the further affirmation and deepening of their vows. A meeting may provide assistance when a family experiences health problems or loss. It may formalize support to couples by sponsoring couple enrichment workshops and on-going couple support groups. Couples within a meeting provide a model of rich Quaker marriage relationships as one kind of support to those considering marriage.

Continuing care may require times of providing counseling and clearness committees when families face difficulties. Many meetings experience gaps of awareness and awkwardness regarding ways to offer care. A meeting may want to locate friendly outside counseling and support services. Clearness committees may be offered to a couple who are considering divorce or separation, if they are open to that. A meeting can assist with the on-going nurture and care of any children that may be involved. The meeting community seeks to love and respect both of the
individuals involved, and if possible, to help them continue to participate in the spiritual life of the meeting.

**The On-Going Union**

Marriage can illuminate the spiritual journey with God for both the couple and the meeting community. The wholeness of a marriage seems to strengthen and multiply the gifts each is able to offer as individuals, and that both are able to offer as a couple. Successful relationships give the meeting community a precious gift, a tangible model of the hard work and deep joy that true intimacy with self, others and God can bring.

**Queries**

For the Meeting:

1. How does your meeting nurture the marriage commitment before the wedding?
2. How does your meeting help a couple come to clearness?
3. How do your meeting and its clearness committees nurture the on-going relationship?
4. How do your clearness committees and arrangements committees assist the couple to develop their vows and plan a wedding which will focus on the deep spiritual nature of the commitment, and keep the celebration welcoming, orderly and simple?
5. What does it mean to your meeting to support a marriage under the care of the meeting?
6. In what ways does your meeting offer assistance and support to couples who may encounter difficulties?
7. How will your meeting lovingly embrace both members of a couple if there is separation or divorce?
8. How does your meeting nurture and support all couples?
9. How does your meeting continue to nurture couples who move away from the meeting?
10. When a marriage under the care of the meeting is not legally recognized by the state, how will your meeting assist the couple to protect and care for each other and any children.

For the Couple:

1. How will you, as future marriage partners, continue to seek the Light as you make decisions for your home and your family?
2. If your marriage is not legally recognized by your state, how will you protect and care for each other and any children?
3. What level of counseling and support would you, as a couple, feel free to seek from your meeting for continuing growth, or if you encounter difficulties?
4. How will you continue your relationship with your marriage clearness committee?
5. What is the couple’s responsibility to the spiritual life of the meeting?

NYM Minute Appendix A – Clearness Committees for Marriage

These are possible questions which may help a clearness committee for marriage as it meets with a couple. None of them are required. The most important role of the Clearness Committee for marriage is to allow the Spirit to work with the group, as they are preparing for their meetings and as they meet. Couples need to know that there are no right or wrong answers to questions, and that questions are raised to help reach clearness about whether a marriage should occur, whether it should occur within the meeting community, and what the specifics of the relationship will be. The questions are mostly derived from materials prepared by several monthly meetings within Northern Yearly Meeting, including Madison, Twin Cities, Minneapolis, and Prospect Hill, as well as individual comments from Friends.

Individuals
1. How would each of you describe what an ideal, committed relationship might be?
2. How did you become acquainted with each other?
3. Are there differences in your backgrounds? How will these affect your relationship?
4. Have you shared gritty experiences as well as festive ones? Have you encountered each other when you were ‘not at your best’?
5. Often it is the little everyday things that can really build up and bug a person. To consider these things, do you put the cap back on the toothpaste, or leave it about? Do you want all of the dishes washed immediately after a meal, or whenever someone has time? What happens to your shoes when you arrive home? Do both of you take time to care for your home environment?
6. Are you a morning person or an evening person?
7. Why do you want to marry HIM/HER? Why do you want to MARRY him/her?

Families
8. Have both of you become acquainted with the extended families of each other? Are your families supporting your desire to marry? If not, how will that affect your relationship? Spiritual
9. Why do you want to be married under the care of the meeting? Do you seek to be an on-going part of the meeting community? Do you feel that a spiritual community will support the spiritual life of your marriage?
10. Do you regard marriage as a sacred relationship? Will the ‘presence of God’ be part of your home after the wedding ceremony?

11. What part do you expect marriage to play in your individual spiritual lives?

12. If you are not both Friends, how do you expect to reconcile your different spiritual practices? How will religious holidays be observed in your home? If there are children, which religion will they be raised in?

13. Have you considered the legal issues of marriage, the rights and responsibilities including disposition of property, financial issues, survivorship options?

14. Have you considered, as a couple, how you will manage your money? How will you finance your home? Do you have the same ideas about lifestyle?

