



## *Quakerism and Quaker education: A Conversation with Parents*

Outline for a two-hour parent workshop at Friends schools  
developed by Irene McHenry and Sarah Sweeney-Denham  
for use by Quaker leaders in Friends schools

*What draws families to Quaker education?*

*What are the roots of Quaker history and belief?*

*What is “Quaker” about Quaker education?*

*What are the Quaker testimonies and how is the peace testimony relevant in today’s world?*

The goal for this parent workshop is to generate discussion that begins to answer these questions for families in Quaker schools. Through individual, partner, and whole group reflection, parents engage in an overview of Quaker history and beliefs, and how they influence the life of a Friends school. This is an outline for a two-hour introductory discussion.

### **Materials:**

*Available from Friends Council on Education:*

“The Roots and Witness of Quakerism,” by Steve Cary

“Quaker Decision-Making,” by Barbara Caldwell

“Toward a Clearer View of Quaker Education,” by Sam Caldwell

“Meeting for Worship: Written for Students by Students,”  
by students at Delaware Valley Friends School

“What Does a Friends School Have to Offer?” Friends Council on Education

*Originals to be copied by the school:*

Discussion questions

One page testimony handout

Peace testimony with queries

*Other materials:*

3 x5 cards, flipchart, stand, marker

### **Preparation for the leader:**

Read the pamphlets “Roots and Witness,” “Quaker Decision-Making,” “Toward a Clearer View...” and “Meeting for Worship: Written for Students by Students.” Use the basic outline below as a topic guide and timeframe for the two-hour workshop to assist in preparing an overview of Quaker history, testimonies, and use of queries. Below find the outline of activity, materials, and approximate timing planned for each portion of the workshop.

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<i>Activity / Topic</i>	<i>Materials</i>	<i>Timing</i>
1. Begin with a moment of silent centering.		3 min.
2. Introductions		5 min.
3. Focus questions	3x5 card	10 min.
<p>Ask the group: <b>What attracted you to Quaker education?</b>  <b>Why did you choose this school for your child?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite parents to write their answers on the 3 x 5 card</li> <li>• Invite parents to share in dyads, joining a partner whom they do not know very well</li> <li>• Bring together the whole group and ask what resonated with them in this sharing? Did they notice any common themes?</li> <li>• Note on chart paper and look for themes. Note that some of these values that attracted them to Quaker education may be related to the core beliefs and testimonies of Quakerism, to be discussed next.</li> </ul>		
4. Leader Presentation: Quaker history and beliefs		10 min.
Include...	<p>That of God in every person</p> <p>Religious tolerance (Wm. Penn, Q. to new world &amp; Pa.)</p> <p>Equal status for women</p> <p>Commitment to education for all (started public education in U.S., started schools for children of slaves and Native American children)</p> <p>Truth as a process of continuing revelation (refer to decision-making brochure)</p> <p>History (excerpt from “Roots &amp; Witness”)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">How Quakerism is different from other Christian traditions</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">How Quakerism makes space for all religious traditions</p>	<p>plus time</p> <p>for questions</p>
5. Testimonies and Queries	Handouts:	10 mins.
• Name major Quaker testimonies, and explain use of queries.	Testimonies (1pg) Peace testimony	plus time for questions
• Focus discussion on peace testimony, as it is especially relevant to current world situations.	w/ queries	

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6. The aim of Quaker education	<i>Twd Clearer View</i>	<i>25 min.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In small groups (3-4, depending on size of group), Read silently panel of “Twd Clearer View” that begins “Quaker education seeks...”</li> </ul>		<i>(5 min.)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss in your small group:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What questions do you have about this author’s perspective?</li> <li>• How would you describe the sort of person you want your child to become?</li> <li>• How is your vision similar to the one described here?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<i>handout questions</i>	<i>(15 min.)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In whole group, share comments, questions generated from group discussion</li> </ul>		<i>(5 min.)</i>
7. Meeting for Worship	<i>MFW brochure</i>	<i>15 min</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give overview of meaning and place of meeting for worship in Quakerism and in your school.</li> <li>• Review together excerpts of “Meeting for Worship: Written for Students by Students.”</li> <li>• Share ways into meeting and strategies for focused meditation.</li> <li>• End with a period of worship, inviting parents to speak if moved, and inviting them to attend meeting with their children at school and/or at a local meeting house.</li> <li>• <i>Optional:</i> read and reflect on queries on the peace testimony as you settle into silent worship.</li> </ul>		

*After reading an excerpt of Caldwell's "Toward a Clearer View of Quaker Education," discuss the following questions together:*

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## *The Quaker Peace Testimony*

### ***What is a testimony?***

Quakers have certain values which come from the belief that there is that of God in every person. These values, when applied to daily life, guide how people should treat each other and live in harmony with each other and the environment. Examples of essential Quaker testimonies are:

- Equality
- Peace
- Stewardship
- Simplicity
- Integrity

The testimonies are value-based calls for action in the contemporary world.

