

Shepherdstown Friends Meeting Minute On Gender and Sexual Equality

Robert Barclay, Ester Biddle, and other early Friends of the 17th century quoted and paraphrased many times the opening verses of the First Epistle of John 1:1-4 to express their experience of the Divine Presence in their lives and the fruits of the Spirit in their communities:

We proclaim what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the gift of life. This gift was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it. This gift is a word that has spoken to our condition. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

21st century Friends in Baltimore Yearly Meeting find these words express our experience of the Light (the gift of life) shining through the lives of Friends whose sexualities do not conform to the expectations of general society, because they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender, and because they find that to live otherwise would be a lie. These dear Friends have worshiped and labored with us as vital members of our Monthly Meetings and our Yearly Meeting. We testify that their presence is a gift among us. We have witnessed the fruits of the Spirit that these treasured Friends have generously shared with us.

We Friends remember the persecution that our Quaker forbearers suffered in earlier centuries for their acts of nonconformity motivated by conscience and their commitment to the truth. Mindful of our heritage and in steadfast growing love, we in Baltimore Yearly Meeting stand in support of full equality – including marriage – for our gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender brothers and sisters, and work for the elimination of all policies and actions that diminish their dignity, malign their spiritual worth, or deny their loving relationships.

We acknowledge that many Friends elsewhere in the US, and the world, have not personally known gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender persons, and, lacking experiences akin to ours, have difficulty with this testimony. Many do not share our vision of equality, justice, and peace for nonconforming sexual orientations and gender identities. Because of these facts, we in Baltimore Yearly Meeting will continue to labor with other Friends on behalf of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Friends by participation in all our existing memberships in Friends' associations – as imperfect as each of them is – towards a generous, compassionate vision of the loving community.

Adopted by the Shepherdstown Friends Meeting, WV, on Nov 21, 2010.