



Cover of *this we can say*, a compilation by contemporary Australian Quakers expressing their faith in text, poetry, drawings and song. Available from Interactive Publications: <http://www.ipoz.biz/quaker-publications/>

about Quakers

Something of our ideas and practices



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Who we are

SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY

Our meetings are a spiritual community where individuals who are seeking to deepen their experience of the spirit can find a source of strength, enlightenment and love. Meetings are also committed to expressing 'faith in action', where those who have deep concerns about the world can find support and sustenance in working towards improvements.

OUR NAME

Our official name is 'The Religious Society of Friends', and we call each other Friends. The Society began in Britain in the 17th century, when it was called 'The Religious Society of the Friends of Truth', but we became generally known as Quakers. Although we have been around – and active – for 350 years, many people are unsure who we are and what we stand for, often confusing us with other religious groups.

Worldwide, Quakers are very diverse in faith and practice. This leaflet attempts to give you an idea of who Quakers are in Australia today.

MEMBERS & ATTENDERS

There are about a quarter of a million Quakers or members of the Society worldwide. In Australia we have over 1000 members. There are many more attenders – people who worship with us regularly but are not in membership. Attenders may apply to become members when they feel ready. We welcome enquirers and visitors to our meetings.

ORGANISATION

Each local meeting runs its own affairs with regular Business Meetings in which all members and attenders are encouraged to participate. Local meetings are part of a larger Regional Meeting, bounded roughly by state boundaries. There is an annual gathering called Yearly Meeting, which is attended by Friends from around Australia. There are also international links through the Friends World Committee for Consultation. Australian Quakers do not ordain ministers or appoint pastors. Instead, the responsibility for the spiritual life of the meeting and pastoral care is shared by the group.

Further reading

Australia Yearly Meeting produces a wide range of books, information leaflets and brochures, many of which may be found in your local Meeting House library. Books marked with an asterisk can be purchased by emailing: sales@quakers.org.au More pamphlets are available from the Quaker Australia website: www.quakers.org.au

AUSTRALIA YEARLY PUBLICATIONS BOOKLETS AND LEAFLETS

- *Who Are the Quakers: the Religious Society of Friends in Australia today*, revised 2001.
- *Quakers in Australia: their faith and practice*, reprinted 1998.
- *As the Seed Grows: essays in Quaker thought*, ed. Charles Stevenson, 1997.
- *Quakerism – a mature religion for today*, David Hodgkin, 1988.
- *Living the Way: Quaker spirituality and community*, Ursula Jane O'Shea, Backhouse Lecture, 1993.

PERIODICALS

- *The Australian Friend* (4 issues per year)
- *Regional Meeting newsletters* (issued monthly)

BOOKS

These are just a few of the books that you can borrow from your local Meeting House library – or try your local library.

1. **The Quaker Way*, David Johnson, 2007.
2. **The Handbook of Practice & Procedure*, The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia Inc., 2004.
3. *A Short History of the Quakers*, Michael Birkel, 2004.
4. **this we can say*, AYM Faith and Practice Committee, 2003.
5. **Quaker Ways*, ed. Elizabeth Stevenson, 1996.
6. *A Light that is Shining*, Harvey Gillman, 1988.
7. *Encounter with Silence*, John Punshon, 1987.
8. *Quaker by Convincement*, Geoffrey Hubbard, 1985.
9. *Introducing Quakers*, George Gorman, 1981.
10. *Coming Home: an introduction to the Quakers*, Gerald Priestland, 1981.
11. *Friends*, Richard T. Vann, 1974.
12. *The Amazing Fact of Quaker Worship*, George Gorman, 1973.

Where to find out more

CONTACT ADDRESS:

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There is at least one meeting in each state and the ACT. To find your nearest meeting, look in your local phone book under 'Friends' or 'Quakers' or 'Religious Society of Friends'.

YOUNG FRIENDS

The Young Friends clerk can be contacted at: yfclerk@quakers.org.au
The Young Friends website is at: <http://youngfriends.co-operista.com/tiki-index.php>

OUR WEBSITE

Some basic information about Australian Quakers can be found on our website www.quakers.org.au

This site is linked to other sites which relate to Quaker concerns and Quakers in other countries.

