

**In the Presence of God and these our Friends:  
Quaker Marriage  
Under the Care of London Grove Monthly Meeting  
Religious Society of Friends**

**“For the right joining in marriage is the work of the Lord only, and not the priests or magistrates; for it is God’s ordinance and not Man’s; and therefore Friends cannot consent that they should join them together; for we marry none; it is the Lord’s work, and we are but witnesses.”**

**George Fox, 1669**

Revision prepared by the Care and Membership Committee – April 2010

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## INTRODUCTION

*Marriage is a sacred commitment of two people to love one another in faithful partnership with the expectation that the relationship will mature and be mutually enriching. Friends know that marriage depends on the inner experiences of the couple who marry and not on any external service or words. Thus, the ceremony in which the couple enter into this commitment is performed by the couple alone, in the presence of God, the families, and the worshipping community. Both the solemnity and the joy of the occasion are enhanced by its simplicity...*

*The Meeting extends its loving care through its oversight of the clearness for the couple and, upon approval of the Meeting, through careful attention to a meeting for worship for marriage. In addition, care is given to assure that any applicable legal requirements are addressed...*

*While most Friends' marriage ceremonies conform to civil law, couples who do not want, or are not eligible to contract, a legal marriage occasionally ask for a ceremony of commitment or a wedding under the care of the Meeting. The Religious Society of Friends has long asserted its freedom to conduct under divine leading marriage ceremonies not conforming to civil law. (**Faith and Practice**, p. 47, 50)*

London Grove Monthly Meeting will consider application for marriage under its care by couples in which at least one person is a member of London Grove Monthly Meeting. Couples who are not members of the Meeting may request use of the meeting house for a ceremony by contacting the clerk of the Meeting.

This pamphlet explains the process for marriage under the care of the Meeting and is intended to be a reference for the couple as well as the clearness and oversight committees. The current **Faith and Practice** of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting serves as the key resource for this pamphlet and is recommended as an important source for more complete information.

# Flowchart for Marriage Under Care of LGMM

## Couple

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Congratulations!

Choose marriage under care of London Grove MM (if one or both are members).

Send letter to clerk of Meeting (at least 4-6 months before proposed date).

Ask calendar keeper to reserve date for wedding, rehearsal, and reception (if applicable).

## Meeting

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Clerk receives letter.

Letter given to clerk of Care and Membership.

Clearness committee formed.

Convener of clearness committee contacts couple to arrange meeting.

Clearness committee meets with couple.

Clearness committee makes recommendation to Care and Membership.\*

Care and Membership makes recommendation to Monthly Meeting.\*

In a second letter to the clerk, couple requests permission to marry and names the date, time, and place.

Meeting approves.\*

Oversight committee formed.\*

(\*Couple notified at each step)

Couple and oversight committee plan wedding:

Vows

Order of events

Logistics (parking, welcome, etc).

Issue invitations.

Order certificate.

Obtain license if applicable.

Rehearsal

Wedding

Marriage certificate signed

Reception

Marriage recorded in Meeting records.  
Oversight committee reports to Monthly meeting

## **PROCEDURE FOR MARRIAGE UNDER THE CARE OF LONDON GROVE MONTHLY MEETING**

Marriage “under the care” of London Grove is for couples, at least one of whom is a member of the meeting. There is an expectation of a continuing, reciprocal relationship between the couple and the meeting. (Couples who do not have a membership with the meeting, or do not expect to participate in an ongoing relationship with London Grove, would be welcome to choose the meetinghouse for a wedding provided the date is approved by the keeper of the calendar and the meeting.)

It is important, as the initial planning begins, that the true nature of a Quaker wedding be made clear: it is a meeting for worship in which a marriage takes place; and, like all meetings for worship, it is open to all.

