

A black and white photograph of a two-story building with a prominent covered porch. The porch is supported by a series of square columns and has a decorative wooden ceiling. The building's facade is light-colored with a textured finish. A chimney is visible on the roof. The text "GERMANTOWN FRIENDS SCHOOL" is overlaid in the upper middle section of the image.

GERMANTOWN FRIENDS SCHOOL

*Faith & Practice*



Germantown Friends School is dedicated to reaching that of God in every person. Our mission is to seek truth, challenge the intellect, honor differences, embrace the city, and nurture each student's mind, body and spirit.

## FAITH AND PRACTICE OF GERMANTOWN FRIENDS SCHOOL

Welcome to the Germantown Friends School community, which is based on the Quaker belief that there is that of God in everyone.

This pamphlet is intended to give members of the Germantown Friends School community insight into the core values that guide everyday life at our school and that give the institution its Quaker character.

While Germantown Friends School is nurtured by being under the care of the Germantown Friends Meeting, the students, faculty, staff and parents bring life and energy to the Germantown Friends School experience from diverse faith backgrounds.

A committee of parents, faculty and staff prepared this pamphlet with advice and participation from all corners of Germantown Friends School. This pamphlet is intended to inspire understanding of and discussion about the values, commitments and practices of the Germantown Friends School community. Like Quakerism itself, our school is a living, dynamic institution of which you are now a part.

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### WHAT IS QUAKERISM?

As members of the Germantown Friends School community, we believe that every one of us is able to come to know God's love—a love available to all people everywhere, directly and without intermediaries. Each of us is born able to directly experience the Divine Light which, if we look for it and choose to follow it, leads us to right relationships with the divine, ourselves, and each other. While we can choose to ignore it, any person anywhere who lives in accord with this Inner Light is considered to be living in the Spirit.

Quakerism sprang from the teachings of George Fox, who found that established religions provided insufficient guidance and comfort, and so he roamed England in the mid-1600s seeking spiritual direction. He described his original revelation in his journal: "... when all my hopes in men were gone . . . I heard a voice which said, 'There is One, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition.' And when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy." So persuasively did he convey in his preaching the idea that we all may experience God directly, "without the help of any man, book or writing," that hundreds of thousands throughout the British Isles became Quakers.

Even though early Friends often spoke of Christ as their inner teacher, they believed that their experience of a direct, unmediated communion with God was available to all people everywhere. American Quaker John Woolman wrote in 1762 that there is "a principle" which "in different places and ages hath had different names" and is "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." Woolman concluded "In whomsoever this takes root and grows, of what nation soever, they become [brothers and sisters]..." That sense that there is a universal spirit that welcomes and includes everyone from all backgrounds underpins Quakerism at GFS.



These tested truths, while held by people of many faiths, spring for us from our shared experience and are called “testimonies.” They serve to guide our actions.

Our efforts to live by these truths are a constant work in progress. Still, we hope that our lives, alone and together, testify to the power of these insights. We continue to be open to seeing these evolve and change.

At GFS students use the acronym “SPICES” to remember the individual testimonies of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship. In this booklet, we begin with Integrity because it is the cornerstone of individual behavior and our GFS learning community. The other five testimonies flow from Integrity.

## **Queries**

Although there is no checklist of correct behavior, Friends regularly ask ourselves questions – called “queries” – to help us examine how our lives are expressing our testimonies. There are no correct answers to these queries. It’s the sincere seeking and trying to do God’s will that is important.

## **Integrity**

After being “convinced” and joining the Quaker movement, 17<sup>th</sup> century Friends would not take off their hats to nobility, bow, use titles, or adopt the prevailing fashions of dress. These were attempts to conform actions to beliefs. Even attempting this put off their “unconvinced” neighbors until those neighbors realized Friends’ motive for this behavior – Friends believe in dealing fairly, equally, and honestly with everyone. For a Quaker “yes” means “yes” and “no” means “no.” Thus, many Quakers will not swear to tell the truth, but will affirm that they are truthful in all their statements.

Our modern surroundings have changed, but the need to deal honestly with everyone we meet and with ourselves, known as the testimony of integrity, is still the foundation of Friends’ behavior in the world. Integrity is the testimony we can use all day, every day – at work, home or school, with colleagues, clients, teachers, students or family.

Integrity also means being true to oneself and not trying to be somebody we are not. By being obedient to the divine spirit – often called the Light – we seek wholeness in our lives and communities.

At GFS, we trust that each student will do his or her work honestly, attributing the contributions of others. We also expect that all members of the school community will accept responsibility for their own actions, and will not overlook dishonesty around them.

