

# About Quakers

A brief introduction about Quakers, our worship and our beliefs.

## Quaker Worship

Meeting for Worship is the cornerstone of our Quaker faith. Meetings are held on Sunday mornings and usually last an hour. Some meetings also hold a mid-week Meeting for Worship.

Quakers believe that we can each commune directly with God. We do this by sitting in stillness and mostly silence, waiting on God or as some prefer to describe it 'the light' or 'the spirit' to show to us. In doing so we have no minister or pastor and no order of a planned service.

This waiting is a very deep experience which is difficult to describe in words and is best experienced. In the stillness members make a spiritual connection with the God in each other. From that connection someone may feel moved to speak. This happens in a spontaneous way. We call this 'giving ministry'. Giving ministry can be a moving and life affirming experience.

*True silence  
is to the spirit  
as sleep is  
to the body  
nourishment and  
refreshment.*

*William Penn (whose father lived in Wanstead)*

## Quaker Beliefs and Values

Quakers believe that there is 'that of God in everyone'. This gives rise to our strong belief that everyone is equal. Hatred, war and prejudice arise from seeing some groups of people as 'other' or 'different' and somehow inferior. This Quaker principle encourages us to aspire to live in particular ways. We may not always live up to these aims. We describe them as testimonies.

## Testimonies

It has always been important to Quakers 'to let their lives speak' by aspiring to live out the spiritual truths or values in which they believe. The following testimonies guide us.

**Peace** – Quakers do not believe in war as a means of resolving conflict. During both World Wars, whilst some Quakers enlisted, many refused to join up because of their belief that we should not kill. They became conscientious objectors. In the First World War especially many were treated harshly and often cruelly for their beliefs. In both World Wars many Quakers served as Conscientious Objectors in the Friends Ambulance Service.

In order to promote our peace work we have a Quaker Office at the UN in New York. There is also an office in Brussels, where quiet space is offered away from the media spotlight to diplomats to meet together to discuss their differences and seek peaceful solutions to conflicts. In many less prestigious settings people are taught and encouraged to implement skills that are a more positive way of resolving differences than resorting to violence. Peace is seen as, not only a matter of external conflict, but a part of our internal world – we must all strive to be at peace with ourselves.

**Equality and Community** – we believe in the equality of all. This does not mean that we think everybody should be exactly the same but that, if we regard every human being as of equal spiritual worth, all should be treated with compassion and respect. This links in with the concept of Community, in that true community exists where each member of that community is seen as of equal spiritual worth.

**Truth and Integrity** – openness, honesty and integrity are values that early Quakers were particularly noted for. This led to Quakers establishing companies where they cared for the welfare and education of their workers. Today the values of truth and integrity are important when we work in situations of conflict helping build trust between different parties.

**Justice and Equality** – Quakers have always been outspoken campaigners against injustice wherever they perceive it to be happening. Along with others Quakers campaigned for the abolition of slavery. Quakers today are campaigning against the recruitment of child soldiers. Quaker Chaplains in prisons seek to improve conditions for prisoners, following the example of Elizabeth Fry, who lived in East Ham.

**Simplicity** – we are encouraged to live simply and think about how our standard of living is achieved, sometimes at the expense of others who are exploited so that we can buy things cheaply. Simplicity is not just about possessions though, it is also about attitudes. We need to constantly challenge ourselves by examining our lives, and rethinking what our true needs are.

**Sustainability of the environment** – this is a testimony that has come to the fore in more recent years. We believe human beings are contributing in so many ways to the destruction of the natural world by assuming their need for resources comes first. We believe that ‘we do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will’. We must therefore show consideration for all creatures and seek to maintain the beauty and variety of the world.

If you are looking for somewhere to worship in our area and are interested in trying Quakers, why not join us in one of our Sunday meetings. You will receive a warm welcome.