



Faith and Practice

GERMANTOWN FRIENDS SCHOOL



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

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Welcome to Germantown Friends School, where our mission and educational practices are based on the Quaker belief that there is that of God in everyone. Faith and Practice is intended to give members of the Germantown Friends School community insight into the core values that guide everyday life at our school and give the institution its Quaker character. While Germantown Friends School is nurtured under the care of the Germantown Friends Meeting, our students, faculty, staff, and parents come from diverse faith backgrounds. A committee of parents, faculty, and staff prepared this pamphlet with input and participation from all corners of Germantown Friends School. This information 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 with the ability to directly experience the Divine Light. If we look for this light and choose to follow it, it can lead 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 arose in England during the religious turmoil of the 17th century. It sprang from the teachings of George Fox, who found that established religions provided insufficient guidance and comfort, 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” that “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.

Friends’ regular worship service, called Meeting for Worship, is based on our belief that if we open our hearts and listen, as George Fox did to the inner teacher, we can hear what is right and live out these inner teachings in our own lives. If we can be led by the Inner Light in our lives, we believe others can, too. Consequently, we seek that of God in others and expect to find the sacred in everyday life.

We gather in Meeting for Worship to seek divine guidance together. In Meeting for Worship, we wait in silent expectation of a transcendent experience. We rise to speak when we feel moved to share what we trust are messages illuminated by the Inner Light. At a truly inspired Meeting, you can feel a presence unfold that’s greater than any individual. Those meetings are called “gathered” or “covered”—meaning those present genuinely feel communion with each other and with a higher spirit.

Outside of Meeting for Worship, we try to live our lives in the same spirit. While Friends have no formal creed that everyone must follow, over the years, we at Germantown Friends School have recognized a series of principles, or “testimonies,” that help guide us and remind us of what we have come to believe is good behavior in the world. Early Friends called them “disciplines,” which suggests the important work needed to uphold them.

✿ What are Quaker Testimonies at GFS?

Testimonies

“Let your lives speak!”

—Traditional Quaker saying

Quakers believe that our lives do speak. Likewise, at GFS, we believe that what we do and how we do it are important to us and to the world. More than 175 years at Germantown Friends School has taught us that:

- Activities and possessions should not overwhelm us: **Simplicity**
- Each life is precious and unique: **Peace**
- We seek the truth and try to live it: **Integrity**
- We care for each other: **Community**
- We are all equal before God: **Equality, Equity**
- We use God’s gifts wisely: **Stewardship**

These tested truths, while held by people of many faiths, come from our shared experiences 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/Equity, and Stewardship. We begin with Integrity because it is the cornerstone of individual behavior and of 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

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 their 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?
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Equality/Equity

When our children file into their weekly Meeting for Worship, together with faculty and staff, they all sit as equals before God. 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 by 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. The idea of Equity thus calls us to meet each child where they are.

GFS seeks to foster the individual talents of every student, whether they are 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 name 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/Equity on campus and in the wider community?
 4. What does GFS attempt to convey to its community by not computing class rank or giving out academic awards?
 5. Are we doing enough to make GFS available to eligible students of varied economic means?
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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, faculty, and staff.

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 engagement 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.

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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?

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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 busyness overcome us.

By encouraging simplicity, GFS tries to offer an alternative to consumer culture. We believe modest dress and moderate social habits allow students and faculty to spend their energies on the teaching, learning, and nurturing of each other 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 extracurricular, 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 this testimony by allowing us a pause from our hectic lives.

Queries

1. Do I balance my work, possessions, and busyness 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?
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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 that have led Quakers to renounce war and violence and to work to eliminate their 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.

Friends believe that each person must be convinced in their 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, some have gone to prison for non-cooperation, and some have joined the military.

At GFS, we recognize and try to live by the testimony of Peace. 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 use 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?
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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 for 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 engagement 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 I take good care of school equipment, facilities, and resources?
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✻ Quakerism at GFS

Meeting for Worship is the cornerstone of our shared spiritual experience at GFS. Once a week, students from each division—Early Childhood, Lower School, Middle School, and Upper School—gather in the 1869 Meeting House on campus and settle into what is an unnatural state for most American youth: 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 staff listen inwardly to “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 should be neither predisposed to speak, nor determined not to speak.

Of equal importance are the act of listening and 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 include a Meeting 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 to respond to a prompt. They 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 varied topics, such as concern for the environment and body image, often based on 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 they perceive as the “sense of the meeting.” The clerk asks if everyone present can unite with the “sense of the meeting.” Unless someone declares that they 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 the 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.”

Student groups, such as Middle School government, often rely on the principles of Meeting for Business to guide the work they do. This ethos of the 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 path 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, 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.

✿ 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 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: A 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 Principle, 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, as well as 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 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 Meeting for Worship was sometimes expressed in a shaking or quaking motion, this term is now simply an alternative designation for a member of the Religious Society of Friends.

Queries: A set of questions, based on Friends' practices and testimonies, that 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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Definitions adapted from: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's Faith and Practice 1997, Faith and Practice of Friends School of Baltimore, and An Insider's Guide to GFS.



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