

# about Quakers

*Something of our ideas and practices*



## Who we are

### **SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY**

We 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.

We commit 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, a time of Civil War and great religious turmoil. Reputed to tremble in the grip of deep religious fervour, critics called the early Friends 'Quakers', a name that has endured.

Since then, Quakers worldwide have evolved to become very diverse in faith and practice. Australian Quakers continue largely in the British tradition of silent worship.

### **MEMBERS & ATTENDERS**

There are close to 400,000 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 formal membership. Attenders may apply to become members when they feel ready. We welcome enquirers and visitors to our meetings.

### **ORGANISATION**

In contrast to most faith communities, 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, seeking to 'know one another in the things that are eternal'.

In addition to weekly meetings for worship, each local meeting runs its own affairs with regular Business Meetings in which all members and attenders are encouraged to participate. Regional Meetings for Business make decisions affecting a wider region, usually roughly aligned with state boundaries. Yearly Meeting is an annual national business meeting attended by Friends from around Australia. International links are maintained through the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC).

## 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 this in different ways. Quakers often speak of the 'Inner Light' and 'the Spirit'; by these phrases we mean 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 the prayerful reflection of a group is more discerning than that of an individual. Valuable guidance often comes from the pooled wisdom of our Religious Society of Friends.

While we have no set creed, the Bible, other religious texts and Quaker writings are important to us. The *Advices and Queries* succinctly embody the wisdom and philosophy of Quaker life, faith and thought. The question 'What canst thou say?', based on individual experience, is crucial.

### **ALL OF LIFE IS SACRED**

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 all our actions, public and private. As patterns and examples, we endeavour to let our lives speak.

### **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. Friends' inward faith has prompted fearless outward action, often at great personal cost. Friends take heed of events around them and in the wider world. In many of these concerns, Friends have been at the leading edge of reform. Quakers stand against war and any act of violence. Australian Friends support the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in prisons and communities, refugee and migrant services, Friends' School in Hobart, our international aid organisation Quaker Service Australia (QSA) and QUNO offices in Geneva and New York.

## 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**

### ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

*The produce of the Earth is a gift from our gracious creator ... and to impoverish the Earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.* **John Woolman, 1720–1772**

*We find delight in the grace of creation, and are humbled by the richness of its gifts. Our very existence depends upon sustaining our intimate relationships within nature. Yet much has been harmed or lost forever through our lack of reverence, our ignorance, denial, wast and ill-action. We have set ourselves against the Spirit.* **Quaker Earthcare Statement, 2016**

## 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.

Finally, Friends do not claim to be perfect or to have all the answers. We are enjoined to 'Think it possible that you may be mistaken'.

*Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts.'*

## Where to find out more

### CONTACT ADDRESSES

Australia Yearly Meeting's national secretary can be contacted at:

AYM Secretary  
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)  
in Australia  
Australia Yearly Meeting Office  
119 Devonshire Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010  
P: 0423 308 550  
E: [secretary@quakersaustralia.info](mailto:secretary@quakersaustralia.info)

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

### YOUNG FRIENDS

The Young Friends clerk can be contacted at:  
[RMYFClerk@quakersaustralia.info](mailto:RMYFClerk@quakersaustralia.info)

### OUR WEBSITE

Some basic information about Australian Quakers can be found on our website [www.quakersaustralia.org.au](http://www.quakersaustralia.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/>

## 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.

- *Being a Quaker: a guide for newcomers*, 2nd ed., by Geoffrey Durham, 2013
- *Letters to a fellow seeker: a short introduction to the Quaker way*, by Steve Chase, 2012
- *The Quaker Way: a discovery*, by Rex Ambler, 2012
- *Living our Beliefs: an explanation of the faith and practice of Quakers*, by Graham Ralph, Quaker books, UK, 2016
- <https://www.quakersaustralia.org.au/> - this website has information specifically prepared for seekers and those new to Quaker Meetings.
- DVD: *What to expect in Quaker meeting for Worship: 8 short videos for the Quaker-Curious*, Friends Journal project, produced by Quaker Speak, [www.QuakerSpeak.com/DVD](http://www.QuakerSpeak.com/DVD)
- Resources for further reading: [www.quakersaustralia.info/?page=22](http://www.quakersaustralia.info/?page=22)



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://ipoz.biz/quaker-publications/>

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