15. Have you discussed having children? If you have children from a previous relationship, how are you caring for their needs now? How will they be a part of your family after you marry?

16. If you cannot or choose not to obtain legal recognition of your marriage, have you made appropriate legal arrangements that protect you and any children, to the extent possible?

17. Do both of you become involved when large decisions are to be made? If you do not initially agree, how are your differences resolved?

18. If you are of the same sex, what will you do to provide positive role models of the opposite (other) sex for your children?

19. Is there anything you cannot talk about so far in your relationship? Do you think this interferes with the wholeness of your relationship?

20. Will you be a two-career family? How will you make changes, if a new, better, different job is considered?

21. Do health requirements or physical and mental conditions raise concerns for you in this relationship? What if one of you becomes impaired?

22. What are you going to do as your parents grow older? Meeting Concerns

23. Are we ready, as a meeting, to be a part of this relationship? To receive the care of this marriage?

**NYM Minute Appendix B – Marriage Certificates, Possible Wordings**

These are the traditional words:

WHEREAS, (name_______), County of (name______) and State of (name), son of (name____) and (name______), County of (name______) and State of (name______) and (name______), daughter of (name____) and (name______), having made known their intentions of marriage with each other, in a Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held at (name______), (name______), and having consent of their parents, their proposals were allowed by this Meeting. These are to certify that for the full accomplishment of their intentions, this _____ day of _____, in the year of
our Lord _____, they appeared in an appointed meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held at (place_____), where they took each other by the hand and publicly declared that, in the presence of the Lord, they did promise, with Divine assistance, to be loving and faithful to one another as long as they both shall live.

As a further confirmation thereof, they did then and thereto sign their names:

_____________ ________________

And we, whose names are hereunto affixed, being present at this marriage, have as witnesses thereto subscribed our names:

_____________ ________________

Couples may review the wording with their arrangements committee. The wording of the vows is important to include, as the signatures are witnessing what has been said. Many current certificates do not include the names of the parents, or the county of residence.
Part II: Marriage in Madison Monthly Meeting

This guide for use by couples seeking marriage, the relevant committees, and the caring Meeting community as a corporate body. It is intended to be used as a supplement to Northern Yearly Meeting’s Faith and Practice chapter on Marriage (included here in pages 3 through 9 and also available online at www.northernyearlymeeting.org/article/marriage-nym-faith-and-practice-may-2008). It focuses on logistics, wedding planning and coordination, the actual wedding, optional arrangements, and additional aspects of marriage and weddings specific to Madison Meeting.

The Clearness Committee

In Madison Meeting, Clearness Committees for Marriage are convened by the Care Committee. It is customary for Friends to volunteer to serve on Clearness Committees at the time the couple’s request to be married under the care of the Meeting is read in Meeting for Business. The couple may also request that specific Friends be included. Both members and attenders may serve; care should be taken to include Friends who are seasoned and aware of the clearness process and goals. The clearness process helps the Meeting discern its readiness to take the marriage under its care, and helps the couple discern their readiness for marriage. It also enhances a couple’s preparation for marriage by helping them think about their commitment to each other at a deep level, as well as considering the many practical issues they may encounter.

While the Clearness Committee may feel that one meeting with the couple is sufficient to reach clarity, it may also wish to meet with the couple several times, or meet with one or both of the partners separately, or possibly with children involved or with others familiar with the couple. When the Clearness Committee achieves unity on whether it supports the couple’s decision to marry, it presents a recommendation at the next Meeting for Business. The Meeting’s decision about taking the marriage under its care is minuted, and the couple is notified.

If, however, at any time during this process, unity to move forward has not been reached by the couple, the Committee for Clearness, or the Care and Counsel Committee, the recommendation may be to continue to seek God’s will in this matter or to lay aside the request indefinitely or permanently. When the right course of action is clear, the Care and Counsel Committee brings the recommendation to the monthly meeting. – “Marriage at Gwynedd Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends”

Madison Monthly Meeting affirms spiritual marriage under the care of the Meeting even if not legally recognized by the state.
Additional Queries for the Couple

As the Clearness Committee for Marriage follows its Spirit-led process to come to clearness, it is guided by the queries in Faith and Practice (see page 5-8). The following are additional possible queries that be helpful:

1. How have you dealt with conflict in your relationship? How do you resolve large and small differences? What tools and skills for negotiating, sharing of time and space, and communicating do you bring to the relationship that could help you navigate difficulties you may encounter? Are there skills you hope to develop and strengthen?

2. Have you talked about responsibilities you may have, now or in the future, to support or care for children, aging parents, or other family members? Have you considered how these may affect your relationship?

