

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **How did the Quakers arise?**

In the 17th Century, England was in political, religious, and social turmoil with many different religious denominations and sects. There were also many “seekers” who found no comfort in any of them. One of these was George Fox (1624-1691), the founder of the movement of early Quakers. At a time of spiritual despair, after finding that none of the clergy and preachers preached a Christ that could lead him out of his own inner darkness, he heard an inward voice say to him, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition.” And when he heard it, he wrote, “my heart did leap for joy.” This led him to challenge the doctrines and practices of all the official and professional priests and preachers. He maintained that Christ can mean nothing to men and women in their own time unless he has really come, as he promised, to lead and teach his people himself and he can only do this in an inward and spiritual manner. A necessary consequence of this is a commitment to live and act in accordance with the truth revealed by the teaching of Christ in ourselves and to respond to the same teaching in the Bible (John 14:23). In spite of intense persecution the movement spread rapidly in Britain and to its colonies. These “Children of the Light” (John 12:36, 1 Thessalonians 5:5) or “Friends of Truth” (John 15:14) were also commonly called “Quakers.” They later organized themselves as “the Religious Society of Friends.” This is still our official name but we are generally known as Quakers.

### **What do Quakers believe?**

Quakers have always been concerned with being led by the spirit of Christ, and with making non-creedal professions of belief. We do not formulate our beliefs into a Christian creed or Statement of faith as a test

for membership. It is our experience that the light of Christ within each one of us will show us the true Way of Life (John 14:6). It is the discernment of, obedience to, and knowledge of this inner truth that guides our lives. We say that this capacity to respond to God's Spirit exists, however faintly, in every human being (John 1:9). So Friends believe that each person is unique, precious, and of equal worth in the sight of God.

Inward spiritual reality is often symbolized outwardly in other churches by traditional ceremonies and sacraments. For Quakers, "Water Baptism" means an inward, spiritual experience of God, and the "Lord's Supper" is also an openness to and communication with God (Luke 3:16, Revelation 3:20). For someone who lives this way there are no special "sacred places" and "religious acts." All life is one when lived in the Spirit.

### **What kind of worship do you have?**

Meeting for Worship is the central activity of our faith. We meet for worship in silence. This is an expectant kind of worship so that we may become responsive to the spirit of Christ. In the depths of this worship some Friends may be given spoken words to share with us. We call this "vocal ministry." As well as impromptu speaking it will include vocal prayer, a Bible reading, and occasional singing (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 1 Corinthians 14:31-33). Our silent worship requires a humble simplicity of spirit. It helps us to be aware of the inner and deeper meaning of our individual lives and of our corporate life. In this kind of silence one can be aware of external sounds but not be distracted by them. The silence of Meeting for Worship is different from that experienced in traditional, solitary meditation. The waiting upon God and the listening for the inner voice of God in a Meeting for Worship is a shared experience in which worshippers seek to be aware of God's presence (Habakkuk 2:20, Psalms 130:5-8, Isaiah 40:28-31, Romans 8:26-27).

Anyone present may minister in the way described above and we have no professional priests or pastors. Our weddings, funerals, and memorial services are held in the same manner, but in these cases there may have to be some special preparation and prepared statements. We also come together for mutual support in times of difficulty and suffering.

### **What is your view of salvation?**

Quakers have always believed that salvation refers to the way our lives are spiritually transformed as we die to self, and with a repentant heart, turn in obedience to the divine light that is the spirit of Christ in each one of us, and in our meetings for worship (Hebrews 5:9, Acts 4: 11-12, John 3:16).

### **What do you believe about man's origin and destiny in the future?**

Quakers believe that man originated by being created by God as in the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible (Genesis 2:4-23). We also believe that man's future destiny after death will be in Heaven for the Christian man, and in Hell for the unsaved man (Daniel 12:2, Luke 16:19-26). We seek to adhere to practical efforts to bring in what the New Testament calls the Reign of God. Jesus Christ asked us to pray that God may bring in the Kingdom of Heaven, here and now, on this earth (Matthew 6:9-13). We are called upon by God to co-operate in this by helping all people to develop to the full their God-given potential (1 Corinthians 3:9).

### **What is your view of the Apocalypse?**

The Apocalypse is the revelation given by Jesus Christ to the Apostle John about the coming of the New Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 21 & 22, Luke 17:21). For Quakers this is a spiritual state that can be known inwardly when we meet for meeting for worship and in our daily lives. We do not regard it as a literal prediction of the future.