### A. Clearness for marriage

1. Persons wishing to be married under the care of the Meeting shall send a letter of their intention to marry to the clerk of the Meeting. (500 West Street Rd, Kennett Square PA 19348). This letter may be accompanied by letters of support from their respective parent(s) or guardians(s) as appropriate. In order to accomplish all of the necessary preparatory steps in an orderly and unhurried fashion a couple must begin its work with the meeting at least four to six months prior to the time when they wish to marry. The couple may wish to tentatively reserve a date with the keeper of the calendar at this time.
2. The clerk of Monthly Meeting will refer the marriage request to the Care and Membership Committee.
3. Care and Membership will then appoint three to five persons to a clearness committee for the proposed marriage. Note: If one member of the couple is a London Grove Meeting member and the other is a member of a different meeting, the couple must allow time for both meetings to consider the request and to determine if a clearness committee will be named jointly, conducted separately, or assumed by one of the two meetings.
4. The couple planning marriage will meet with the clearness committee at least once and preferably two or more times. During these meetings, it will be the responsibility of the committee:
  - to be certain that each of the individuals is free from all other obligations and commitments;
  - to look for dedication and consistency in the relationship;
  - to provide practical directions and support; and
  - to speak truth in kindness.
5. The clearness committee will report its findings to the Care and Membership Committee.
6. The Care and Membership Committee will present to the Monthly Meeting:
  - the letter of intention of marriage from the couple and

- the Care and Membership Committee's recommendation to the Meeting.

7. After Monthly Meeting's approval, in a second letter to the clerk of Monthly Meeting, the couple should request permission to marry in a regular or in a called Meeting for Worship and state the day, hour and place of the marriage. The couple may also suggest 3-5 persons who have agreed to serve on the oversight committee of the marriage, at least two of whom must be members of London Grove.

8. This request will be read and acted upon at Monthly Meeting. Once it is approved, the couple is free to accomplish their marriage. Meeting shall appoint an oversight committee and its convener.

#### B. Arrangements for marriage

1. The couple will meet promptly with the oversight committee to make wedding arrangements in accord with Quaker practice. Items to discuss include:

- Wording and ordering of the marriage certificate (see p. 7)
- The use of the facing benches
- How the bridal party will enter and be seated
- The seating of the couple, the wedding party (including attendants and parents), and the oversight committee
- Who will open the meeting by welcoming guests and explaining the form of a Friends wedding, in regards to the solemnity of the occasion, the absence of clergy, and the role of those gathered (see p. 17)
- Who will read the certificate
- Who will close the meeting
- Who will be in charge of the signing of the certificate

Additional traditions or practices should be discussed between the couple and their oversight committee.

2. The Quaker regard for reverence, dignity and simplicity discourages the taking of pictures during the worship service. Flash photography and special lighting distracts worship and is clearly inappropriate. The couple should consider carefully the intrusion into the spirit of worship that recording (videotaping, visible audio taping, etc.) of any kind can present. A designated recorder to take minutes might be considered.

3. No alcoholic beverages are to be served in the meeting house or on the grounds. There is also no smoking within any part of the meetinghouse. Arrangements should be made so that the meetinghouse areas used are left in a clean condition, with trash and garbage removed, and the furniture returned to its proper place.

4. Invitations may be issued following Monthly Meeting's approval for the marriage to take place under its care.

5. The couple is encouraged to commit to memory the promises to be made vocally which should be to the following effect:

*“In the presence of God and these our friends, I (name) take thee (name) to be my husband/wife/partner, promising with Divine assistance to be unto thee a loving and faithful husband/wife/partner so long as we both shall live.” (Faith and Practice)*

Any contemplated changes from the traditional text deserve thoughtful and careful consideration in consultation with the oversight committee.

### C. Wedding certificate

1. The couple assumes responsibility for ordering or purchasing their wedding certificate. The marriage certificate should be prepared in ample time. Preprinted certificates are available for purchase or the couple may wish to have one prepared by hand.

