



A Quaker wedding

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Photograph: Philip Meech



A wedding is a time of celebration, joy and hopefulness. In the presence of family, friends and the local community, a couple chooses to make a lifelong commitment of faithfulness and love. Those who attend the wedding promise help and support. This commitment is spiritual, emotional and physical. Made publicly and openly, it is recognised in law.

A Quaker wedding begins with people gathering in silence and stillness, with a sense of waiting and openness. You can participate by holding the couple in your heart and thoughts.

For Quakers it is important that weddings take the same simple form as regular Quaker worship (often called 'meeting for worship'). When you are ready, go into the meeting room and try to take a little time to settle. The meeting will start with a short introduction from one of the Quakers present.

After a short time of stillness, the couple take each other by the hand and make solemn declarations of marriage. Each in turn says: "Friends, I take this my friend ... [name] to be my spouse, promising, through divine assistance, to be unto him/her a loving and faithful spouse, so long as we both on earth shall live."

After this the Quaker marriage certificate is signed by the married couple and two or more witnesses. This certificate is read aloud by the local Quaker registering officer, either immediately after the declarations have been made or towards the close of the meeting.

Rings play no formal part in a Quaker wedding, but many couples like to exchange them after they have made their declarations.

The meeting continues as it began, with a period of silence, in which anyone present may speak. Quakers call this 'ministry'. It may be the sharing of guidance or encouragement, or insights from people who feel called or 'prompted' to speak. This can be a time when the couple concerned gain inspiration, help and encouragement. What they hear can continue to be a source of strength to them during their married life. It is also an opportunity for those who attend the meeting to ask God's blessing on the marriage and commit themselves to supporting the couple in whatever way they can. It is helpful to leave a pause for reflection between contributions.

The meeting will be brought to a close by two Quakers shaking hands. You are invited to shake hands with those around you. As soon as the meeting has ended, everyone who has been present at the wedding is invited to sign the Quaker marriage certificate. This makes it a document that couples can cherish for years to come. Quaker weddings are legal procedures as well as spiritual ones so, when the certificate is signed, the couple and their witnesses will go with the registering officer to complete the civil paperwork.

The solemnation of a marriage is only its beginning. It is a joy to attend a wedding and Quakers believe the commitment to the couple continues beyond the day.