### ***What is the peace testimony?***

The peace testimony is one of the most widely known of the Friends testimonies. Since Friends believe that there is that of God in each person, they have always opposed violence to another human being. This has led Friends to oppose wars and any armed conflict. Friends established the American Friends Service Committee during World War I and conscientious objector draft status so that men who did not believe in carrying weapons and fighting in wars could assist by serving the needs of people who were victims of war.

Quakers have followed the peace testimony for more than 300 years. The peace testimony was clearly stated 340 years ago in 1660 in London when the Quakers made this declaration to King Charles II:

“We utterly deny all outward wars and strife, and fighting with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretense whatsoever; this is our testimony to the whole world...Therefore, we cannot learn war any more.”

The peace testimony is not just a wartime thing. It is a way of life – pacifism – which urges decision-making and action from the idea so clearly expressed by William Penn: “Let us see what love can do.”

*Queries for focusing on the Peace testimony are on the back of this sheet.*

## *Queries for Focusing on the Peace Testimony*

How can we create communities in our families, neighborhoods, and school where we honor that of God in every person and do not engage in subtle forms of violence, such as unkind words, disrespect, and putting others down for their differences?

Do I treat conflict as an opportunity for growth and address it with careful attention? Do I seek to recognize and respect the dignity and the aspect of the Divine in those with whom I have a basic disagreement? Do I look for ways to reaffirm in action and attitude my respect and caring for the one with whom I am in conflict?

How can we take this opportunity to use our power of honesty, courage, respect for others, forgiveness, and careful attention to different points of view to create a safe, just, and peaceful community and world?

How does our school act to advance peace, to oppose violence, and to support the constructive use of authority in our community, our nation, and the world?

How can we bring peaceful solutions to today's world with its increasing capacity for destruction by atomic, chemical, bacteriological, and conventional warfare?  
How can we work to co-create a world law with love, justice, peace, and freedom?

It is no use opposing great wars, if there are small ones in our lives. If we quarrel with other people and bear them grudges, we are causing a state of war around us. To what extent do I try to eliminate the "small wars" in my daily life in my family, school, and community?

## **The Quaker Testimonies, Excerpts from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice.**

### **EQUALITY, PEACE, SIMPLICITY, STEWARDSHIP, INTEGRITY**

**EQUALITY:** "We believe there is that of God in every person, and thus we believe in human equality before God." Quakers pioneered equal rights for women, worked for the abolishment of slavery, and have "fought" to end racial discrimination.

**SOCIAL JUSTICE:** "...Friends aid the non-violent efforts of the exploited to attain self-determination and social, political, and economic justice, and to change attitudes and practices formerly taken for granted.... Exploitation impairs the human quality of the exploiter as well as of the exploited."

**CRIMINAL JUSTICE:** "Believing that the penal system often reflects structural and systemic injustice in our society, Friends seek alternatives." Friends strongly oppose capital punishment.

**PEACE:** "We utterly deny all outward wars and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or any pretense whatsoever; this is our testimony to the whole world..." Friends "therefore avoid not only physical violence but also more subtle forms - psychological, economic, or systemic." "We support those who resist cooperation with conscription and those who oppose war by performing work as conscientious objectors."

**STEWARDSHIP:** "Friends need to examine their decisions about obtaining, holding, and using money and other assets, to see whether they find in them the seeds, not only of war, but also of self-indulgence, injustice, and ecological disaster.... We recognize that the well-being of the earth is a fundamental spiritual concern. How we treat the earth and its creatures is a basic part of our relationship with God. Our planet as a whole, not just the small parts of it in our immediate custody, requires our responsible attention."

**SIMPLICITY:** "The testimony of outward simplicity began as a protest against the extravagance and snobbery which marked English society in the 1600s. In whatever forms this protest is maintained today, it must still be seen as a testimony against involvement with things which tend to dilute our energies and scatter our thoughts, reducing us to lives of triviality and mediocrity. Simplicity does not mean drabness or narrowness, but is essentially positive, bring the capacity for selectivity in one who holds attention on the goal. Thus simplicity is an appreciation of all that is helpful toward living as children of the living God."

**INTEGRITY:** "Life is one. There is an invisible spiritual aspect and a visible material aspect of the same life. This life includes the whole world and all there is in it. Each aspect has its peculiar function.... How do I strive to maintain the integrity of my inner and outer lives -- in my spiritual journey, my work, and my family responsibilities? How do I manage my commitments so that overcommitment, worry, and stress do not diminish my integrity? Am I temperate in all things? Am I careful to speak truth as I know it and am I open to truth spoken to me?"