3. Are you aware of the need for other friendships that contribute to both individual growth and the marriage relationship?

4. If you experience serious difficulties in your marriage, are you open to seeking help?

Basics of Planning the Wedding

Arrangements Committee

After Meeting for Business approves, the couple is offered the option of drawing together an arrangements committee to assist with the details of the wedding meeting and celebration. The couple and the clearness committee may both give input to the makeup of the arrangements committee; it is often helpful to include at least one member of the couple’s clearness committee.

Each wedding is unique; depending on the couple’s preferences, the nature and extent of the help the committee offers may vary. In addition to its concern for logistics, arrangements committees are encouraged to help couples focus the wedding plans on the spiritual nature of the union, on the lifelong commitment being made, and on the testimony of simplicity.

The arrangements committee can help plan and carry out what follows, and can also assist with additional arrangements the couple wishes.

Picking a Date

The marriage clearness committee and the Meeting need to be sensitive to the
couple’s hopes and expectations for setting the wedding date. However, until the Meeting has actually approved taking the marriage under its care, no date should be announced. -- Faith and Practice, Pacific Yearly Meeting

Couples wishing to be married at the Madison meetinghouse are advised to choose a date on which the meetinghouse is entirely available, in consultation with the Caretakers, who keep the meeting calendar. So that parking is not a problem, it is important to choose a date that does not conflict with University home football games, graduations, or other large events in the neighborhood.

Certificate of Marriage

The marriage certificate is a central part of any Quaker wedding, a record of the event, of the couple's vows, and of those who witnessed it. It plays a key role not only in the wedding meeting for worship, but also in the homes of many couples throughout their lives together. Originally developed as a record of marriages not recognized by civil authorities, it is meaningful now even for those Friends whose marriages are recognized by the state. Hand-lettered certificates are often created for the occasion. Couples may use a local calligrapher, or contact any of those who advertise online or in Friends Journal. Preprinted certificates are available from Friends United Meeting, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting or a number of online sources. The most traditional format is a large scroll, although a wedding album is also used. Certificates often contain artwork. The certificate should contain, at a minimum, the names of the couple, the location of the wedding, the wording of vows and sufficient space for all of those present at the wedding to sign. See Appendix B to NYM’s Faith and Practice (page 8) for the traditional wording of Quaker wedding certificates.

On the wedding day, the certificate is usually placed on a small table. Madison Meeting has a special table and certificate paperweights reserved for weddings; see the Meeting caretakers for use of them.

Participants

In a sense, all who attend a Quaker wedding are participants. As part of the preparations for the wedding, however, the couple and/or the arrangements committee ask a number of people to play key roles in the meeting for worship. These may include:

- Clerk: The Friend chosen to clerk the meeting for worship on the occasion of marriage rises at the beginning of the worship to welcome all who are present and to explain what will happen to those who may be unfamiliar with Quaker weddings. At the end, the Clerk closes the meeting by shaking hands with nearby attendees.
- Certificate reader: This person reads the certificate aloud after the couple has signed it.
- Certificate carrier(s): One or two people to carry the certificate and its table to the
couple and back again. The certificate carrier or carriers may also assist with the certificate after the rise of meeting, when all present takes turns signing.

- Greeter: May greet people at the door, and hand out programs if desired.
- Ushers: Help seat guests. May also hand out programs. Ushers may also receive gifts guests bring; at the Madison meetinghouse, the sunroom near the entrance to the meeting room is normally reserved for family use, and gifts can be kept there.
- Ring Bearers, Attendants, etc.: if desired.

The Marriage License (for marriages recognized by a civil authority)

If the marriage is to be legally recognized, the arrangements committee should be cognizant of Wisconsin law regarding marriage and provide clear information to the couple so that all legal requirements, if applicable, are met in a timely manner. County websites have information on applying for marriage licenses; for Dane County, see http://www.countyofdane.com/clerk/marriage_license.aspx. Friends should be aware of the timeline: normally, license application is made at least six full calendar days before the license may be issued, and then the license must be used within the next 30 days.

When they make their application, the couple should indicate that they are performing the ceremony themselves, which means they are the officiants recorded on the license. The license, including the couple’s signatures, should be properly filled out, in black ink, before the wedding. On the wedding day, two witnesses must sign the license. See Appendix 1 for detailed instructions on completing the license. Once it is complete, the license must be filed with the county clerk within three days.

At the next meeting for business, a member of the Arrangements Committee reports that the marriage took place. All marriages celebrated under the care of the Meeting are recorded in the Meeting records.

