

GLOUCESTERSHIRE AREA QUAKER MEETING JOB DESCRIPTION

Title: Area Meeting registering officer for marriages

General Context of the Role:

Friends, from the early days, have maintained that marriage is “the Lord’s work, and we are but witnesses”. Stress is laid on the need for serious consideration prior to marriage, the clearness of the parties from all other engagements, the publicity given to the intention of marriage, and the value of the meeting for worship, in which the declarations are made by the parties in the presence of God and a number of members of the Society.

Britain Yearly Meeting has established certain procedures in the case of a marriage to be solemnised in a Friends’ meeting for worship. This is partly to ensure that the legal requirements are observed and the proper records kept. Each area meeting appoints a suitable Friend as registering officer to oversee these procedures and to register all marriages that may be solemnised according to the usage of the Society within the area meeting. Chapter 16 of Quaker faith and practice sets out the spiritual, legal and practical guidance on this.

In 2009 Britain Yearly Meeting decided to enable local Quaker meetings to recognise, celebrate, record and report same sex marriages. Subsequently The Equality Act 2010 included an amendment to The Civil Partnership Act 2004 creating a new power to make regulations enabling the registration of religious premises for civil partnerships. Meeting for Sufferings and the Church Government Advisory Group have been working on amendments to Quaker faith and practice that it is hoped will be brought to Yearly Meeting 2011 but the time scale for the implementation of The Equality Act is uncertain. Currently same sex couples cannot legally marry according to Quaker usage. The registering officer is not required to act contrary to the law, but the law does not preclude the registering officer from playing a central role in the celebration and recording of same sex marriages, acting alongside and in anticipation of the law rather than within, but certainly not in opposition to it.

Experience and qualifications sought:

The Friend appointed as registering officer needs to have an open and approachable manner, a clear understanding of the legal and procedural requirements of marriage according to Friends’ usage, and an eye for detail. S/he will be an experienced Friend, with a care for the exercise of discernment; experience of participating in meetings for clearness will be helpful. S/he needs to have neat handwriting.

Main Responsibilities:

The registering officer’s primary role is to ensure, on behalf of the Society, that proper internal and external marriage procedures for opposite sex and same sex couples are

followed (see *Quaker faith and practice, Chapter 16 and the Registering Officers' Handbook*). S/he also has an important pastoral role in the area meeting. S/he has the responsibility of ensuring that the current marriage registers and certificates are safely and securely stored (in either the area meeting's safe at Gloucester meeting house or an alternative fireproof and waterproof safe) and that completed registers are appropriately archived.

In practice this means...

Within Gloucestershire AM there have been, on average, one or two marriages solemnised each year according to Friends' usage. For each one, the registering officer has a key role in the couple's preparation for marriage, in helping to ensure that the wedding day runs as smoothly as possible, and a long-lasting interest in the couples married "in the care of the meeting". This involves a number of meetings with the couple, and may involve convening one or more meetings for clearness. It would be realistic to say that each marriage will require at least ten hours of meetings and conversations, and attendance at area meeting and the couple's own local meeting at least once each, as well as at the meeting for marriage itself. Use of a car is, therefore, probably a requirement. Area meeting will meet reasonable travel and other expenses incurred in the course of the registering officer's service.

Resources and training opportunities:

Considerable support and advice is available from the Recording Clerk's office, from experienced registering officers in other monthly meetings, and in the registering officers' handbook. Other useful publications are *Committed Relationships* (volume 6 of the Eldership and Oversight handbook series published by Quaker Books) and *Quaker Marriage* (by Edward Milligan, published by Quaker Tapestry Booklets, Kendal). A conference for registering officers is held about once every five years.

Rewards and satisfactions of the job:

This has been described as "the plum job" within the area meeting. The rewards include a sense of being of real service to Friends, the satisfaction of a job well done, and the gift of being closely involved with a couple in the preparation for and celebration of a Quaker marriage.

Seren Wildwood

Approved by MM nominations committee 04.09.2001

Updated by Kim Roberts (Registering Officer), Wendy Gerard (Deputy Registering Officer)
and Meg Holiday

and approved by Area Meeting on 14.11.10

To be further amended in line with amendments to Quaker faith and practice and changes
in the implementation of legislation