

Another Friends testimony supports social justice. Quaker colonists in America were fair and friendly with their Indian neighbors, and they early advocated the abolition of slavery. Today Friends work as friends with and for American Indians, Blacks, Mexican-Americans and other ethnic groups in the United States and Canada, and with indigenous peoples in Mexico and elsewhere throughout the world.

Many Friends today are non-proselytizing, disinclined to witness verbally for their central religious beliefs. Witnessing for Christ, however, so earnestly a part of early Quakerism, continues to be the crowning testimony of evangelical Friends.

9. *What is the meaning of "the Quaker Way" and "the manner of Friends"?*

The Quaker Way is simply the way Friends at their best (and with all their differences) put into practice their deepest beliefs.

One example is the meeting for business conducted after the manner of Friends. Such a meeting proceeds in the spirit of worship and openness to divine leading. Questions are not decided by majority rule. The presiding clerk tries to be sensitive to the meeting's search for truth and unity. Strongly opposed views are often reconciled through suggestion of a Third Way; or in a period of silent worship differences are quietly resolved; or decision is held over to a later meeting, awaiting further insight, information, understanding. No vote is taken. When the clerk sees clearly that unity has been reached, he phrases and rephrases what he believes to be "the sense of the meeting"—approval is voiced or apparent—the minute is recorded.

In ministry and service to others, however disadvantaged, the Quaker way is to identify with them, to share and work with them in dignity, to approach those who oppose them with openness and faith. When their witness and concern bring Friends face to face with illegal or repressive authority, nonviolence is an essential part of the way Friends approach the oppressors as persons.

10. *How do people become members of the Society of Friends?*


Each individual Friend holds membership in a particular Friends meeting or church and in this way belongs to the Society of Friends.

Children born into Quaker homes and brought up in a Friends meeting/church may in time be accepted as adult members. Other persons, who are attracted to membership by the faith, witness, or fellowship of Friends—who

feel themselves ready to become members of a Friends meeting or church by "convincement" or conversion or by transfer from another religious body—are encouraged to apply for membership.

There is such a wide range of conviction and belief within the Quaker framework that persons of quite dissimilar views may find somewhere within it their spiritual home, opportunity to worship and serve with others of the same persuasion. Speaking truth to each other in love, as Christian neighbors, would be the Quaker way for Friends—with all their variations—to feel themselves "members one of another" (Eph. 4:25).

For additional information about Quakerism, approach a Friends Church or Meeting—consult a standard encyclopedia or your public library—or write to:

Friends  World Committee for Consultation
Section of the Americas
1506 Race Street
Philadelphia, PA 19102 USA

WHAT IS QUAKERISM?

Friendly Answers

TO QUESTIONS ABOUT AMERICAN QUAKERS

YOU MEET PEOPLE called Quakers—or you worship with Friends in their church or meeting—or you join in a service project or witness sponsored by Friends. Naturally you ask, Who are these people? What do they believe? How do their beliefs affect their lives and activities? . . . And you seek answers.

1. *Who are "the Quakers"?* *1. Are they the same as "the Friends"?*

Friends or Quakers—either name will do as they have the same meaning—are most easily described as those persons who belong to Friends meetings and Friends churches. These make up the religious bodies that as a group are known as the Society of Friends—called by some the Religious Society of Friends, by others the Friends Church.

"Quaker" was originally a nickname for those Children of Light or Friends of Truth, as they thought of themselves, friends of Jesus (John 15:15). They were said to tremble or quake with religious zeal, and the nickname stuck. But in time they came to be known simply as "Friends."

Quakerism began in England about 1650 in the aftermath of the Protestant Reformation. It was a religious protest against the hollow formalism which, for many, marked the Established Church of that time. Seeking spiritual reality, these early Friends found that they could experience God directly in their lives without benefit of clergy or liturgy or steeped church.

2. *What do Friends believe?* *2. Do they have a creed?*

Quakers do not have a creed. No single statement of religious doctrine is accepted by all the overlapping regional bodies of Friends that together make up the larger Society. Each of the so-called Yearly Meetings, however, has its own *Book of Discipline* or *Faith and Practice*, which includes statements of belief or doctrine and the uniquely Quaker feature: Advices and/or Queries.

George Fox, a troubled and searching youth in 17th century England, underwent a profound religious experience that he described as a voice answering his need: "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to Thy condition." Immediate, direct experience of God became the heart of his message and ministry, the beginning of the Quaker movement.

Friends are united in stressing that an inward, immediate, and transforming experience of God is central to their faith. They turn to an inner guide or teacher for continuing revelation and direction. Many Friends identify this "Inner Light," "Seed Within," or "Christ Within" (as it has been variously called) with the historic Jesus. Many affirm their acceptance of Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Others conceive of the inward guide as a universal spirit which was in Jesus in abundant measure and is in everyone to some degree—"that of God in everyone," as George Fox put it, "the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." (John 1:9)

3. *How can Friends differ so widely in their religious beliefs?*

Respect for the individual man, woman, child—as each may respond to the Holy Spirit, to the Light Within—has been the basis for a good measure of tolerance among Friends. But their sense of individual divine guidance has also led to sharp differences and continuing tensions between Quakers of widely divergent views and "leadings." In the 19th century, American Quakerism was split by repeated Separations that divided many Friends meetings and yearly meetings, but 20th century reunions have mended some of these breaches.