The Wedding Meeting

Clerk’s Introduction

The wedding begins as all meetings for worship do, in silence. When all have gathered, the Clerk for the Meeting for Worship, chosen by the couple, stands, welcomes everyone, and explains what will be taking place so guests unfamiliar with Friends’ practices may understand what is going on. (See Appendix 2 for an example of the Clerk’s introduction.) The meeting then settles into silence.

Vows

During the silent worship, the couple rises and speaks their vows to each other.
Signing (By the Couple) and Reading of the Certificate of Marriage

The certificate is customarily placed on a table; after the couple has said their vows, they may walk to the table, or the table and certificate may be carried to them. Each should sign with the full name they plan to use from that date forward. The couple returns, or the certificate and table are returned, to their original place. A designated person then reads the entire certificate aloud.

Silent Worship and Close

The meeting continues in silent worship. The usual length of the meeting is about an hour, at the Clerk’s discretion. At an appropriate time, the Clerk breaks the meeting, invites all present to sign the certificate, and announces any post-wedding events. If the certificate table is not already by the main exit, it should be moved there before guests start to leave.

Signing (By All Present) of the Certificate of Marriage

All present are requested to sign the certificate, as witnesses, at the rise of meeting for worship. Everyone who signs the certificate should use the same pens. Very black floating ball ballpoint or fine point felt type pens work well. So that the ink does not fade over time, be sure that the ink is India-type or archival quality ink. Have at least two pens of the same type available – more if there are many guests – and a blotter to prevent smudging. The person or persons who carried the certificate table during the wedding may be enlisted to help guests with the certificate, pointing out where to sign and moving the blotter down to expose more space for signatures as needed. It is best not to leave the certificate unattended.

Planning the Wedding: Optional Extra Arrangements

Depending on circumstances, location, and the desires of the couple and their families, the Arrangements Committee may also assist with other preparations for the wedding day. These are suggestions and ideas to incorporate into the preparations, or not. Couples are invited to provide feedback, updates, additional suggestions, etc. to the clerk of Care Committee. One couple’s report from their recent wedding at the Madison meetinghouse is included in the appendices.

Invitations

A wedding taking place within a meeting for worship is traditionally open to the Meeting community, and often invitations are made orally, as announcements, in the weeks before the event. The couple may also send invitations.

For family and friends of the couple who may not be familiar with Friends’ style of worship, it is helpful to include with the invitations an explanation outlining what they may expect.
It is also useful to include with the invitations information about childcare, if it is to be provided, and parking. See the appropriate sections below. Experience has taught us that it is helpful to provide a map in the invitations, especially for those who are not extremely familiar with the wedding location. A map is available on the meeting’s website, www.madisonfriends.org.

**Preparing the Site: Seating, Accessibility, Flowers, Music, Gifts, Signs**

Well in advance, the Arrangements Committee and the couple should discuss and make decisions about logistics for the wedding day, which may include room arrangements, accessibility, any seats to be reserved for participants and special guests, the placement of the certificate table, flowers, music, a procession, a recess, a receiving line, guest parking, reserved parking places for wedding participants, parking attendants, signage, receipt of wedding gifts, childcare, hospitality for out-of-town guests, photographs, reception, food, cleanup, etc. It may help to prepare a checklist of points to cover during the rehearsal, and a list of those who need to be present so that they can be contacted.

What will seating arrangement be? Keep in mind the ease of seating guests, the convenience of the wedding party entrance and exit and the convenience of carrying the table and certificate. If there is to be live music, plan seating for the musicians. Consider guests who are not able to negotiate narrow aisles or who have special seating needs. Consider how many chairs will be needed, and whether extra chairs can be rented or borrowed. In recent years, the Meeting House has had a sufficient quantity of chairs for most weddings.

Consider whether signs, such “Bathroom” or “Reserved For…”, need to be made for inside or outside the building.

**Rehearsal**

A rehearsal is usually held the evening or day before the wedding. This is an opportunity to review the entire procedure and sequence of events, to walk through all procedures and events from beginning to end of reception line, and to clear up any questions. The couple, their close family members, the Arrangements Committee, and all key participants in the meeting for worship should attend.

**Programs**

A printed program is optional, and can include the following:

1. Introduction to Quaker worship
2. Program of events
3. Vows
4. Words to songs if guests are expected to join in.
5. Names of participants
6. Description of meeting for worship for newcomers. See Appendix 3.
7. Other items as desired.
Rings

Although wedding rings are not necessary in a Quaker wedding, the couple may exchange them if they wish. This is often done after they speak their vows.

Hospitality for Out-of-town Visitors

The Arrangements Committee may assist the couple in finding housing for family and friends who are coming from a distance to attend the wedding. They may make announcements in meeting, place an item in the weekly announcements or monthly newsletter, or ask individuals directly.

