

Learning to value community through Quaker process during a financial crisis

RECENT STAFF TERMINATION
SHROUDED IN SILENCE,
LACK OF INFORMATION

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In the 1600s, George Fox started a movement in Northern England that became known as the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers. Quakers then began settling in North Carolina shortly after the birth of Quakerism. In the late 19th century, N.C. Quakers selected Greensboro as a central location for their New Garden Boarding School. This school led to the establishment of what we now know as Guilford College.

The basis of Quakerism is held in their testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community and equality. In 2004, Guilford College established its set of seven core values of: community, diversity, integrity, equality, justice, stewardship and excellence. So in 2004, I was pleased to have the opportunity to work at Guilford College with its rich Quaker heritage further affirmed by its own core values derived from the Quaker testimonies.

Guilford's recent financial situation that created a budgetary shortfall has led to actions that have caused many among us to call into question Guilford College's sincerity with respect to its core values. It

seems the issue can be characterized as a tension between the value of stewardship and the value of community. Although stewardship is often not listed as one of the Quaker testimonies, it certainly is a principle that resonates with Quakers. So most of us have been able to accept reasonable measures needed to ensure the survival of Guilford College. We had been advised throughout the open budgeting process that a "worst case" financial situation would involve position cuts. However, many among us were shocked in early June to learn the cuts were now a "done deal," and employees had been terminated. Some of

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the cuts were in vacant positions, but seven of the cuts were staff positions that resulted in community members losing their jobs at Guilford College. The tricky part is how to

respect and value community throughout such a survival process that involves losing members of that very community. These losses and the lack of information unsettled our college community. We were not informed of what positions had been cut, just that positions had been cut. Information about the positions and the people affected had to be learned through the campus grapevine.

While our administration has done a good job in very tough economic times, did they forget that these co-workers who no longer had a job had been a part of our community? On two occasions Friends Center did convene a Meeting for Worship in the manner of Friends. However the lack of information available created a mood of shock and confusion rather than one of understanding and support for each other. And why not hold a "reception of recognition" to thank those employees for their years of service? That could have been a great opportunity for the community to gather round in mutual support while we came to terms with (and grieved) the losses. The lack of information felt like a secret purge. I don't believe this has helped the morale of the remaining community. It may even call into question how open our community truly is.

According to the plans presented in the budgeting process there is still the possibility of more cuts next year. So, to channel the recognized founder of Quakerism: What would George Fox do?

Is marriage privatization for you?

Imagine a world where marriage has been completely privatized, where the government will no longer recognize people as being legally married. I know — pretty hard to picture something so bleak. But you might not have to picture it much longer, because that situation may become a reality.



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Earlier this month, Laurie Shrage wrote an article for The New York Times blog called "The End of 'Marriage,'" in which she closely examined the idea of privatizing marriage. This idea would call for the removal of the word "marriage" from any pieces of official legislation, with the terms "civil union" or "domestic partnership" to be used in its place.

Essentially, the state would no longer recognize a couple as being married and would instead refer to two people living in a form of legal partnership. This would allow the government to make sure the well-being of citizens was maintained without impinging upon the intimate world of marriage.

This new mandate would not only apply to heterosexual couples, but to couples in the LGBT community as well. This would consequently mean that gay and lesbian couples could raise a family, all while sharing the government benefits given to straight couples.

Furthermore, the well-being of children in a domestic partnership would be managed more carefully, as the government wouldn't have to worry about sticking their nose in family affairs. Each person would be treated as an individual, making it easier to ensure children were getting the attention, care and education they needed.

But this isn't all sunshine and puppies.

Let's pay a little closer attention to the concept of privatization. Sure, the state wouldn't be able to declare two or more people

as "married" anymore, but private institutions such as religious and ethnic groups would still be allowed to. This would give rise to further discrimination upon who can and can't get married at the hands of groups that the government couldn't do anything about.

In theory, privatization sounds like a great way of allowing people to have more freedom. However, allowing a couple, whether they be gay or straight, to operate and negotiate terms outside of the law is a terrible idea and gives citizens countless loopholes to exploit.

For example, imagine a mother who is in a civil union, but is also married to her partner by way of a shared church. The husband could ruthlessly abuse the wife, but the state could no longer charge it as "domestic abuse" and keep the abuser away from the victim. There would be no laws in place to protect people in marriages, because legal marriages would be a thing of the past.

To some, the idea of a civil union or domestic partnership may be enticing. More power to them, and if that's what they really want, then let them have it.

But don't force this absurd piece of legislation upon people who want to get married in the traditional sense, especially under the guise of "it's for the kids" or "it's to balance out inequality with gay and lesbian couples."

Privatizing marriage is not a bad idea because it goes up against old tradition. It's a bad idea because it can be exploited to the advantage of sick people looking to find loopholes that protect their abusive ways. It's a bad idea because our kids should have a standard set of laws that protect them from abuse.

If you really want to help our kids, come up with better laws for protecting them and keeping them in the hands of the right parent. And if you really want to make things even between gay and straight couples, why not just let everybody get married to whomever the hell they want to?

Hey, it's just a thought.

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