OTHER WEBSITES

- *Quaker Information Centre*, a US website: <http://www.quakerinfo.org/>
- *Quaker faith & practice: The book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain*, online at: <http://www.quakerweb.org.uk/qfp/>
- Quaker Service Australia – the aid and development agency of the Quakers in Australia: <http://www.qsa.org.au/>
- US list of Quaker resources: <http://www.quaker.org/>
- Quakers in Britain: <http://www.quaker.org.uk/>

What we stand for

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE SPIRIT

Friends believe that there is 'that of God' in everyone. Words cannot adequately convey the essence of spiritual experience, and individual Quakers will express their understanding in different ways. Quakers often speak of the 'Inner Light' and 'the Spirit'; by these phrases we mean the divine stirrings which it is possible for anyone to experience, the promptings of God which illuminate our lives and lead us to make good and loving choices. We share and test our promptings with others because we find that prayerful reflection of a group is more discerning than that of an individual. Valuable guidance often comes from the pooled wisdom of the group – in fact, a Society of Friends. Whilst we have no set creed, the Bible, other religious texts and Quaker writings are important to us.

ALL OF LIFE IS SACRED

"Religion and life are one, religion brings the inner and outer life together" (an Australian Friend, 1993). Quakers regard all life as sacramental, and respect all persons equally, so we think of religion as inseparable from everyday living. This

leads to an emphasis on taking responsibility for our actions, whether this means having a positive, loving attitude to people, or working for social justice or peace.

FAITH IN ACTION

"True godliness does not turn men out of the world but enables them to live better in it and excites their endeavours to mend it" (William Penn). From the beginning, Friends have resisted injustice and worked to improve social institutions. Inner experience of the meeting has led Quakers to care about what is happening in their outer world: both in events immediately around them, and in the wider world of the day. In these concerns Friends have been at the leading edge of reform; inward faith has prompted fearless outward action, often at great personal cost. Quakers take a particular stand against war, as we do against any act of violence. Friends' faith in action in Australia includes support for the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in prisons and in their communities, and Quaker Service Australia (QSA) an international aid organisation.

Our testimonies

People may mean different things by 'God'. What matters to Quakers is how we live 'in the spirit'.

Be patterns; be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.

George Fox, 1656

We try to live according to basic principles that we call 'testimonies'. The chief among these testimonies are:

PEACE

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fighting with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world.

From the first Quaker Peace Testimony, issued to Charles II in 1660

TRUTH

Are you honest and truthful in all you say and do? ... Taking oaths implies a double standard of truth; in choosing to affirm instead, be aware of the claim to integrity that you are making. 'Advices and Queries', n. 40, Australia Yearly Meeting, 2008

INTEGRITY

*Integrity is a condition in which a person's response to a total situation can be trusted: the opposite of a condition in which he or she would be moved by opportunist or self-seeking impulses. **Kenneth C. Barnes, 1972***

EQUALITY

*There is that of God in every one and in the natural world. Quakers believe that every person has that of God in them and that each of us has the potential to grow in our relationship with God. This means that everyone is equally worthy of respect and love. **'Who Are the Quakers?', Victoria Regional Meeting***

SIMPLICITY

*A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength. **Advices and Queries, n.45 (in part), Australia Yearly Meeting, 2008***

*Individually and as a group we are seeking to let go of internal and external clutter and be open to the light. **Jenny Spinks 2002, 'this we can say', 3.84***

Meetings

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

The Meeting for Worship is central to the Quaker way of life. Quakers come together, normally on a Sunday, for Meeting for Worship, which is based on silence. The silence gives us greater opportunity to move closer to God. It is an active, listening silence which has been practised by Friends for over 350 years. When moved by the Spirit someone may give spoken ministry, which could take the form of a statement, a prayer, a quotation, a poem or a short scriptural reading to the gathered group. This 'spoken ministry' is seen as a fulfilment of the silence rather than an interruption. Other special-purpose meetings are also held in a spirit of worship, such as meetings for marriages and funerals.

*Long before I became a Quaker, there were Bible passages that stood out for me. One is I Kings 19:1-12: '... but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire, a still small voice'. So the Quaker emphasis on listening in the silence to the voice of the Spirit rings very true for me. **Doreen Cope 2000, 'this we can say', 2.16***

MEETINGS FOR BUSINESS

Friends regard practical matters as part of worship, and decision-making processes are conducted in a similar way to Meetings for Worship – as a spiritual exercise to find the will of God. The group seeks to discern a way forward, which goes beyond personal views and preferences. Rather than voting or looking for a consensus, we are seeking to be led into new understandings.

'The silence gives us greater opportunity to move closer to God. It is an active, listening silence which has been practised by Friends for over 350 years.'