Childcare

If there is to be childcare provided during the wedding, it is helpful to include this information in invitations and announcements, and to ask guests to respond with the number and ages of the children for whom they would like care. For weddings at the meetinghouse, the Arrangements Committee can ask Meeting adults or young Friends who are familiar with the facility.

Parking

Also helpful to include in invitations is information about parking. The Associated Bank parking lot, except for the ATM drive-through lane, is available Saturday afternoons and Sundays all day. By arrangement, the bank uses six of the Meeting House parking lot during weekdays and Saturday mornings until about noon. On the wedding day, volunteers to serve as parking lot attendants in the meetinghouse lot are helpful. Guests may need information as they arrive. Spaces should be saved for wedding couple, family, and those who need to park close, including disabled and/or aged guests.

As noted above under “Picking a Date”, it is important that weddings at the meetinghouse be scheduled on a day that does not conflict with university football games or other neighborhood events.

Receiving Line

A receiving line may be formed after the wedding so that all present may greet the couple and the wedding party. This is often done in conjunction with the signing of the certificate by all present, with one activity flowing into the other.

Photographs

Photographs can be taken before and/or after the ceremony. Because this is a Meeting for Worship, photographs are not taken during the actual wedding meeting. The couple is urged not to plan such an elaborate or extended photography session that they miss the opportunity to be with friends who have come to wish them well.
Reception

Couples may plan a reception if they wish, either at the same locale used for the wedding meeting, or elsewhere. The couple may also seek the help of the Arrangements Committee in planning the specifics of this event – including food, music, dancing, or entertainment. Gifts may be opened.

Food and Drink

Some things to consider:

- It is not permitted to serve alcohol at the meetinghouse.
- Will there be simple refreshments or a full meal? Will the food be potluck, catered, or coordinated? Where will the food be served? Who will serve? One wedding provided “finger foods” for those attending the wedding itself, and held a catered reception at a separate location for family and close friends.
- For receptions at the meetinghouse, the Arrangements Committee should check the kitchen to see what actually is available. Are there enough tables, dishes, silverware, and wastebaskets? The meetinghouse has some dishes, but a count should be made of whether there are enough or more must be brought in.
- Who will oversee food? Who will supply each component? Who will handle setup? Will tablecloths, flowers, centerpieces, napkins (printed?), etc. be needed? Will chairs need to be moved from meeting room to dining area? When and by whom? When will the meal start? Will it be announced during or after wedding or in programs? If meal is buffet style, provide plenty of room for lines. Separate beverages from food area to reduce congestion. Perhaps two lines can help. Who will supply food? Who will supply beverages? What will beverages be? Will punch bowl, coffee maker, special servers, tablecloths, etc. be needed? Who will supply them? When? The Meeting has two or three large punch bowls, ladles, and a few punch glasses. These are in the kitchen.
- Will the food area be set up the day/ evening before, or another time? How many people and who will be in the kitchen? Will wedding cake be served? Who will cut and serve it? When, where, and on what dishes? Does a table need to be reserved for family?

Entertainment

Will there be any program after the meal, for example folk dancing or social dancing? If so, when, who will lead, where will it be, who will announce it?

Cleanup

Who will take final responsibility for cleanup? Who will help? When? Don’t forget to wash dishes and tables, sweep floors, take out trash, and rearrange chairs and tables. Who will take back rented or borrowed equipment? When? This is vital if the wedding is on a Saturday. We suggest contacting the caretakers in advance of the
wedding to clarify cleanup procedures.

Closing

This document is available for those wishing to seek Marriage under the care of Madison Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. We encourage you to share with members of the Care Committee your experiences of what was helpful, what was not, and what unique elements you included to make your wedding meaningful.

Appendices

MMM Appendix 1: Instructions for Completing the Marriage License

Sections 1-18 of the Marriage License are completed before the wedding. The county clerk, or a deputy, transcribes these from the license application and witnesses the couple’s signatures (as bride and groom) at the county offices. The clerk may also complete sections 19, 20a, 20b, 23, 25a and 25b (everything but the signatures).

After the wedding, the couple, acting as their own officiants, fill in sections 19, 20a, 20b, 23 and 25 if they have not already been completed, and both sign (as officiants) in section 21. Two competent adult witnesses sign in sections 22 and 24. See the attached Wisconsin Department of Health Services document F-05152C, “General and Detailed Instructions for the Bride, Groom, and Officiant for Completing the Marriage License and the Original Certificate of Marriage”, particularly the “Officiant Section” on the second page. In the language of this document, a Quaker wedding is a “self-marriage”.

