

## Sexuality and Gender (November 11, 2017)

*The mystery of sex continues to be greater than our capacity to comprehend it...[I]ts mystery relate(s) to the mystery of God's relationship to us.*

- Mary S. Calderone, 1973

Quakers consider sexuality to be a gift. Like the gift of spirituality that we have also been given, it is intended to be developed and progressively understood as each of us proceeds through our life's journey. Considering one without the other may mean that we do not fully grow in our understanding of the role of either in our lives.

Friends regard discernment about one's sexual behavior as a reflection of the Testimonies (pages xx-xx). We are called to interact with each other in ways that recognize that all of us are beloved by God. Sexual relations, like all human relations, should be marked by honesty, integrity, and mutual respect.

Sexual abuse and exploitation are inconsistent with Friends testimonies. Just as individuals bear responsibility in those areas, so too do Quaker meetings. In order for the dignity of all people of God to be honored and protected, each meeting must do everything possible to provide a safe and loving space for all. The meeting must take care to prevent occurrences of sexual abuse and misconduct in its midst or in any events under its auspices, and to undertake appropriate actions both of a preventive and responsive nature whenever it sees the opportunity or necessity of doing so. These matters are formally the responsibility of the care and counsel committee (pages xx-xx), but every member and attender plays a part in nurturing a trustworthy and beloved community.

Our cultural understanding of sexuality and gender is evolving quickly at present, perhaps more quickly than at any previous time in recorded history. This fact is reflected in changing views on matters such as sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, same-sex relationships, and polyamory, among many others. Friends' perspectives regarding these matters can be expected to continue to change in the foreseeable future and related issues will continue to emerge. Friends are called to acknowledge the importance of seeking the divine will in all such cases. While such discernment can be difficult and complex, Friends are reminded that we are called to act always in ways that embody Love.

### Queries:

- 1) Is my sexual behavior consistent with Friends testimonies on honesty and integrity?
- 2) How does my sexual behavior reflect Friends' belief that all of life is sacred?
- 3) Does the meeting accept that although there is diversity in matters of sexuality and gender among Friends, we are a Religious Society because we are committed to a unity that is more profound than that diversity?
- 4) How spiritually open is the meeting to sharing and hearing the diversity of experiences and viewpoints of its members and attenders on matters of sexuality and gender?
- 5) Is the meeting willing and able to offer protection and support to those who have been affected by sexual abuse and exploitation? Is the meeting prepared with appropriate contact information to make referrals to professional resources?