

## Quaker experience

Friends' spiritual experience has led us to a concern for personal integrity, social justice and for peace. We try to bring our lives and actions into conformity with our beliefs.

Quakers believe that there is 'that of God' in everyone and that all people have the same privileges and responsibilities regardless of race, age, creed, gender or sexual orientation. We value all people and affirm the power and joy of all truly loving relationships.

We hope that gay and lesbian people who are searching for truth will continue to find a spiritual home in the Religious Society of Friends. We also hope that our whole community will outgrow its intolerance of differences in sexual orientation and understand that we are all loved by God.

### **Friends of Lesbians and Gays Concerns group**

Brisbane:

Duncan Frewin: [wahcumba@bigpond.com](mailto:wahcumba@bigpond.com)

Hobart: Sue Headley: [suefx@netspace.net.au](mailto:suefx@netspace.net.au)

## Quaker Meetings

All people who seek to grow spiritually are welcome to participate in the Quaker community.

The Friends' Meeting for Worship provides an opportunity for all people to nurture their spiritual experience and also to be aware of the Universal and Eternal Spirit. Within a local Friends' Meeting participants also find a spiritual community where our common humanity transcends our differences.

Our Meeting for Worship is based on silent worship, rather than outward religious forms and hierarchies. Vocal contributions may arise out of the silence when someone feels moved by the Spirit. The Meeting for Worship can be profoundly uplifting, a time of spiritual renewal and growth.

Business Meetings of Friends are conducted in a spirit of worship.

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## **Gay and lesbian people in the Society of Friends (Quakers)**



## Some Quaker history

The Religious Society of Friends (commonly known as Quakers) originated in the 17th century as a movement to return to the original spiritual basis of Christianity, free of ritual and hierarchy. With their belief in 'that of God' in every person, Quakers quickly became known for their equal treatment of all people, especially those who were disadvantaged or persecuted.

Early concerns about the equal treatment of women and children and about prison conditions have continued to this day. A strong commitment to pacifism was followed by conscientious objection to military service. In the 19th century, Quakers were involved in the movement to abolish slavery, and in Australia, were and still are concerned for the right treatment of Aboriginal people.

*Our life is love and peace and tenderness; and bearing one with another and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another and helping one another up with a tender hand.*

Isaac Pennington, 1667

## Quakers and homosexuality

With this background, Quakers supported the establishment of Queensland's first openly homosexual organisation, C.A.M.P. Inc., in 1971. In 1975, Quakers officially stated:

*The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia calls for a change in the laws ... to eliminate discrimination against homosexuals. This statement is made in the light of the Society's desire to remove discrimination and persecution in the community. The Society also calls on all people to seek more knowledge and understanding of the diversity of human relationships and to affirm the worth of love in all of them.*

Yearly Meeting 1975, *Minute 23*

There followed further discussion in the Society over the next decades. Statements were made supporting gay and lesbian people and indicating that some Quaker Meetings wish to support their committed relationships.

## Quakers and relationships

By 1994 Quakers were ready to clarify their attitude to committed relationships.

*At the centre of Friends' religious experience is the consistently held belief in the equal worth of all people. Our common humanity transcends our differences. We aspire not to say or do anything or condone any statements, actions or situations which imply a lack of respect for the humanity and human rights of any person or people.*

*The Religious Society of Friends has always recognised that the Spirit of God dwells in every person, and we believe that this is regardless of gender or sexual orientation.*

Yearly Meeting 1995, *Minute 16*

Committed, same-sex relationships are as valuable as other committed and loving relationships.

Formal celebration of commitment between the partners in a relationship is possible when at least one person is a participant in a Meeting. The clerk of the Meeting will be able to discuss with couples what arrangements may be necessary for such a celebration.