### *Queries*

1. Do I speak the truth?
2. Do my actions truly and consistently reflect my beliefs?
3. Do I do my own work honestly?
4. How do I deal with dishonesty around me?

## **Equality**

When our children, together with faculty and staff, file into their weekly Meeting for Worship, they all sit equal before God. Friends believe that the divine spirit is directly available to lead and to teach each and every one of us. Though we might resist or ignore it, that spirit, often called the Light, is freely given by God to every human being.

This profound equality is personally liberating, and also leads us to treat others with respect, looking for that of God in everyone. We don't always achieve our ideals. For example, while Quakers are known as early abolitionists, they struggled with remnants of slaveholding in their midst. The GFS curriculum is designed with the understanding that while each student may have equal access to the light, that light leads and illuminates lives differently.

GFS seeks to foster the individual talents of every student whether he or she is painting a portrait or competing in the physics Olympics. In keeping with Quaker tradition, many adults in the GFS community choose to be addressed by their first names by students, without titles or honoraria.

### *Queries*

1. Do I look for the good in everyone?
2. Do my actions help to create a world where everyone is treated with dignity – without prejudice or discrimination?

3. Does GFS embody and encourage the testimony of equality on campus and in the wider community?
4. What does GFS attempt to convey to the GFS community by not computing class rank or not giving out academic awards?
5. Are we doing enough to make GFS available to eligible students of varied economic means?

## **Community**

Quakers believe that, in the words of Helen Keller, “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” Faith in community is the belief that many different voices together bring forth wisdom that exceeds any individual contribution. A diversity of voices requires a diversity of backgrounds, which we at GFS work hard to achieve in our student body and faculty.

As a school community, we have many opportunities to come together in smaller groups to express a wide range of interests, both as performers and audience and as players and fans.

Our strong community involvement programs are integrated throughout our curriculum and provide the opportunity for students, faculty and staff to interact with the diverse Germantown community and the world beyond.

We believe that our community not only cares for our own members, but also strengthens us so we can care for other communities – schools, friends, neighborhoods and the wider world.

### *Queries*

1. Do my actions and behavior contribute to creating a caring, interdependent community?
2. Do I fully support and actively participate in programs in my community that promote harmony and equality?
3. Am I willing to go beyond my comfort level to work with people who are different from me?

## **Simplicity**

The 18th century Quaker John Woolman wrote that he organized his life so that “nothing might hinder me from the most steady attention to the voice of the True Shepherd.” Friends still try to live lives in which our activities and possessions do not get in the way of open and unencumbered communication with God. We are encouraged to balance our work and school lives with our family, community, and religious lives, not letting busy-ness overcome us.

By encouraging simplicity, GFS tries to offer an alternative to our consumer culture. We believe modest dress and moderate social habits allow students and faculty to spend their energies on the teaching, learning, nurturing and service that is at the heart of the GFS experience. Given our school’s high academic goals, we at GFS must continually remind ourselves that the demands of the school, both academic and extra-curricular, should not consume students’ lives. While our aspirations are far from realized, we believe that simplicity allows a life fuller in spirit and more perfectly ordered towards other people and the earth. In fact, Meeting for Worship contributes to “simplifying” our lives by allowing us time out from our hectic lives.

### *Queries*

1. Do I balance my work, possessions and busy-ness so that I might readily hear “the still small voice of God?”
2. Am I aware that my words, actions, dress and possessions contribute to the climate of the school and wider community?
3. How do we keep our curriculum and extracurricular demands from overwhelming the lives of our students and faculty?

## **Peace**

“Love your enemies.” Matthew 5:43

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares.” Isaiah 1:18

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him.” Romans 8:20

These are among the biblical passages which have led Quakers to renounce war and violence and work to eliminate their “occasions” or causes, such as ignorance, racism and poverty. While recognizing this world’s ocean of



darkness, we try to focus on the ocean of light available to all of us. Further, Friends believe each life is precious and can be improved by listening to and then following the Divine Light within. Therefore, we believe that to take a life – whether someone else’s or one’s own – is wrong.

As in all things spiritual, Friends believe that each person must be convinced in his or her own heart that something is true. No one can be forced to believe something that goes against his or her conscience. That is why at times of war, some young Friends have become conscientious objectors, a few have gone to prison for non-cooperation, and some have joined the military.

AT GFS, we recognize and try to live by the peace testimony. GFS teachers and staff work hard to help students respond non-violently to conflict on campus and in their lives. For example, “feedback” is a technique students in Lower School learn to voice grievances with classmates and resolve them without aggression or intimidation. Throughout the school, in and out of the classroom, we encourage open discussion of differences in the hope that it will lead to understanding and tolerance.