Note: The license must be filled out using black ink only. No “white-out” or other corrections are permitted.
GENERAL AND DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE BRIDE, GROOM, AND OFFICIANT FOR COMPLETING THE MARRIAGE LICENSE AND THE ORIGINAL CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE

YOU CANNOT MARRY IN THIS STATE UNTIL YOU COMPLETE A WISCONSIN MARRIAGE LICENSE APPLICATION (F-05081) AND OBTAIN A WISCONSIN MARRIAGE LICENSE (per s. 765.05, Wis. Stats.). Marriage is a civil contract that creates the legal status of husband and wife (per Chap. 765.01, Wis. Stats.). There are many legal responsibilities and privileges associated with being married. You will need to have a certified copy of your marriage certificate to prove your name change, if applicable. You may need to show proof of your marriage for insurance coverage and claims, overseas travel, and other legal transactions. It is important for you to have a legal document that is universally accepted as evidence of your marriage.

The marriage certificate (F-05080) is called the “marriage license” until the marriage ceremony is complete, all of the information has been entered on the form, and it has been filed with the Register of Deeds in the county where the marriage ceremony took place.

Errors on your marriage license/certificate can cause legal problems for you in the future. Therefore, it is essential that this document is completed accurately and legibly and that it is filed promptly. These instructions are designed to provide assistance to the bride, groom, and their chosen officiant.

The Original Certificate of Marriage has two main sections: CERTIFICATION (which includes subsections) and CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION.

CERTIFICATION

• LICENSE
  • Groom and Bride Application. After the groom and bride complete and submit the Marriage License Application (F-05081), the County Clerk transcribes the appropriate groom and bride information to the corresponding sections of the Original Certificate of Marriage (F-05082).
  • License issuance. When the couple returns to the County Clerk’s office to obtain the Original Certificate of Marriage, they verify the groom and bride information and sign the “license” section. IMPORTANT REMINDER FOR THE BRIDE AND GROOM: SIGN THE LICENSE BEFORE THE CEREMONY, preferably in the County Clerk’s office.

• OFFICIANT
  At the time of the marriage ceremony, the marriage license is given to the officiant who is responsible for its accurate completion and filing. The officiant must ensure that the couple has a valid Wisconsin marriage license before performing the ceremony.

• REGISTRAR SIGNATURE AND DATE
  When the marriage license is received by the Register of Deeds of the county in which the marriage occurred, it is filed (signed and dated). At this point, the couple may purchase certified copies of the marriage certificate from the Register of Deeds to use as proof of marriage.

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Information collected in the bottom section of the Original Certificate of Marriage is for statistical use only. It does not appear on officially issued copies. This information may not be disclosed without the consent of the bride and groom (except as stated in the marriage application instructions).

IMPORTANT GENERAL MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE REQUIREMENTS

(1) Unauthorized alterations, such as correction fluid, correction tape, erasures, write-overs, and cross-outs, are NOT ALLOWED.
(2) All entries including signatures, must be in BLACK INK to insure legible photocopies and clear images for microfiling.
(3) The officiant may NOT place a church seal (or any other type of seal) on the marriage certificate.

The Register of Deeds will NOT accept a marriage license if it is prepared with any ink color other than black; if it contains erasures, correction fluid, correction tape, or other unauthorized alterations; or if it has a seal. IT WILL BE RETURNED AND A NEW, PROPERLY COMPLETED RECORD WILL BE REQUIRED. Counties may charge additional fees to replace the record.

PENALTY INFORMATION

(1) A fine of not less than $10,000 or imprisoned for not more than nine (9) months or both for:
  a. Marrying outside the state for the purpose of avoiding Wisconsin law.
  b. Making certain false statements to obtain a license to marry.
  c. Issuing a marriage license illegally (County Clerk).
  d. Willfully and knowingly performing a marriage without statutory authority to perform marriages in the state. (See "Who May Legally Perform a Marriage in Wisconsin" below.)
  e. Being a party to performing a fictitious marriage ceremony for fraudulent purposes.
(2) A fine of not less than $100 nor more than $500 or imprisoned for not more than six (6) months or both for:
  a. Unlawfully solemnizing a marriage (by the officiant or by the two parties themselves).
(3) A fine of not less than $10 nor more than $200 or imprisoned for not more than three (3) months or both for:
  a. Failing to file a marriage certificate (the officiant must mail the certificate to the Register of Deeds within 3 days of the marriage ceremony, per Chap. 69.16, Wis. Stats.)
  b. Failing to keep a public marriage docket (County Clerk).

