



Beliefs in Action

Most faith groups have specific beliefs that their members are expected to follow. Quakers rely heavily instead upon spiritual discernment by individual members, congregations, and regional assemblies. This makes Quaker beliefs difficult to describe. The following attempts to briefly describe Quaker beliefs and practices in Lake Erie Yearly Meeting. Some groups of Quakers differ significantly from what is described below.

Testimonies

Quaker spirituality is both inward and outward. Friends have always expected the Holy Spirit to transform individuals and then guide them into ways to transform society. The mystical stream in Quakerism has a profound ethical dimension. In worship together Friends have experienced not only wordless union with God but also practical leadings to engage in concrete actions.

Friends have always held dear the belief that the Light would bring them into unity. Their pattern of worship is contemplative yet corporate, blossoming into experiences of deep communion and community. Similarly, Quakers have expected this Light to lead them in the same direction and toward the same goals. Because revelation is continuing, new leadings will come, but because the Spirit is consistent, certain principles will prevail. Friends have called these principles “testimonies” because they witness to the wider world of the power of God to transform individuals and human society.

The testimonies are radically counter-cultural. They challenge the values of a society based on unbridled greed, distrust, violence, and oppression. They are rooted in love for God and one’s neighbors.

The testimonies challenge us to live our lives as God would wish us to. Testimonies bear witness to the truth as Friends in community perceive it—truth known through relationship with God. Some key testimonies are integrity, simplicity, equality, and peace.

Integrity. Integrity means to speak and behave so there is no slippage between what you say and what you do. It means to be honest in all dealings and tell the truth on all occasions.

Simplicity. Quaker understanding of simplicity has changed over time. Earliest Friends opposed luxury and waste. In the eighteenth century, simplicity became a code of plain dress and speech. Today, simplicity is understood to have to do with trust and with focus. A simple life is one that enables one to keep God at the center. Friends have also come to see simplicity as linked with the commitment to social justice and to responsible stewardship of God’s good creation.

Equality. Since every person has a spark of the Divine, Quakers emphasize that all people are equal before God. We welcome to our fellowship and worship all persons of whatever sexual orientation, race, religion or gender.

Peace. Since every person has a spark of the Divine, Friends are opposed to the taking of life, even in war or civil strife.

Community. Quakers seek to create a beloved community in their meetings and hope to influence the wider community to become one as well.

Living our Beliefs

A consequence of Friends’ search for truth is that scientific discoveries do not challenge the basis of our faith. Like the scientific method, Quaker faith and practice rely upon experience as a

guide. We come to know truth experientially. The search for truth is more important to us than the maintenance of beliefs, so we try to remain open to new approaches to the truth.

Quakers attempt to live by our testimonies. Much of our ministry is carried out within our families, places of work, and through our community involvements. Over the years, Quakers have worked for prison reform, the abolition of slavery, an end to the death penalty, civil rights, right sharing of the world's resources, stewardship of the earth, peaceful conflict resolution, religious liberty, and have advocated for alternative service for those whose conscience forbids them to kill others in war. Quakers have ministered to the needy, especially victims of war.

As you come to know us better, you will discover our shortcomings, our faults, and our failures. We have high ideals, but do not always live up to them. We are on a lifelong journey toward truth and fulfillment—a journey made more meaningful and easier by the companionship of other seekers.

Portions of this text are quoted or paraphrased from *Silence and Witness: The Quaker Tradition*, by Michael L. Birkel, 2004, ISBN 1-57075-518-3. Used by permission.