

June 20, 2017

Dear Friends,

For over twenty years, Wilmington Yearly Meeting has been divided over a number of issues, but the one that seems to have caused the greatest amount of strife has been the matter of same-gender marriages. As most of you are aware, there are some Meetings and some individuals who strongly believe that the time has come for Wilmington Yearly Meeting to endorse "Marriage Equality," or at the very least to allow those who strongly believe this way to practice their beliefs without disciplinary consequences (note attached Minute from Fairview Friends). Others would be inclined to discipline those Meetings who have openly conducted Same-Gender marriages, or who have said that they will do so if opportunity arises. One Meeting has unilaterally performed a same-gender marriage regardless of the opinion of the Wilmington Yearly Meeting or its affiliated Monthly Meetings. There are some who think they should be disciplined in some way. Many others believe they should be left alone to do as they believe is right.

About two years ago I spoke at a meeting of the Ministry and Counsel Executive Committee of Wilmington Yearly Meeting, as we were holding committee meetings in Berea, Kentucky. At that time we were AGAIN arguing about gay marriage and I recommended that we table the discussion as it was not at that time legal in either state. I also stated that if it ever did become legal, that at that time I for one would be willing to reopen the discussion.

Due to the recent Supreme Court decision, same-gender marriage is now legal in both Ohio and Tennessee. Therefore, I stand true to my word and am willing to once again discuss this issue with those Friends who are concerned about it. Since that time, I have also been called upon to serve as Presiding Clerk of Wilmington Yearly Meeting. I believe it is our responsibility to seek a way forward in this divisive issue, regardless of our personal feelings on the matter. I have been talking with Friends from both perspectives about the issue of same gender marriage, and am convinced that the time has come for us to find a way forward from this issue which has long divided us. Friends, we are so divided that we cannot get anything done! This is NOT the Spirit of Christ of the testimony of Friends to the world!

Friday and Saturday, July 28 & 29, 2017 may someday be remembered as the most important days in living memory for Wilmington Yearly Meeting. We will spend time discussing the issues thoroughly on Friday. Then Saturday, the major focus of business will be consideration of how we can move forward together. The Fairview Minute is one option. Others may also be suggested and considered. If no option is found to be agreeable, perhaps we may need to begin the process of a separation into two or more groups. That is not what I want, and I do NOT believe it is necessary, but we must either find a way forward together or begin to consider how we should formally divide. The divisiveness among us is a disgrace to the cause of Christ. For the record, and for the information of Friends in Ohio, Friendsville Quarterly Meeting is NOT, and has not been for a number of years, seeking to separate and form a new Tennessee Yearly Meeting. We have come to deeply value our relationship with Wilmington Yearly Meeting, and there is no longer among us an "us vs. them" mentality.

Returning to the issue of same-gender marriage ("marriage equality"), some Meetings have already sent Minutes or Statements. Some individuals have announced an intention to do so. All are perfectly welcome to do so, but the decisions made at this session of Yearly Meeting will not be based on written statements. The various statements are being collected and will be made available. However, if you have an opinion, if these matters are important to you, PLEASE BE PRESENT! It is those who are present who will make whatever decisions that are made, if any! If you believe that Wilmington Yearly Meeting has ever been of value, that it is, or that it someday might be, we need you to be present!

I am urging every Monthly Meeting to have representatives present who can speak for your congregation, and who have the authority vested in them to consider and negotiate! Please do not come, read a printed statement, and say "I can approve nothing else without taking it back to my Monthly Meeting." If you take that position, you will be hindering any healing work the Spirit of God may do among us! You may be of the opinion that there is no room for negotiation. Fine. Come to Yearly Meeting in July and say that!

Please be in prayer, and come prepared to participate. REMEMBER, this is a 2-DAY PROCESS!

We need you engaged with us, both Friday and Saturday! Your voice and participation on SATURDAY will be inadequate unless you also attend on FRIDAY! The converse is also true!

Please be aware also that no lengthy harangues will be allowed, and it will be required that all words spoken will be loving and respectful, as befits servants of Jesus Christ.

Thank you, Friends, for listening to my concerns. I hope to have record attendance at the 2017 Sessions of Wilmington Yearly Meeting as we consider our future together!.

One final thought: I plan to send additional information about the preparatory topics of discussion, so please watch for and read those e-mails when they come!

In Jesus Love,

Dave