## **What is your source of authority?**

The Light of Christ as it is followed within each one of us, will show us the true Way of Life. It gives every person immediate and direct access to God (John 1:9-13). Therefore Quakers have no professional priests or ministers. Our individual human interpretation of the spirit and light of God within is confirmed by reference to the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and by the way God continues to guide the worshipping group of Quakers. The Meeting offers a gentle, yet strong discipline by seeking corporate discernment of the leading of the Spirit. In our Meetings for Worship it is possible that any one of us may be moved by the Holy Spirit to speak with the same kind of inspiration with which the prophets and apostles spoke in Biblical times. Authority however rests with the divine source of the inspiration and not with the words or with the man or woman who speaks them (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

“Elders” are appointed to take special responsibility for the spiritual life of the Meeting, and “Overseers” are appointed to care for the practical needs of members. “Ministers” are recorded to ensure that the vocal ministry is of a high Biblical standard. An Elder is also an Overseer and a Minister in (Titus 1:5-9).

Committees are appointed to look after work with children, maintenance of Meeting Houses, the printing of a Christian Quaker publication and other literature, and other activities.

## **How do you view the Bible?**

Quakers find guidance and spiritual encouragement in the Bible, and they take all the stories and teaching literally. They regard the printed words of the Bible as the final authority in matters of doctrine, morality, and church government (2 Timothy 3:14-17). Divine revelation is not confined to the past, and the same Holy Spirit that inspired the Scriptures can inspire

Christians living centuries later (John 16:13-15). The Scriptures need to be read in the same Spirit as that in which they were written. We recognize our own imperfection, at times, in interpreting what the Holy Spirit has said to us. And so, we rely on Scripture as a witness of what the Spirit has already said, and as a check of our own understanding.

### **What other books or writings do you have?**

For our perusal we have the Book of Discipline of the Yearly Meeting of Christian Friends (Evangelical Quakers) - 2020 Edition. We also value the insights found in other writings, including those writings from other Christian denominations and World faiths.

### **What is your approach to morality and values?**

Quakers try to conduct their lives in a way that is consistent with the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. This may lead to actions that run counter to practices currently accepted in society at large. This kind of behaviour is what we call a “testimony” and all our Testimonies arise naturally from our faith in God. We find that the Bible supports and encourages these concerns which are summarised in Isaiah 58:6-12 & Matthew 22:36-40.

\*As one of the historic peace churches we reject participation in war and all preparation for it, as inconsistent with the spirit and teaching of Jesus Christ.

\*We feel that it is wrong to lie to persons and organisations, and we try to be honest in word and deed in all things. Our respect for truth and for the equality of all human beings before God leads us to reject honorific titles.

\*We are opposed to all forms of injustice, oppression, slavery, exploitation, greed, waste, and discrimination, and we work for reconciliation between individuals, communities, and nations.

\*We recognize the equal worth and rights of all people regardless of age, sex, race, sexuality, religion, disability, and social class, etc.

\*We work to reduce the causes of strife in social and political affairs, but we recognise that these negative tendencies exist in us and among us. This requires constant self-examination, sensitivity and love. We accept that we must continually examine ourselves in the regulation of our lives so that we do not contribute to the causes of strife in personal and social affairs.

\*We seek a simplicity of lifestyle that promotes reverence for God's Creation, and care of the environment (Genesis 1:20-31). So we encourage the conservation of habitats and the right sharing of the world's resources (Matthew 6:19-21, 25-34).

\*We try to live, worship, and order our affairs in the same spirit as the Early Christians, but we do not think it is either desirable or necessary to try to imitate their practices in every respect.

### **Where and when do you meet?**

Quakers meet on a Sunday for meeting for worship as a worshipping group of Quakers. Vocal prayer can only come from God the same as vocal ministry; the person's voice is used, but the speaker is God; And straight afterwards, Quakers meet for Bible study, for congregational singing, and for waiting worship upon the spirit of Christ. This is in a Friends' Meeting House if there is one in the area. Worship may however take place in a rented room, a private house, or even in the open air. Friends can worship God at any time and in any place. We attach no special sanctity to any building. We regard Sunday as more holy than other days, and we try to live every day in an awareness of the presence of God (Mark 2:27-28, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

## **How do you manage your practical affairs?**

Each group of Quakers is known as a “Monthly Meeting” and once a month we hold a “Meeting for Church Affairs” which is conducted in a spirit of worship, and dependence upon the guidance of God.

A Monthly Meeting will have oversight of several smaller Preparative Meetings and is responsible for questions of membership. Members from all the Monthly Meetings gather once a year for a Yearly Meeting. This will make decisions on matters raised by the Monthly Meetings and other important issues.

Monthly Meetings are funded by contributions from members and the Monthly Meetings contribute to the general expenses of the Yearly Meeting. Yearly Meeting appoints its own “Clerk”, a Treasurer, and other officers as needed. Most appointments are for one year and are unpaid. Any Friend may attend all these meetings.