2. The spoken vows should match the written vows. The oversight committee should review the traditional wording of the marriage certificate with the couple, including any desired word changes. The traditional wording for the marriage certificate is as follows:

*Whereas (name) of (address), son of (names of parents: use mother’s maiden name), and (name) of (address) daughter of (names of parents: use mother’s maiden name), having declared their intentions of marriage with each other to London Grove Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held at \_\_\_\_\_, their proposed marriage was allowed by that Meeting.*

*Now this is to certify to whom it may concern, that for the accomplishment of their intention, this \_\_\_\_ day of the \_\_\_\_ month, in the year of our Lord \_\_\_\_\_, they, (name) and (name) appeared in a meeting for worship of the Religious Society of Friends, held at \_\_\_\_\_, and (name) taking (name) by the hand, did on this solemn occasion, declare that he took her, (name), to be his wife, promising with Divine assistance to be unto her a loving and faithful husband so long as they both shall live; and then, in the same assembly (name) did in like manner declare that she took him, (name), to be her husband, promising with Divine assistance to be unto him a loving and faithful wife so long as they both shall live. And moreover, they, (name and name), did as further confirmation thereof, then and there, to this certificate set their hands.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
(name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(name)

*And we having been present at the marriage have as witnesses hereto set our hands.*

### D. Marriage license

1. If applicable, the couple obtains a self-uniting marriage license through a Pennsylvania county courthouse or city hall. In Pennsylvania (*information from [www.chesco.org/wills](http://www.chesco.org/wills) September 2009*):

- a. The couple should ask for the marriage license appropriate for a Friends ceremony, i.e. which does not require a member of the clergy or a government official. The county refers to this as a “self-uniting license”.
- b. Both members of the couple must appear together to obtain the license.
- c. The application for the license can be made no more than 60 days nor less than three business days prior to the wedding date.
- d. Physicals and blood tests are no longer requirements for obtaining a marriage license in Pennsylvania.
- e. Each member of the couple should provide social security number (if they have one) and photo identification that shows current legal name and date of birth.
- f. There is a fee(\$50 in Feb. 2010) for the marriage license which must be paid in cash.
- g. The license can be used in any county in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. An out-of state license cannot be used in PA, nor can a PA license be used out-of-state.
- h. The county where the couple obtains their marriage license is the county to which the oversight committee must return the signed license after the marriage has been accomplished.

#### E. Rehearsal

1. The date and time of the rehearsal should be set so that all who are to participate in the marriage ceremony can be present. This must be approved by the Meeting via the keeper of the calendar.
2. One member of the oversight committee should assume responsibility for being in charge of the rehearsal so that it can move with dispatch and will reflect the Quaker ideal of simplicity.

Some couples will need very little assistance from the oversight committee beyond determining who will welcome the guests to this special meeting for worship for their marriage, where the couple will sit and how they will accomplish the signing of their marriage certificate. Some couples may wish to have a wedding party, and in this case a rehearsal is helpful in preparing appropriately for the role of the wedding party, the arrival of the guests, the entry of the couple and bridal party, the welcoming of the guests to a Quaker wedding, the taking of the marriage vows, the reading and signing of the certificate, and the closing of meeting.

3. At the rehearsal, the oversight committee should check to be certain that small, but important, details have been considered, such as assigning people to help with the

parking of cars, securing pens with permanent ink for the signing of the certificate, assigning the moving of the table with the certificate before the couple for their signatures during the wedding, and using weights and blotters within the table drawer for securing the certificate for signing.

#### F. Meeting for Worship for Marriage

1. The Quaker marriage ceremony takes place during a meeting for worship in which those present, including Meeting members who wish to attend, will be invited to share in the service through prayer, meditation and spoken ministry. The couple marries one another through the exchange of their vows in the presence of God and those gathered.

