

But speaking the truth in love,  
we must grow up in every way into him who is the head,  
Into Christ. Eph 4:15

June 24, 2013

Dear Friends:

I am writing this *Clerk's Letter* to bring the following information to your attention before we gather in Annual Sessions in August. The *Clerk's Letter* is being sent to everyone on the Wilmington FRIEND electronic and snail mailing list.

Sixteen years ago, Wilmington Yearly Meeting approved a minute on same-gender marriages. The minute states that Wilmington Yearly Meeting "remain(s) committed to the traditional Quaker understanding and practice that sexual expression is confined to the context of marriage between one man and one woman. We, as monthly meetings within Wilmington Yearly Meeting will not bless same gender unions." The minute concludes: Friends APPROVED the report of the actions of the Permanent Board and the document, accepting the report as a working document. (See The Wilmington Yearly Meeting statement on "same gender marriages" from the 1997 Minute Book, pages 8-9.)

After accepting the responsibilities of Presiding Clerk, I have been in conversation with numerous Friends in Wilmington Yearly Meeting about same-gender issues. It became clear there are several monthly meetings, including those who stood aside in 1997, who cannot say that if a same-gender couple in their monthly meeting asked for a marriage ceremony, they would be guided by the 1997 minute. In addition there is confusion about what Friends meant when the minute on same-gender marriages was approved as a **working document**.

My question to the Yearly Meeting at this time is: do we want to wait until one of our monthly meetings celebrates a same-gender marriage to take up consideration of what Friends mean by a "working document", OR do we want to enter a conversation now about what this 'working document' language means in order to give clarity for our monthly meetings in facing decisions they may be asked to make about this issue?

At our 2013 Annual Sessions this summer, there is a block of time from 1:00-2:00 PM on Friday, August 2, in which the Yearly Meeting may consider the following questions:

- 1) Do we want to clarify what we mean by a 'working document' in the 1997 minute on same-gender marriages? and if so,
- 2) Are Friends ready to set up an agreed-upon process by which the Yearly Meeting will seek to clarify what is meant by 'working document' in the 1997 minute?

I have always believed it is our intention as Wilmington Yearly Meeting Friends to honor the minutes we approve. The purpose of Friday's meeting is not to discuss same-gender but marriages but rather to decide how to honor the intention of the 1997 minute on same-gender marriages. It will allow us time to seek a sense of the meeting on where we go from here.

Please be in attendance during the Meeting for Business sessions. Your prayerful participation and listening as a community under guidance of the Holy Spirit is what makes Quaker business procedure so powerful.

May our time together be blessed by Christ's Presence amongst us.

Patricia Thomas, Presiding Clerk

Wilmington Yearly Meeting

## From the 1997 Minute Book (pages 8-9)

### The Wilmington Yearly Meeting statement on "same gender marriages"

Reports of the Permanent Board sessions on Feb. 15 and June 28 were presented the Yearly Meeting. At the June 28 session, a statement on same gender marriages was adopted with representatives of Community, Wilmington, Eastern Hills and Dover Meetings and five individuals recorded as 'standing aside'. The individuals were Torn Hill, James Ellis, John Hubbard, Mike Miller and Neil Snarr. The adopted statement said:

"Wilmington Yearly Meeting recognizes the diversity of views held by Friends concerning sexual ethics, but remains committed to the traditional Quaker understanding and practice that sexual expression is confined to the context of marriage between one man and one woman. We, as monthly meetings within, Wilmington Yearly Meeting, will not bless same gender unions, We also continue to support the rights of all regardless of sexual orientation and to oppose violence against homosexual people whether verbal or physical. One of the realities which we have to acknowledge is that 'all have sinned and come short of the glory of God'. Given that reality, the question faced by Christians is how to express redemptive and healing love that will draw men and women into the life of wholeness and purity which God desires for us. We believe that such ministry must combine the 'grace and truth' that Jesus came to bring (John 1:17).'

Franchot Ballinger, clerk of Community Monthly Meeting, said he could not accept that statement. He added that he did not think that Community Meeting would say that. It would not again bless a same sex union. Franchot said he would not stand aside. Several persons spoke on the issue. This discussion prompted Neil to say that "there are very kind, loving people here today with a whole different feeling." It was agreed that there could be unity without unanimity.

Friends APPROVED the report of the actions of the Permanent Board and the document, accepting the report as a working document.