

# Using Quaker Practice

in

## Relationships Society at Large Conduct of Meeting for Business

### Introduction

By becoming members of the Religious Society of Friends, we commit ourselves to a distinctive way of life. This distinctiveness is reflected in what Friends refer to as Quaker practice. A guiding premise of Quakerism is that our actions are as important as our basic beliefs, and ought to reflect those beliefs.

The personal disciplines that we adopt on becoming committed Friends may be difficult to maintain. But the Light and the Spirit help guide us in their pursuit and help us to grow spiritually.

Although we may differ in our theological understanding and manner of worship, it is the use of Quaker practice that distinguishes us as Friends. This is one of the great contributions that Friends have made and continue to make to the world at large.

### The Quaker Testimonies

Quaker practice is rooted in our traditional testimonies, guides to the living out of our faith. Friends are encouraged to seek a better understanding of the testimonies and to lovingly support each other in living them out.

Briefly stated, these are testimonies that have guided Friends:

**Community**—a unifying bond created by shared worship and nurturing each other's gifts.

**Equality**—a respect for that of God in everyone, and hence the dignity and value of each person.

**Integrity**—a genuineness in speech and conduct that brings all parts of life into a consistent whole and leaves no room for deceit or artificiality.

**Peace**—a commitment to nonviolence and reconciliation that addresses the misuse and abuse of power in all spheres of life.

**Simplicity**—moderation in our possessions and our daily lives that leaves us free to follow the leadings of the Spirit.

Quakerism as a lived faith finds expression in our testimonies and our practices. Both spring from a belief that there is that of God in every person. This principle, referred to as the Inward Light or the Christ Within, illumines for us every aspect of life.

To bring all areas of our lives under the ordering of the Spirit, we try to follow these practices in relationships and in society at large.

## **In Relationships**

- Recognizing that of God in everyone.
- Affirming the Spirit in oneself and others.
- Creating space for the Light; fostering and preserving opportunities congenial to the Spirit.
- Living with simplicity, avoiding materialism or mere conventionality.
- Defusing tensions with the help of the Spirit; striving to deal openly and lovingly with others when conflicts arise.
- Seeking alternatives to violence in our words and actions.
- Listening for the truth in the words of others.
- Speaking the truth as we discern it with cordiality, kindness, and love.
- Avoiding gossip, talebearing, breaking confidences, or the disparagement of others.
- Resisting temptations to falsehood, coercion, and abuse.
- Avoiding behavior that supports social ranking.
- In Society at Large
- Helping others who are in need in whatever ways are open to us.
- Supporting causes consistent with Quaker values.
- Making economic choices that contribute to the fair sharing of world resources.
- Questioning the myths and generalities often used to justify deprivation, punishment, and other human misery.
- Avoiding support of war or the seeds of war.
- Speaking truth to power, even when truth may not be welcome.
- Embracing a style of life that promotes a healthy planet—supporting environmentally sound behavior.
- Participating positively in public affairs.
- Choosing to affirm in legal proceedings, rather than to swear an oath, which implies part-time truth telling.

## **In the Conduct of Meeting Business:**

### **Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business**

In the consideration of business, Friends seek the sense of the meeting, a spiritual process of corporate discernment in the presence of God. Pursuit of the sense of the meeting as we try to reach a decision requires us to exercise openness, sensitivity, and tenderness to one another.

The following practices, also called Quaker process, foster wisdom and a spirit of forbearance and love. Quaker process calls upon Friends to:

- Begin with centering worship.
- Listen to all messages with openness, receive them in worship, and allow for silence between them.
- Respond to the heart of the message, not to the messenger.
- Wait for recognition from the clerk before speaking.
- Speak, as standard practice, to the clerk, not to individual Friends.
- Speak only once to a given issue unless it is clear that more is appropriate; allow all present to speak before seeking to speak a second time.

- Avoid interrupting or engaging in asides or side conversations (maintaining one's center).
- Seek God's guidance before speaking.
- Avoid inappropriate emotional attachment to one's own opinion.
- Consider introducing potentially contentious ideas and expressing deep convictions by means of queries rather than statements.
- Call for silence (anyone can do this) to re-center in a spirit of worship.
- Defer a decision if there is not clearness.
- When personally disagreeing with the sense of the meeting, either stand aside (accept the meeting's decision while expressing disagreement with it) or stand in the way (gently insist that the meeting consider your concern before acting).
- Learn to trust Quaker process to work and leave the outcome to the Spirit.

Additional information about Quaker practice will be found in  
New York Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice*.  
Copies may be obtained from: New York Yearly Meeting

Books and other publications about Quakerism are available from:  
QuakerBooks of FGC  
Friends General Conference  
1216 Arch Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
1-800-966-4556  
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