2. An example of the events of a Friends simple wedding ceremony:

- Guests and the couple assemble before the appointed hours.
- The oversight committee may sit together on the facing benches or near the front of the Meeting.
- A designated person stands to welcome guests and explain the Quaker wedding process. (“Sample Welcome and Explanation”, see following)
- Meeting settles into a reverent silence which may be as long as the couple wishes before taking their vows.
- The couple stand, face each other, take hands and recite their vows.
- Two people so designated may rise and bring the table on which the wedding certificate rests and place it before the couple for each to sign, using their chosen married names.
- The certificate is read aloud and guests are requested to sign as witnesses following the meeting for worship.
- Meeting for worship continues, during which there may be messages, prayers and music.
- Designated members of the oversight committee will close the meeting with the shaking of hands.
- The newly-married couple and two members of the oversight committee sign two copies of the marriage license, one for the couple to keep and the other to be returned by a member of the oversight committee to the Clerk of Courts office in West Chester, or wherever the license was obtained
- A member of the oversight committee sees that a photo copy of the certificate is made for the Monthly Meeting’s Marriage Record Book.

3. The oversight committee sees that the certificate of marriage is properly signed by the guests. Each person witnessing the marriage should sign the certificate after the meeting for worship has concluded. Following Quaker tradition omit the use of titles such as Mr., Mrs., Dr., etc. (e.g. John M. Smith, Mary Johnson Smith).

4. The oversight committee sees that a copy of the certificate is made for Meeting records and the original is returned to the couple.

5. A member of the oversight committee safeguards the marriage license, then obtains the signatures of the couple and of at least two members of the committee immediately following the service and promptly delivers or mails the license to the proper authorities at the courthouse or city hall where the license was obtained.

6. If there are flowers at the service and the couple and family do not choose to take them following the service, they may be left for meeting for worship, assuming Meeting will be gathering the next day. The oversight committee assumes responsibility for their distribution to Crosslands, Kendal, or absent members held in the Light after meeting for worship.

7. The oversight committee reports on the successful completion of the wedding at the next Monthly Meeting. The report includes testimony to completion of the signing of the license and return of the license to the courthouse or city hall where it was obtained. The report should also provide the name(s) assumed by the couple after marriage for the proper recording in the monthly meeting minutes. If no members of the Oversight Committee are present at monthly meeting, a written report may be submitted.

### **ONGOING CARE AND NURTURING OF FRIENDS MARRIED UNDER THE CARE OF THE MEETING**

London Grove Monthly Meeting endeavors to provide ongoing care and nurture for Friends married under the meeting's care. Both the couple and the meeting expect a continuing, reciprocal relationship. If the couple relocates, the meeting may wish to make a special effort to maintain a relationship with them and remain open to requests for support or help. However, actual nurture is best carried out by the meeting to which the couple transfers.

## NOTES FOR THE CLEARNESS COMMITTEE

Marriage clearness is a gift of love, support and caring from the Monthly Meeting to the couple intending marriage. The clearness committee is composed of three to five individuals who meet with the couple to help them consider what is involved in building a lasting and fulfilling relationship. The clearness committee must also satisfy itself that there are no impediments to the accomplishment of the marriage. The clearness committee provides the couple with an opportunity to consider their readiness for marriage. The clearness committee should carefully and lovingly help the couple in their consideration. In providing its assistance, the clearness committee will strive to support the couple with loving concern and a genuine desire to be helpful.

The members of the clearness committee attend to the following:

1. The clearness committee acts for the Monthly Meeting and is required to report to it through the Care and Membership Committee. The clearness committee should be mindful of the final authority of the Monthly Meeting.
2. It is recommended that the clearness committee meet together before the first meeting with the couple in order to prepare themselves. One of the members should be appointed convener.
3. The clearness committee should promptly acknowledge its charge by contacting the couple, identifying themselves as the clearness committee, arranging meeting times, dates and places, and providing the couple with this pamphlet.
4. Clearness committee members should review “Clearness: The Process” in *Faith and Practice* and should take *Faith and Practice* with them to the meeting for reference and to answer questions.
5. It should ascertain whether either party has been married previously to make sure that all legal requirements have been met.
6. Each meeting with the couple should begin with a period of silent worship. A private, relaxed and warm atmosphere with no time pressures sets a supportive tone. The Meetinghouse could be used or the clearness committee might wish to consider the home of one of its members.
7. The clearness committee is reminded to respect the confidentiality of all conversations. This should be explicitly stated to the couple.
8. The clearness committee can be guided by these suggested queries for the couple from *Faith and Practice*:
  - a. How did the couple meet? What values and beliefs do they hold in common?
  - b. On what matters do they differ? Can they meet differences with humor and respect?