If thus from its beginnings Quakerism carried the seed of its own diversity, the amazing Christian experience and witness of George Fox and other early Friends, their preaching and pamphlets, provided a rich and varied heritage for all Friends.

4. *How does the faith of Friends show in their personal lives?*

Love of God and love of neighbor—the overriding Christian commandments—find expression in the varied forms of Quaker worship; in Friends' "witness" and historic "testimonies"; in their social attitudes and concerns, their mission and service outreach, their programs of education and action. For Friends, these are the fruits of their faith: the affirmation of the indwelling Spirit and redemptive Love, spiritual realities that they feel they do share and must share with others.

5. *What forms of worship are practiced by American Friends?*

Two rather different forms of worship characterize American Quakers.

Some groups of Friends gather in silence and expectant waiting, without prearranged singing, Bible reading, prayers, or sermon. Their worship proceeds, rising above individual meditation to a sense of seeking as a gathered group, with spoken ministry only as Friends may feel led to share their insights and messages. Such unprogrammed worship is the usual practice in both the more liberal and the more traditionalist Friends meetings, and it continues in some measure the Quaker way of earlier times.

Other congregations of Friends follow the form of worship practiced by Protestant and Evangelical churches generally, and adopted by many Friends meetings during the nineteenth century, a time of revival and renewal in American Protestantism. Such services for worship may include pastoral prayer and responsive reading, hymn singing and choral/organ music, Scripture and sermon. There may also be a significant open time of free worship based upon silent waiting, as among other and earlier Friends. Such programmed or semi-programmed worship is usual in Friends meetings or churches that employ the services of a pastor.

6. *What are Friends' attitudes toward sacraments and Scripture?*

Most Friends reject the sacraments in their outward forms—communion and baptism as variously practiced in Christian churches. They are seekers, rather, for the inward reality. For them, all great human experiences are of a sacramental nature.

The Bible was very precious to George Fox, but he saw clearly that to understand the Scriptures they must be read in the same Spirit that inspired those who wrote them. Another early Quaker leader, Robert Barclay, said that the Scriptures are only a declaration of the source and not the source itself. However, reliance upon the Inner Light led Friends in the 18th century to decreased emphasis upon the Bible as a source of religious wisdom. The Evangelical and Revival movements influenced large segments of American Quakerism in the 19th century and brought a new authority to the Bible and a literalism of interpretation. From this, in time, many Friends felt themselves liberated. Today, especially among more orthodox and evangelical Friends, the Christian Scriptures are interpreted and honored as in a special sense the Word of God.

7. *What are the principal "concerns" and activities of Friends?*

The belief that there is a potential for good in *all* persons—as indeed also the capacity for evil!—makes Friends sensitive to human degradation, ignorance, superstition, suffering, injustice, exploitation. Under a sense of concern—inner prompting, divine obedience, urgency—Friends are drawn to humanitarian callings and to programs of education and evangelism, to projects of service and constructive action.

Early Friends went out with the Good News of their quickened faith to the American Colonies, and they bore their message of Truth to Czar, Sultan, and Pope. With changed perspectives, this missionary witness for Christ continues under the Friends United Meeting and the evangelical Yearly Meetings—in Alaska, in Latin America, in Africa, in Asia. There is a new concern, too, for sharing of human resources with the developing peoples, and transnational programs are now encouraged by Friends World Committee for Consultation.

Many Friends today are pressing for more rapid social change by nonviolent means; for reform of the present system of criminal justice; for real equality of opportunity in employment, housing and education; for elimination of prejudice and discrimination against minority groups and the underprivileged. The American Friends Service Committee plays an important part in furthering these Quaker concerns, which are indeed the continuing expression in action of historic Friends testimonies.

8. *What are the historic and continuing Quaker "testimonies"?*

The Quaker testimonies—what Friends have stood for publicly as a form of Christian witness—derive from their central belief in the essential oneness and equality of all persons (women no less than men). This has found expression in simplicity of life style, integrity in personal relations, and at times controversial stands on public issues.

The Peace Testimony is perhaps the most widely known of these. Taken as a whole, the Society of Friends is strongly opposed to war and to conscription. It seeks to remove the causes of war; it tries to reconcile factions and nations; it ministers to suffering on both sides of conflicts; it helps to rebuild at war's-end. It witnesses creatively to the power of nonviolence in the movement toward social change. While there have indeed been "fighting Quakers" bearing arms in every American war, and some young Friends have accepted the draft, many declare themselves conscientious objectors, and the others are active draft resisters (refusing to register or in any way cooperate with the war system).