## **How do you reach decisions?**

Quakers have a “Clerk” who combines the functions of a chairperson and a secretary. He listens carefully to proceedings without personal bias to what Quakers report from God’s teaching within, and until he feels he has the “sense of the meeting,” and can write a minute which all present can accept. If unity is not reached, and all Quakers present do not have the same unity in their understanding of what Christ is telling the worshipping group of Quakers, the matter is held over for further consideration. The Clerk is the servant of the Meeting, appointed to perform that particular function. Any gift of wisdom or leadership that he may possess comes from Christ for that occasion. At other times and for other purposes he has no special personal status or authority. This is our practical application of the saying of Jesus Christ that “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)

A Meeting for Church Affairs begins and ends with silent prayer because what we are seeking is the guidance of the Spirit. When there is difficulty in reaching a decision we listen to one another in a thoughtful and prayerful manner. We are not trying to make our own opinion prevail but to seek God's will for us. Therefore we do not take a vote.

### **Do you have other joint activities?**

We also meet for recreation and sharing together - for parties, camps and celebrations. Friends and friends of Friends of all ages are welcome at all these events. All these events are for families to get to know one another and have fun. Along with light-hearted activities such as bonfires, concerts, and fancy-dress, there are opportunities for serious Bible study, and sometimes with guest Christian speakers. Special activities are planned for Junior Young Friends, including an annual gathering for 13-17 year olds.

Young Friends, (aged approximately 18-30) hold an annual week-long camp during which they may share in various projects. Young Friends make a significant contribution to the Yearly Meeting.

### **What does it mean to be a member of the Society of Friends?**

Asking for membership implies a commitment to the Quaker community and its work as outlined above. There is a formal requirement to pay a subscription, and members are expected to make a reasonable financial contribution on a yearly basis of \$500 to \$1000 towards the cost of maintaining the Society and its work. All members need to have a very good knowledge of our orthodox Christian Quaker heritage, especially in regard to our manner of worship and way of doing business in our Meetings for Church Affairs. The responsibilities of membership include a willingness to serve the Meeting in a variety of ways without seeking any financial reward. It is important to understand that Friends are all

servants of one another and no special function confers personal status or superiority. A full understanding and practice as a Quaker requires what Christ calls “convincement” – a recognition of an inner change that can only be the work of God. Admission into membership means the outward recognition by the worshipping group of Quakers of the inward born again experience of the applicant.

### **How may one become a member?**

If you wish to know us better the simplest way is to go along to a Quaker Meeting, take part in a meeting for worship and talk to Friends afterwards. You can also borrow books from Friends’ library. If attendance at a Meeting is not possible or you do not feel ready for that you can study this website or write to the Clerk or an Elder of any of our Monthly Meetings. Enquirers are always welcome. Your initial interest will not be met by any pressure to join us. If you make enquiries your confidentiality will be respected.

If your first impressions are favourable, the next step is to become associated with a local Meeting as an “Attender.” This means that you are a regular visitor to a Quaker Meeting for Worship and are known as someone who wishes to be kept informed of Meeting activities. Attenders are welcome at all discussions and social activities (including Meeting for Church Affairs).

An Attender who wishes to apply for full membership does so by sending this request in writing to the Clerk of the Monthly Meeting, preferably with the encouragement and support of the Elders, Overseers, and Ministers of the Meeting. The applicant will then be asked to talk things over with two representatives from the Monthly Meeting. This will not be seen as a test of the applicant’s suitability, but a way of ensuring that he

fully understands the implications of belonging to the wider body of Quakers and the additional responsibilities that will be incurred.

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**Is there any further information about Quaker faith and practice you would like the general public to be aware of?**

We are a religious Society with our own distinctive understanding of the Christian faith. That does not make us a Christian cult with narrowly defined boundaries and beliefs. Our commitment to simplicity in speech and dress does not require wearing unusual or old-fashioned clothes or using outdated forms of speech. The love of God and our neighbour to which we are called goes far beyond acknowledging that all are loved and of equal worth as persons. Jesus Christ was calling us to personal sacrifice of time and possessions even to lay down one’s life for the good of others. If we are able to grow in Christian love we need to be willing to examine our actions and attitudes and allow God to make changes.

We welcome contact with other orthodox Christians and people of other world faiths and are willing to learn from them. Although, in our own Meetings, we reject the idea of voting and decision-making by majority, we try to be loyal citizens of our country in everything that does not conflict with our prior loyalty to Christ and our obligations towards humanity as a whole. With that proviso, we work with public institutions and try to improve them for the benefit of all people.

## **What about Quakers in other countries?**

There are many of these. To learn about traditional Christian Quakerism just go to the Christian links document given on this website.