### *Queries*

1. Do I strive to live in harmony with those around me?
2. When I am confronted with disagreement or aggression, how do I respond?
3. Do I seek ways to promote peace both within my community and in the world?

### **Stewardship**

Our material possessions and our space on earth are not ours alone. Good stewardship means taking care of what we have been given not just for ourselves but for our community and for future generations. As good stewards, we attempt to maintain and improve school property and resources for the benefit of our current students and students who have yet to be born. Within our means, we seek to design our buildings to be simple, modest and sustainable. We design our campus to serve the needs of the curriculum. Stewardship also leads us into community involvement and action.

## *Queries*

1. How does our commitment to simplicity guide us in being good stewards of our health, energy, land, buildings and resources?
2. Do I avoid being wasteful? Do I help with campus cleaning and recycling?
3. Do we take good care of school equipment, facilities and resources?

## QUAKERISM AT GFS

Meeting for Worship is the cornerstone of our shared spiritual experience at GFS. Once a week, students from each division - Lower, Middle, and Upper - gather in the 1869 Meeting House on campus and settle into what is an unnatural state for most American youths: silence. What follows is a Quaker Meeting for Worship in which all present are invited to open themselves to direct communion with the divine without liturgy or clerical intermediaries. Students, faculty, and interested staff listen inwardly to the “the still small voice” that can offer insight and sustenance, or give shape to one’s questions and struggles.

Ministry comes when an individual - the youngest kindergartener, the ready-to-graduate senior, or a first-time visitor - feels “moved” or “divinely led” to stand and speak. These “messages” may be worshipful or prayerful, personal or universal. While messages may build on what has been said before, they should not be a direct response to previous speakers’ words. Each person is expected to be open to the voice of the spirit shared by others, and neither predisposed to speak, nor determined not to speak.

Of equal importance is the act of listening, the willingness of each and every person to be open to the voice of the spirit as shared by others. It is in this communal experience of quiet worship and reflection that we nurture the spiritual life of our school and strengthen our sense of community. Meeting ends with the friendly gesture of handshakes all around.

GFS graduation ceremonies are extended Meetings for Worship in which families and guests are invited to participate. Those who speak are encouraged to offer messages that apply to the whole class, rather than words directed to one student.

Worship Sharing is a time when students come together in smaller groups for discussions that are guided by the same principles as Meeting for Worship: silence, reflection, and open mindedness. This spirit guides the generation and exchange of ideas. Because our students are exposed to most of the problems that affect other youth, Worship Sharing is used to address such varied topics as concern for the environment and body image, often generated by questions raised by students. The topics covered during Worship Sharing are adapted to the age and maturity of the students.

Meeting for Business is a Meeting for Worship in which practical issues are prayerfully considered and decisions are made. Instead of voting, Quakers search for solutions through a collaborative process of discussion and reflection. The “clerk” is the person designated to guide and focus the discussion. Wisdom and experience as well as the lone voice are heard and valued. When the group arrives at a shared understanding, the clerk reflects to the group what he or she perceives as the “sense of the meeting.” The clerk asks if everyone present can unite with the “sense of the meeting.” Unless someone declares that he or she cannot unite with the clerk’s statement of the “sense of the meeting,” the decision has been made.

Quaker writer Arthur Larrabee uses the metaphor of music to describe Quaker process. While we will not all “emerge singing the same note,” he says, “our voices together will create a harmony which forms one piece.”

Students’ groups, such as Middle School government, and student and administrative committees often rely on the principles of Meeting for Business to guide the work they do. This ethos of collaborative search for truth permeates the culture at GFS, from the way a teacher leads a classroom discussion or students plan a community event, to the way administrative teams envision the future paths of our school.

Germantown Friends School is a not-for-profit charitable corporation separate from Germantown Monthly Meeting but it is both spiritually and organizationally under the care of the Meeting. For example, the Meeting members, as a whole, have the responsibility to appoint the School Committee or board of trustees of GFS, the majority of whom must be Friends and are largely drawn from the membership of the Meeting.

## HISTORY OF GFS

### *Germantown Friends School Time Line*

1845	School opened in care of Germantown Monthly Meeting
1858	School re-opened on this site next to the Meetinghouse
1885	First non-Quaker admitted
1909	School doubled in size
1925	School Committee approved expanded facilities (GFS now no longer a parochial school)
1928	First Jewish student admitted
1932	First school dance
1933	Carnegie Mellon Foundation “8-Year Study” – GFS seen as a leader in progressive education
1935	First Malvern Festival (1 <sup>st</sup> drama performance)
1946	First African-American admitted
1957	GMM rejects offer of land to move school to the suburbs
1965	Community Scholars Program established
1969	End of dress code with specific requirements
circa1975	Seniors instead of Meeting members oversee Upper School Meeting for Worship by sitting on the facing bench

## GLOSSARY OF QUAKER TERMS

***Affirmation***—A legal declaration provided for Friends and others who conscientiously refuse to take (or swear) judicial oaths.

