

the
young person's
guide to
Quakers



Who we are

OUR NAME

Quakers started as a nickname – our real name is the Religious Society of Friends — but we are quite happy to be called either Friends or Quakers. Although we have been around for 350 years, many people are unsure who we are and what we stand for, and often confuse 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 in Australia are today.

MEMBERS AND ATTENDERS

There are over 300,000 Quakers worldwide. In Australia, just under 2000 people worship in Quaker meetings around Australia. We welcome enquirers and visitors to our meetings.

QUAKERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people involved with Quakers in Australia tend to get together in three groups – Children’s Group (5–11), Junior Young Friends (12–15), and Young Friends (16–29). Young Friends meet in regional groups and also get together nationally at Yearly Meetings, which are held each year in a different state.



Cover: Young Friends at Yearly Meeting 2007. Above: Junior Young Friends at Yearly Meeting 2008.
Photos: Geoff Greeves

What we stand for

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE SPIRIT

Quakers believe that it is possible for every person to have a real and direct experience of God, without the need for priests and rituals.

ALL OF LIFE IS SACRED

Quakers believe that there is ‘that of God’ in everyone, 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

Quakers feel that it is no good having a faith if you don’t put it into practice. Because we believe that there is something of God in everyone – however difficult that may be to find at times – we try to respond to all people in a way that lives out that belief. It means treating everyone with respect, whatever their beliefs, race, age or gender. It also means working towards making this world a better place.

Quakers have always been involved in helping slaves, prisoners, the mentally ill, refugees and war casualties, to name but a few. Responding to that of God in everyone means that we don’t believe in resorting to war or violence to solve a problem. Instead we work for peaceful solutions and reconciliation.

Some recent examples of Friends’ faith in action in Australia are:

- running Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshops in prisons and the community
- lobbying governments about human rights and against the death penalty
- working with international and Indigenous communities via Quaker Service Australia
- lobbying governments for justice for Indigenous people
- considering how to reduce our carbon footprint
- lobbying governments on environmental issues
- lobbying for better treatment of asylum seekers.

Our testimonies



Peace Convergence 2007, Shoalwater Bay, Queensland.
Photo: Frances Kendall

QUAKER TESTIMONIES

Many religious groups have creeds. Quaker faith springs from a deeply held belief in living our lives according to our spiritual experience. The Quaker testimonies are about the way that Quakers live their lives. The chief among these testimonies are peace, justice, equality, community, simplicity, truth and integrity.

PEACE

Perhaps Quakers are best known for their peace testimony. This derives from our conviction that love is at the heart of existence and that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God, so we must live in a way that reflects this. It has led Quakers to refuse military service, and to become involved in a wide range of peace activities from practical work in areas affected by violent conflict to the development of alternatives to violence at all levels from personal to international.

JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND COMMUNITY

Quakers recognise the equal and unique nature of every person. This

means working to change the systems that cause injustice and hinder true community. It also means working with people who are suffering from injustice, such as prisoners and asylum seekers.

SIMPLICITY

Quakers are concerned about the excesses and unfairness of our consumer society, and the unsustainable use of natural resources. We try to live simply and to give space for the things that really matter: the people around us, the natural world, our experience of God.

TRUTH AND INTEGRITY

Quakers try to live according to the deepest truth we know, which we believe comes from God. This means speaking the truth to all, including people in positions of power. Integrity is the guiding principle we set for ourselves and expect in public life.

'... if everyone has some of God within, how can we kill them?'

<http://www.yqspace.org.uk/>

Meetings

MEETINGS FOR WORSHIP

It's hard being a 'seeker' on your own. In the Meeting for Worship, Friends share with each other what they have found out for themselves, and gain from each other in this way.

If everyone can have a direct relationship or 'communion' with God, then no priest is needed to act as a go-between, and Friends have no priests or ministers (though members share the practical tasks that need doing). Meeting for Worship couldn't be simpler: you settle in the Meeting Room in silence – a silence which can become very deep and powerful, a direct relationship between each person and God.

After a time, someone may feel that they must stand up and speak briefly in their own words, or pray, or read from the Bible or some other book. But silent waiting is the framework of the Meeting for Worship – and the regular meetings are something no Quaker would want to miss.

Quaker service

QUAKER SERVICE AUSTRALIA (QSA)

QSA works with community groups in developing countries to assist them in poverty alleviation and empowerment schemes, as well as food and water security. QSA has been able to provide community groups with skills to train others and to run self-sustaining projects.

Some current QSA projects are:

- supporting the Kapululangu elders of Western Australia to teach their cultural knowledge to their younger generations;
- working with women's groups in Tamil Nadu, South India, by providing training in micro-enterprise schemes;
- teaching people in Cambodia and Uganda how to grow enough food for their families, with some surplus to sell in the markets.

In Uganda, many children have lost both parents, as a result of the AIDS epidemic, and are now the head of their household. QSA's partner has been training groups of these children in sustainable agriculture so that they will have the skills and resources to support their siblings.



Bukenya, a child head of household in Uganda, with his mango tree. Photo: QSA

Further info

YOUNG FRIENDS

The Young Friends clerk can be contacted at:
RMYFClerk@quakersaustralia.info
Young Quakers in the UK have a website at: <http://www.yqspace.org.uk/>

QUAKERS AUSTRALIA WEBSITE

A wide range of 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.

CONTACT ADDRESS

Australia Yearly Meeting's national secretary can be contacted at:
Secretary
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
119 Devonshire Street, Surry Hills
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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'.

BOOKS

These are just a few of the books that you can borrow from your local Meeting House library – or try your local library. Those published in Australia can be purchased by emailing: sales@quakers.org.au

Whispers of Faith: Young Friends Share Their Experiences of Quakerism, Quaker Press, FGC, 2005.

The Quaker Way by David Johnson, 2007.

Listening to the Light by Jim Pym, 2000.

This We Can Say by the Australia Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice Committee, 2003.

Quaker Ways edited by Elizabeth Stevenson, 1996, written for Junior Young Friends (aged 10–16).

A Light that is Shining by Harvey Gillman, 1988.

A Short History of the Quakers by Michael Birkel, 2004.

Twelve Quakers and ..., series including *Twelve Quakers and God*, *Twelve Quakers and Equality*, by Quaker Quest, UK, 2004.

footprints & echoes



Cover of *Footprints & Echoes*, a compilation of works by Australian Young Friends. **Cover illustration:** 'Bliss' by Grace

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