

Freiburg Quaker Group

Who are the Quakers?

Who are the Quakers? Or to give them their other name The Religious Society of Friends which reflects Quakers 'desire to come together as a community seeking to find the spirit and truth of God.

Quakers share a way of life rather than a set of doctrinal beliefs. Quakers seek to experience God directly, within themselves and in their relationships with others and in the natural world. These direct encounters with the Divine in all beings and in all Creation, and through the "inner light" of God, is where Quakers find meaning and purpose in their lives.

The central part of Quaker spiritual practice is the silent, contemplative meeting for worship. Here Quakers seek a communal quiet stillness, where everyone can be open to inspiration from the spirit of God. During Quaker meetings to worship some may feel moved to speak. This is something anyone present can do as everyone is equal: women and men. In the shared spiritual experience of the gathered meeting for worship the various contributions to spoken ministry may build upon a

theme. Meetings for worship can be held anywhere at any time, although there are usually regular meetings on Sundays in Quaker meeting houses or elsewhere and sometimes on other days of the week. Many Quakers also follow a personal devotional or spiritual practice, for example setting aside quiet times for private meditation or contemplation.

The Quaker way has its roots in Christianity and find inspiration in the Bible and the life and teachings of Jesus. Quakers also find meaning in value in the teachings of other faiths and spiritual traditions and acknowledge that theirs is not the only way to commune with God.

An early Quaker, John Woolman, wrote in 1762 as follows in relation to the "Inner Light" of God. The truth of his statement is as relevant today as it was then.

"There is a principle which is pure, placed in the human mind, which in different places and ages hath different names. It is, however, pure and proceeds from God. It is deep and inward, confined to no forms of religion nor excluded from any where the heart stands in perfect sincerity. In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become brethren".

The Quaker focus is on individual and shared human experience rather than written statements of belief. A distillation of the collective experience of Quakers is shared in a book entitled Quaker Faith and Practice. This book is an anthology of Quaker insights from the founding of the Religious Society of Friends in the 17th century up to the present day. The book is updated every generation, in recognition that human understanding of truth continues to evolve.

Quakers do not have separate priests, or a hierarchy, as they believe every person can have a direct relationship with God. All Quakers are entitled to participate in decision-making processes and to help run the Society. United decisions are sought without voting by collective spiritual discernment that goes beyond consensus. Those with specific roles within the Society of Friends are asked to serve for limited periods of time, after which others take their turn to serve.

In neighbourhood communities Quakers meet together for worship and other activities in local meetings. These are inclusive and open to all. Families with children and young people are especially welcome. In their meetings Quakers hope to find acceptance, support, challenge, practical help

and a sense of belonging. Quakers experience that their sense of community does not depend on professing identical beliefs but from worshipping, sharing and working together.

"Our life is love, and peace, and tenderness; and bearing one with another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations one against another; but praying one for another, and helping one another up with a tender hand." Isaac Pennington

In working for a better world Quakers' religious experience leads to an emphasis on truth, equality, simplicity and peace. These Quaker testimonies, as they are known, are lived rather than written. They lead Quakers to translate their faith into action by working locally and globally for social and economic justice, to support peace-making and to care for the environment.

"The word "testimony" is used by Quakers to describe a witness to the living truth within the human heart as it is acted out in everyday life. It is not a form of words, but a mode of life based on the realisation that there is that of God in everybody, that all human beings are equal, that all life is interconnected. It is affirmative but may lead to action that runs counter to certain practices currently accepted in society at large. Hence a pro-

peace stance may become an anti-war protest”.

Harvey Gillman

There are about 350,000 Quakers in the world, with 250 Quakers in Germany and around the same number regularly attending Quaker meetings in Germany. There are about 90,000 Quakers in the USA and 17,000 Quakers in Britain. In each country there are in addition others who regularly attend Quaker Meetings for Worship. One does not have to become a Quaker to attend Quaker meetings, which are open to all.

Quaker Meeting for Worship takes place in Freiburg at 10:30 am each Sunday morning in the Cella, behind the Dreifaltigkeitskirche in Hansjakobstrasse. All are welcome.

Further information about Freiburg Quakers can be found via website www.freiburg-quaeker.de and more details about Quakers in Germany via website www.quaeker.org. Those interested in enquiring about Quakers are welcome to contact Ina Nikol or Sylvia Best via email address freiburg@quaeker.org.

Michael H. Best. 9.10.2019