***Clerk***—The person responsible for the administration of a Friends’ body, who is sensitive to the guidance of the spirit in the conduct of the business of that body. This includes guidance preparation, leadership, and the follow-up of Meetings for Business.

***Concern***—A quickening sense of the need to do something about a situation or issue in response to what is felt to be a direct intimation of God’s will.

**Consensus**—A group business decision-making process requiring unanimity of agreement that is similar but not identical to the Quaker business process of finding the “sense of the meeting.”

**Continuing Revelation**—A central Quaker belief that the revelation of God’s will is an ongoing process.

**Discernment**—The process of arriving at the right course of action through spiritual perception and clear rational thought.

**Faith and Practice**—A book that is intended to be a guide to members and those who seek to understand in greater detail the ways Quakers endeavor to apply fundamental affirmations.

**Hold in the Light**—To focus on a person or a concern in a spiritual, prayerful way.

**Inner Light**—Term that represents for Friends the direct, unmediated experience of the Divine. Some other equivalent terms often found in Quaker writings are: the Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, the Divine Principal, the Seed, the Guide, the Christ Within, the Inward Teacher, that of God in every person.

**Integrity**—One of the basic practical principles or testimonies of Friends. It involves both a wholeness and harmony of the various aspects of one’s life, and truthfulness in whatever one says and does. Friends commonly liken this principle to the testimony of simplicity.

**Leading**—A sense of being called by God to undertake a specific course of action. A leading often arises from a concern.

**Meeting for Worship**—A gathering of individuals in quiet waiting upon the enlightening and empowering presence of the Divine: the central focus of the corporate life of the Religious Society of Friends.

**Meeting for Worship for Business**—A Meeting for Worship during which the corporate business of the meeting is conducted – often referred to as a Meeting for Business.

**Meeting House**—The Quaker place of worship; the equivalent of a church building.

**Message**—A spoken message or ministry by an individual inspired by divine leading in a Meeting for Worship. A message may come to an individual that is personal or not for the group, and it is a matter of discernment whether or not to stand and deliver the message to a gathering.

**Minute**—The record of a corporate decision or sense of the meeting on a particular matter reached during a Meeting for Worship for business.

**Moment of Silence**—A short period of silence that allows participants to center themselves so that they can listen and participate in a useful and open way.

**Monthly Meeting**—1) A congregation of Friends who meet regularly for worship and to conduct corporate business. 2) A monthly gathering of such a body for worship and business.

**Peace Testimony**—The corporate commitment of Friends to pacifism and nonviolence.

**Quaker**—Originally, a derogatory term applied to Friends because their excitement of spirit when led to speak in a Meeting for Worship was sometimes expressed in a shaking or quaking motion. Now this term is simply an alternative designation for member of the Religious Society of Friends.

**Queries**—A set of questions, based on Friends' practices and testimonies, which are considered by meetings and individuals as a way of both guiding and examining individual and corporate lives and actions. As such, they are a means of self-examination.

**Recording Clerk**—A person designated to take notes at meetings.

**Right Relationship**—Aligning one's actions to one's discernment of God's will.

**Sense of Meeting**—An expression of the clerk that substantial unity has been reached on an issue or topic by the assembled group not based upon a vote, but inferred from the discussion of the matter.

**Simplicity**—One of the traditional Quaker testimonies that is closely associated with integrity, equality and stewardship. Essentially, to limit the material circumstances of one's life in a way that allows/enables one to follow divine leadings.

**Stewardship**—For Friends, stewardship is an element of integrity. Good stewardship directs Friends’ investment of time and money in sustainable and renewable resources and in work that supports Quaker values and beliefs.

**Testimony**—A guiding principle of conduct that bears witness to the presence of God in the world and in our lives. Though there is no official list of such testimonies, Friends have traditionally identified peace and nonviolence, equality, simplicity, stewardship, community, and integrity as their practical principles.

**Truth**—The revealed will of God, as experienced in communion with the Inner Light or Inward Christ. Early Quakers called themselves the Religious Society of Friends of Truth.

**Unity**—The spiritual oneness and harmony whose realization is a primary objective of a Meeting for Worship or a Meeting for Business.

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