

'From the closeness to my own dying, I know *God is*. Death is not a negation of life but complements it: however terrible the actual dying, life and death are both parts of the whole and that wholeness is in God . . . I believe eternal life is in each moment of life, here and now; the real tragedy is not how or when we die but if we do not live the life we are given to our full potential.'

Jenifer Faulkner, 1982, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 21.57

The Quaker worship service is intended to be an opportunity for friends and family to give thanks for the grace of God in the life of the person who has died. Together in worship we can experience the sorrow of our loss, share memories, celebrate the joy of having known the person and help each other to go forward to continue our own lives.

Friends hope that the experience of touching even briefly the eternal reality which encloses us in space and time will be a source of direction, strength and comfort for all attending the funeral Meeting for Worship.

More about Quakers

Quakers 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.

Information and a list of Quaker meetings are available from the Yearly Meeting Secretary or the Quakers Australia website (see below).

SOURCES

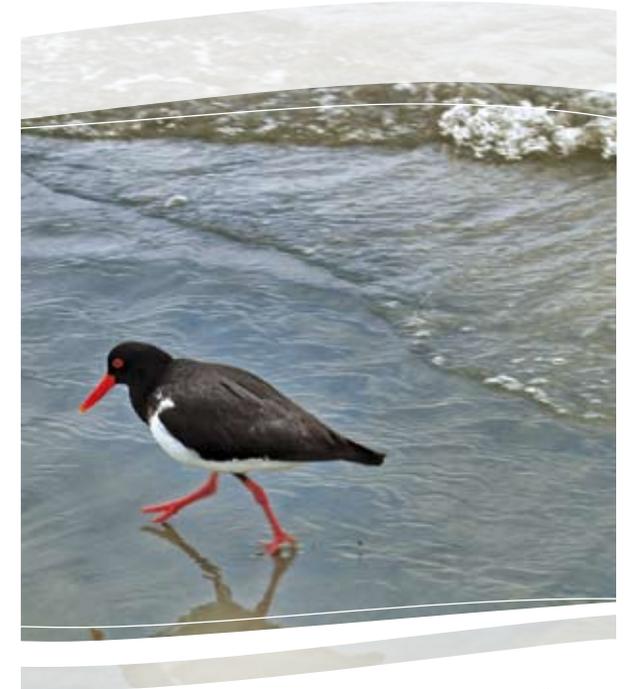
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Quaker funeral ceremonies



Quaker meetings

A Quaker Meeting for Worship creates a space of gathered stillness where we can listen to the promptings of truth and love in our hearts, which we understand as arising from God.

When you walk into a Quaker meeting, you will find a group of people sitting facing each other in a circle or a square. There will not be an altar or hymnbooks, although you will find copies of Quaker books and the Bible on a central table.

Our meetings are based on silent waiting. When moved by the Spirit, someone may give spoken ministry, which is seen as a fulfilment of the silence rather than an interruption.

This active, listening silence has been practised by Friends for over 350 years. Special-purpose meetings, such as meetings for marriages and funerals, are also held in a spirit of worship.

'Love is the force that drives all else.
If life has taught me anything, it is that
love is, of all things, eternal. Love is of
God, my God, therefore it is eternal and
cannot die; here is the greatest comfort
in creation. Love straddles the hurdle
we call death and I, who have loved
you all, I take it with me and its chain
will link us to eternity.'

Bob Lindsay, 1989, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 21.55

Quaker funerals & memorial services

Funerals are an opportunity for family and friends to gather together to give thanks for the life of the person who has died, to show loving sympathy for those who are grieving, and to contemplate the mystery of life.

The Quaker funeral service follows the format of a Meeting for Worship in which we give thanks for the grace of God in the life of the person for whom the funeral is held. Sometimes the person who has died may have left instructions or requests, which are incorporated into the Meeting for Worship.

A memorial meeting may be held at a different time from the funeral. It is a further opportunity to rejoice in the privilege of having known the person who has died. This will be less formally organised and may last as long as an hour.



A Quaker funeral

The Meeting for Worship will start when the first worshipper has arrived. Music is sometimes played while the meeting is assembling. There is no visible leader but usually a member of the meeting is asked or appointed to guide the meeting in the manner of Friends and according to the wishes of the relatives. Relatives and close friends of the deceased may, if they wish, be together at the front of the meeting.

Those present may express their love for the person who has died in poetry, song or prose, speaking out of the silence as moved by the Spirit, or offer their prayers and support in the silence. Some may read extracts from Quaker or other books. Whether in silence or in speech, by their attentive thought and prayer, everyone present contributes to the meeting.

At an appropriate moment a Friend who has been asked to do so will signal the lowering or movement of the coffin. By shaking hands with another, he or she will later signal the end of the meeting.