



**Religious Society of Friends
General Meeting for Scotland
Same Sex Partnerships 'Soundings' from
Meetings in Scotland**

A letter was sent from the GM Clerk to all PMs and MMs in Scotland asking that discussions should take place surrounding the following four questions

- Q. *Should we be content with the law as it stands?*
- Q. *Should same sex couples be offered a meeting for preparation with the help of the Registering officer in the same way as heterosexual couples who wish to be married in the care of the meeting?*
- Q. *Do you think the recently enacted law should be changed to allow same-sex couples to register their civil partnership in a religious ceremony or Meeting for Worship?*
- Q. *Should this then be a 'wedding and a marriage'?*

Not all meetings decided to use the format of answering the questions but most found it useful as a starting point.

A total of 13 responses were received from:

East of Scotland MM and PMs – Angus, Dundee, St Andrews

North of Scotland MM and PMs – Aberdeen, Inverness

South East Scotland MM and PMs – Central Edinburgh, South Edinburgh, Tweeddale

West Scotland Elders and PMs – Milngavie

Observations

1. The smaller and more remote meetings did not respond.
2. The responses from MMs often differed from their constituent meetings.
3. West Scotland MM did not respond directly as the original Concern came from the MM elders and which was endorsed by the MM.
4. There was a wide range of views and opinions.

Points from the responses.

1. Most meetings were united that BYM should have a framework, including a uniform procedure, by which same-sex couples can celebrate their commitment to a lifelong and loving relationship within a meeting for worship and under the care of the meeting, but most respondents specified that the Registering Officers should not be involved.
2. All meetings agreed that same-sex couples should be offered a Meeting for Preparation or Clearness but meetings were divided as to who should offer this, and some specified it should not be the Registering officer.
3. Most meetings reported that they approached the discussions with the Testimony to Equality in mind but there were different interpretations offered and strong views held. Although some of the respondent meetings were in favour of a change in legislation to

treat same-sex couples exactly the same as heterosexual couples in marriage laws, most of these did not want to pursue the changes at present and wanted the present law to have a chance to settle and be accepted.

4. There was a wide range of views on the use of the words 'wedding' and 'marriage'. Some felt the words were totally unimportant but others felt strongly that the words should be retained in the traditional sense, for heterosexual couples.

Specific findings in Relation to Questions.

Content with the law as it stands?

Content = 4 Unclear = 2 Not content = 6

Divided

Should same-sex couples be offered a Meeting for Preparation?

No = 0 Unclear = 3 Yes = 9

United

Should Registering Officer be involved?

Unclear = 4 Yes = 2 No = 6

Strongly No

Should the present law be changed?

No = 5 Unclear = 2 Yes = 5

Divided

Should this then be called a wedding/marriage?

No = 7 Unclear = 4 Yes = 1

Strongly No

NB. 'Unclear' means not mentioned or undecided.

Other Comments made by Meetings

'The law does not recognise civil partnership as marriage, not because it is considered inferior to the institution of marriage, but because as a matter of objective fact and common understanding is indeed different'.

'The concept of marriage itself is changing and the value people place on it is changing. The term partnership' might satisfactorily be used for all couples. There are issues of partnership for people who live together but not in a sexual relationship'.

'To respect the right of those, including those of other denominations, with strongly held beliefs about same-sex partnerships, not to be compelled to undertake such ceremonies and should be able to decline on grounds of conscience'.

'The special status of Registering Officers in the Society should not be put in jeopardy by campaigning for new legislation'.

It was obvious from the responses, that those Friends who met to discuss this topic did so carefully, sensitively and prayerfully. The words of George Fox were mentioned "For we marry none; it is the Lord's work, and we are but witnesses".

Pamala McDougall

John Melling

Pamala McDougall

General Meeting for Scotland Clerk

GM. Assistant Clerk