- c. Do they both see marriage as sacred? Are they open to seeking divine assistance? What are their plans for nurturing the spiritual basis for their marriage?
- d. Do they each see themselves and their partner as equal and trusted, sharing responsibilities and decisions? Do they communicate feelings, needs, dreams and fears?
- e. Have they thought about their faith and practice as a couple? What will be their relationship with London Grove Monthly Meeting?
- f. Are they aware of the need for other friendships that contribute to both individual growth and marriage relationship?
- g. Have they thought about children, and the joys and the challenges families create, including consideration of how work is shared?
- h. If there are children in the relationship to consider, has the couple broached the subject of this change of relationship with them?
- i. How do they view their relationships to their extended families? To their community? To society as a whole?
- j. Are there prior obligations – legal, financial or other – that need to be met?
- k. What are the views of the couple’s parents concerning this relationship?
- l. Has the couple considered financial goals and responsibilities within?
- m. Has each member of the couple fully disclosed physical or mental challenges they are aware of? Does each partner have an understanding of the implications for the relationship of such conditions?
- n. What questions does the couple have?

9. The clearness committee should emphasize to the couple that a Quaker marriage is a meeting for worship in which the marriage ceremony takes place; it is a religious, spiritual experience where God is present and the marriage is accomplished with dignity, reverence and simplicity.

10. The clearness committee should ask the couple what it means to them to be married under the care of London Grove Monthly Meeting.

11. The clearness committee should help the couple to fully understand that the vows or promises which they make to each other at the wedding will be the foundation of their marriage. If these promises differ from that which is stated in *Faith and Practice*, the committee may help the couple in composing alternative promises with which Friends would be comfortable. It is important that the vows said and the words on the certificate be the same.

12. The clearness committee should be familiar with the marriage license process and explain the process to the couple.

13. The clearness committee should seek to know and talk with the couple as two individuals, and not just as a couple. The committee may seek to meet with each person separately. The clearness committee is encouraged to meet with each person separately. The clearness committee should be open to the possibility that additional meetings with the couple may be necessary.

14. The committee should point out to the couple that an oversight committee for the wedding will be appointed by Monthly Meeting. The couple should be asked whether there is anyone they would particularly like to serve on this committee. Members of another Meeting may be included if so desired.

15. It is the responsibility of the clearness committee to:

- a. Inform the couple of the clearness committee's recommendation to Care and Membership regarding the couple's clearness.
- b. Inform the couple of the action taken by Care and Membership.
- c. Notify the couple of the action taken by Monthly Meeting.
- d. Notify the convener of the oversight committee of the action taken by Monthly Meeting.

16. The clearness committee should inform the couple that calendar dates for both the rehearsal and the wedding day need to be reserved early in order to avoid conflicts with Meeting activities. Dates, times and plans for the use of the Meetinghouse and grounds should be registered with the keeper of the calendar.

## NOTES FOR THE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

The oversight committee is entrusted with the final details for the marriage itself. The primary duty of this Committee is to see that the marriage is accomplished with dignity, reverence and simplicity. Specific duties of the oversight committee are set forth in the preceding pages and in *Faith and Practice* and a copy of each should be on hand at all meetings with the couple and at the rehearsal.

