Proposed changes to Quaker marriage declaration

REVISED paper

This version of the paper now includes information about the Welsh language Quaker marriage declaration.

Yearly Meeting is asked to agree proposed changes to the Quaker marriage declaration.

The principles underlying the changes have been agreed by Meeting for Sufferings, but the agreement of Yearly Meeting is needed in order for the changes to come into effect.

If Yearly Meeting agrees to these changes then amended text for *Quaker faith & practice* sections 16.52 (English) and 16.53 (Welsh) will be prepared for YM to agree at a future session.

Background

In December 2023 the Book of Discipline Revision Committee asked Meeting for Sufferings to consider whether there should be changes to the Quaker marriage declaration. Meeting for Sufferings in turn asked Friends and meetings to consider these questions. It received more than 50 minutes and contributions from area meetings, central committees and other bodies, and from individual Friends. In October 2024 Sufferings asked Quaker Life Central Committee (QLCC) to take the matter forward.

Quaker Life Central Committee sent specific proposals to Meeting for Sufferings, which agreed the following minute in December 2025:

Meeting for Sufferings minute MfS/25/12/15 Quaker marriage declaration

In December 2023 Meeting for Sufferings received a minute from the Book of Discipline Revision Committee asking us to consider the wording of the marriage declaration (minute MfS/23/12/07 refers). We invited and received contributions from individual Friends, area meetings, central committees and other bodies. In October 2024 we asked for a working group to be formed under the auspices of Quaker Life Central Committee to continue working on this matter (minute MfS/24/10/11). We now received minute QLCC 25.55 of Quaker Life Central Committee, which encloses the report of the working group. Klaus Huber, a member of the working group, has introduced this.

It is our discernment that a change should be made to the Quaker marriage declaration. We have considered the new words brought to us by the Quaker Life Central Committee working group and we endorse them. We agree that it is acceptable that the two spouses need not use the same phrase in their declarations.

We ask Yearly Meeting to consider the proposed changes to the Quaker marriage declaration.

We ask our Church Government Advisory Group to draft suitable text for *Quaker faith & practice* so that Yearly Meeting can see how the change might work in practice.

We thank Quaker Life Central Committee and the working group for their work.

We send this minute to Agenda Planning Committee.

Summary of changes proposed to the declaration

The declaration may be made in English or Welsh.

Yearly Meeting is asked to approve the following changes, which can be summarised as follows:

Change 1

Currently there is a choice of words with which to follow the first word of the declaration. The options are EITHER 'In the presence of God' OR 'In the fear of the Lord and in the presence of this assembly'. There is also a choice to use neither of these phrases and to go straight on to 'I take this my friend'.

The proposal in English is to replace these two alternatives with one single option i.e. 'In the presence of God and this assembly'. The option to go straight on to 'I take this my friend' remains.

The proposal in Welsh is for the optional wording 'Ym mhresenoldeb Duw a'r gynulleidfa hon'.

Change 2

Currently there are two options for how the marriage promises are given. These are EITHER 'through divine assistance' OR 'with God's help'.

The proposal in English is to add a third option: 'upheld by the Light of Love'.

In order to make the words flow most naturally, there will in practice be four options:

(a) … promising, through divine assistance …
(b) … promising, with God's help …
(c) … with God's help promising …
(d) … upheld by the Light of Love promising …

The proposal in Welsh is to add the option: 'wedi fy nghynnal gan y Goleuni'.

This wording would translate in English as ‘upheld by the Light’, and is felt by native speakers to sound more natural than ‘wedi fy nghynnal gan Oleuni Cariad’, which would be ‘upheld by the Light of Love’.

As noted in the minute from Meeting for Sufferings, there was a further recommendation that the two spouses need not use the same phrase in their declarations. The Recording Clerk advised that this change could be implemented immediately and so this has already been brought into effect, although the text of *Quaker faith & practice* has not yet been amended.