WHO MAY LEGALLY PERFORM A MARRIAGE IN WISCONSIN

(1) Ordained clergy or licentiate of a denominational body or appointee of any bishop (if officiant is a Wisconsin resident).
(2) Family court or other court commissioner or supplemental court commissioner in Wisconsin.
(3) Municipal judge, reserve judge or any judge of a court of record in Wisconsin or a Wisconsin tribal judge.
(4) The two parties themselves, by mutual declarations, in accordance with the customs, rules, and regulations of any religious society, denomination, or sect to which either of said parties belong (per s. 765.16, Wis. Stats.). At least one of you must belong to a religious organization that believes that the marriage ceremony should be performed without an officiant. NOTE: VERY FEW RELIGIONS ALLOW SELF MARRIAGE.
GENERAL AND DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS

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(5) An out-of-state clergy person, if that officiant has a letter of sponsorship from a clergy person in Wisconsin. The letter must state that the sponsor knows of the officiant and believes that the officiant is authorized to perform marriages by that religious organization. The County Clerk may ask to see the letter of sponsorship.

If there are any questions about officiants and/or more detailed information is required, contact the County Clerk.

FILING THE MARRIAGE LICENSE

DO NOT KEEP YOUR ORIGINAL CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE. It is of legal value only if it is filed properly with the appropriate Register of Deeds. The officiant must file the marriage license with the Register of Deeds within three (3) days of the marriage ceremony (per s. 69.16, Wis. Stats.). If the marriage license is not filed, you are still legally married, however, it is more difficult to show proof of your marriage.

CORRECTING ERRORS

Do not correct errors on the marriage certificate. Instead, sign and date a letter which states the names of the bride and groom, the date of marriage, and the items that are to be corrected. Send the letter with the marriage certificate to the Register of Deeds. If the certificate is misplaced or ruined, contact the issuing County Clerk immediately for instructions.

COPIES

IT IS ILLEGAL TO MAKE PHOTOCOPIES OF A MARRIAGE LICENSE. You may purchase copies of your marriage certificate from the Register of Deeds in the county where the marriage occurred or from the State Vital Records Office.

OFFICIANT SECTION (Black Ink Only) (Some County Clerks enter Items 19-20b and/or 23-25b if known prior to the ceremony.)

19. DATE OF MARRIAGE (Month, Day, Year)
Print or type the month, day, and year the marriage was performed. Spell out or abbreviate the month (Example: Enter Jan. 4, 2000, not 01/04/2000.).

20a. WHERE MARRIED - COUNTY
Print or type the name of the county where the marriage was performed. The county must be located in Wisconsin. The city, village, or township listed in item 20b must be located in the county name here.

20b. WHERE MARRIED - CITY, VILLAGE, OR TOWNSHIP
Print or type the name of the city or village if the marriage was performed inside the corporate limits of a city or village. If the ceremony occurred outside a city or village, enter the name of the township, NOT the name of an unincorporated place. Place an “X” in the appropriate box for “City,” “Village,” or “Township.”

21. OFFICIANT SIGNATURE
The officiant must sign in black ink. If the ceremony is a “self-marriage” (see item 4 under “Who May Legally Perform a Marriage in Wisconsin” for limitations on the use of this option), the bride and groom must both sign in this area and enter “self” in Item 25a “Officiant Title.” Be careful that the signature does not obscure other information or go beyond the space provided.

22. & 24. WITNESS TO CEREMONY (Signature)
Two competent adult (at least 18 years old) witnesses must be physically present and must sign their names in black ink. They must not exceed the spaces provided. More than two (2) witnesses may sign as long as the signatures are distinct from one another.

23. OFFICIANT NAME (Print or type.)
Print or type the officiant’s name. If you are performing a self-marriage ceremony, enter both your names. (See item 21.)

25a. OFFICIANT TITLE
Print or type the title of the officiant. The title must reflect the officiant’s legal status such as Judge, Court Commissioner, or clerical title (such as Minister, Rabbi, Priest, etc.). Titles such as “family friend” or “attorney” are not acceptable. Enter “Self” if this was a self-marriage ceremony. (See Item 21.)

25b. OFFICIANT Mailing Address
(Print or type.)
Print or type the mailing address, including ZIP Code, of the person whose name appears in item 23. Enter the officiant’s primary mailing contact address.

KEY POINTS FOR OFFICIANTS

- DO NOT PERFORM THE MARRIAGE UNTIL THE COUPLE GIVES YOU AN ORIGINAL WISCONSIN MARRIAGE LICENSE.
- DO NOT PERFORM THE MARRIAGE UNLESS BOTH THE BRIDE AND GROOM ARE PHYSICALLY PRESENT WITH YOU.
- ONLY USE BLACK INK. DO NOT CORRECT ERRORS ON THE LICENSE. FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS IN THE “CORRECTING ERRORS” SECTION ABOVE.
- SEND OR TAKE THE MARRIAGE LICENSE TO THE REGISTER OF DEEDS IN THE COUNTY OF MARRIAGE WITHIN 3 DAYS OF THE WEDDING.