For reference, a brief checklist of important items follows:

1. Contact the couple and arrange to meet with them as soon as possible in order to continue marriage plans.
2. Speak with the members of the couple's clearness committee on matters relevant to their responsibilities and support of the couple and their marriage.
3. Review applicable legal requirements of the state in which the marriage is to take place and requirements for a marriage license. ([www.chesco.org/wills](http://www.chesco.org/wills) is a useful resource)
4. Discuss plans for the wedding, including:
  - Wording and ordering of the marriage certificate (see item 10, p. 12)
  - The use of the facing benches
  - How the bridal party will enter and be seated
  - The seating of the couple, the wedding party (including attendants and parents), and the oversight committee
  - Who will open the meeting by welcoming guests and explaining the form of a Friends wedding, in regards to the solemnity of the occasion, the absence of clergy, and the role of those gathered. (see Appendix)
  - Who will read the certificate
  - Who will close the meeting
  - Who will be in charge of the signing of the certificate
5. Rehearsal:
  - Determine date/time and who will be in charge.
  - Review plans for parking
  - Plan moving of table
  - Locate pens with permanent ink, weights and blotter for certificate
6. Day of wedding:
  - Hold marriage certificate and make sure signed after exchange of vows. Following Quaker tradition omit the use of titles such as Mr., Mrs., Dr., etc. (e.g. John M. Smith, Mary Johnson Smith.)
  - Hold license until signed by couple and 2 committee members (2 copies) and retain one copy to return to courthouse.

7. After wedding:

- If flowers are left, display in meeting for worship and then distribute to Friends.
- Have copy of marriage certificate made for recorder and return original to couple.
- Mail copy of marriage license to issuing body.
- Report to the Care and Membership Committee and to monthly meeting regarding the suitable accomplishment of the marriage, the satisfaction of legal requirements, and the proper recording of the certificate. The report should also provide the name(s) assumed by the couple after marriage for the proper recording in the monthly meeting minutes. If no members of the Oversight Committee are present at monthly meeting, a written report may be submitted.

## SAMPLE WELCOME AND EXPLANATION

This may be read or spoken freely. Printed information for the guests, such as the “Quaker Marriage” pamphlet (PYM) or a personally written explanation has also been found to be helpful. This can be included with the wedding invitations or made available the day of the wedding.

*Welcome. As a member of London Grove Friends Monthly Meeting and of this meeting for worship this afternoon, it is my joy to welcome you, Anna and Seth’s family and friends who have been called to participate and witness their marriage.*

*We gather today as one group, honoring Anna and Seth’s request to marry in the manner of Friends under the care of London Grove Meeting. Friends, also known as Quakers, recognize marriage as a sacred commitment of two people made during a meeting for worship, to love one another in faithful partnership. No clergy take part in a Quaker wedding. No rituals of official pronouncements are necessary to unite the couple. Marriage depends upon the inner experiences of the couple who marry, not upon an external service or words. A marriage is created when the couple, in the presence of God, their families and the community of friends, freely give themselves to one another.*

*Anna and Seth will sign a Quaker marriage certificate which records the union they have made today. It will then be read aloud that each of you, as witnesses, may sign it using your given names at the close of the meeting.*

*In the manner of Friends, our worship will continue in silence. We invite you to comfortably settle into this silence. Do not be alarmed or uncomfortable with the silence. Sometimes what is happening is deeper than words, for we are gathered to hold this new union of Anna and Seth in the Light. We, all of us gathered in this meeting this afternoon, are offering our own prayers and our hopes that all that is good may be theirs, we are bringing forth our own memories of knowing Anna and Seth, and we are reflecting upon our own relationships. The silence is not empty but full of love.*

*We invite each of you to break the silence. For during this meeting for worship, you may feel yourself moved to speak aloud and to share your thoughts or prayers with Anna and Seth. You may have brought a reading or have a favorite quotation you wish to share. Messages given at Friends meetings for worship and marriage come in all forms and from all places of the heart and spirit. Your words may be prepared or spontaneous; they may be advice, or a memory, or a wish; they may be as brief as a word or two, or as long as a story. They may be sentimental, joyous, cautious, wise, witty or serious. They are your gifts, and Anna and Seth welcome them all today. If you are led to speak, please leave some time before you rise so that the previous message may be reflected on.*

*In the custom of Friends, the meeting will break, or end, with a handshake among the Care and Membership Committee and then among yourselves.*

*Let us now worship*