KEY POINTS FOR EVERYONE

- RESPECT CONFIDENTIALITY. DO NOT REVEAL THE CONFIDENTIAL SECTION AT THE BOTTOM OF THE MARRIAGE LICENSE OR ITS INFORMATION TO ANYONE.
- IT IS ILLEGAL TO MAKE PHOTOCOPIES OF A MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE/LICENSE (per s. 69.24, Wis. Stats.).
The following are additional notes from the Dane County Clerk to Officiates:

"...most marriage licenses you receive from Dane County will have the bride’s and groom’s signatures already on the marriage license. The State of Wisconsin has requested this procedure...."

We are advised that penalties are stiff, so please do not make copies of the marriage license for the bride and groom or anyone else. (Section 69.24 Wis. Stat.)

"...Please make it a matter of practice to check over every line of the marriage license you receive.

If there is any "white out" or obvious corrections made on the license, contact the County Clerk’s Office. A marriage license does not leave this office with any kind of correction on it. There are no exceptions to this rule, it is mandatory."

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**MMM Appendix 2: Sample Clerk’s Introduction to the Meeting for Worship**

Hello. Welcome... on behalf of _______ and the Madison Friends Meeting. My name is _______. I would like to say a few words of introduction for the benefit of those who have not been present at a Quaker wedding before. Within the Religious Society of Friends, marriage under the care of the Meeting takes place during an appointed Meeting for Worship, such as this one. At the beginning of the Meeting for Worship, there will be a period of silence after which _____ and _____ will rise and say their wedding vows. Then, they will sign the marriage certificate, which will be read aloud.

The Meeting for Worship will continue with silent prayer, meditation, and spoken messages from any present who feel moved to speak. "In speech and in silence, each person contributes to the Meeting." We ask that there be no spoken messages until after the marriage certificate has been read. If you do speak, please stand and do so in a clear voice so that all may hear. Allow a few moments of silence between messages in order that we may have time to consider the previous speaker's thoughts.

I will indicate the close of Meeting by shaking the hands of those near me. Following Meeting, there will be an opportunity for all to greet _____ and _____ and to sign the marriage certificate as witnesses. Now let us continue our Meeting for Worship together.

The Clerk may also wish to remind guests that photography or video recording is not appropriate during Quaker Meeting for Worship.

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**MMM Appendix 3: Sample program flyers: Introduction to Quaker Weddings**

Sample flyers to use with program:
1. From its beginning the Religious Society of Friends has stressed the conviction that marriage is a binding relationship entered into in the presence of God and of witnessing friends. Before this public commitment is made on the day of the wedding, the proposed marriage has already received the approval of the local Friends Meeting, given after careful consideration by an appointed committee.

The wedding itself is a meeting for worship held after the manner of Friends, within which the marriage takes place. In an atmosphere of quiet and reverence after a period of silent worship, the couple rises and states their vows. When the couple is again seated, the marriage certificate is brought for them to sign. Then someone who has previously been asked to do so reads the certificate aloud. The meeting then continues in silence with those present free to offer spoken messages about the marriage.

No third person pronounces the couple husband and wife because Friends believe that God alone can create such a union and give it significance. The person chosen to close the meeting then invite those present to sign the certificate as witnesses to the marriage.

2. “In the presence of God and these our friends…”
You are about to witness and participate in a marriage after the manner of Friends. Marriage has always been regarded by Friends as a religious covenant, made in the presence of God, witnessed by friends and invested with deep spiritual meaning. The wedding itself is a meeting for worship, within which the marriage takes place. The couple enter and take their place... A period of worship follows in which we open our hearts to God. The couple rise, taking each other by the hand, and make their promises. "In the presence of God and these our friends, I take thee ...... to be my wife/husband, promising with Divine assistance to be unto thee a loving and faithful husband/wife as long as we both shall live." They give themselves to each other. No third person pronounces them husband and wife because Friends believe God alone can create such a union and give it significance. Following this they will sign the marriage certificate, which will then be read aloud. The meeting will continue in silent waiting upon God, while those assembled share in the worship through prayer and meditation or through spoken messages. Members of the Care Committee and all other guests will then sign the marriage certificate as witnesses to the marriage. —“Marriage Care Committee Guidebook” for Sandy Spring Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends