

Quaker Quest

a spiritual path for our time

Quaker Quest: A Brief Description

Quaker Quest is a dynamic new approach to outreach that has brought seekers to meetings all over England. It is based on the idea that Quakerism, "a spiritual path for our time," is simple, radical, and contemporary.

The project began in 2002 as the leading of a group of seasoned Friends in London, the "core group." Quaker Quest sessions have been so popular that they are currently offered at Friends House, London, every Monday night of the year except official bank holidays. Two years ago the core group began, upon request, to train meetings outside London. Quaker Quest is now being offered by meetings throughout the United Kingdom and in Australia.

Program

In essence, Quaker Quest is a series of public open meetings on Quaker topics, which are presented in *repeated cycles*. The sessions follow a *lively format* which engages seekers intently for two hours. During each session three Friends speak briefly from the heart about the evening's topic. Seekers then divide into small groups each facilitated by a Friend who makes certain that everyone has a chance to share. The three presenters then offer a second, shorter set of talks. A question and answer period follows. The program closes with a 30-minute Meeting for Worship.

Topics for Quaker Quest sessions at Friends House have included: "Quakers and Worship," "Quakers and Simplicity," "Quakers and Faith in Action," "Quakers' Experience of God," and "Quakers and the Practice of Peace Making." *The core group has found that seekers who come to Quaker Quest are interested in exploring*

our contemporary spirituality. With this in mind they have been careful to avoid topics such as yearly meeting structures and Quaker history, which do not engage most seekers today. Members of the core group attend every session. They emphasize that their sessions have improved over time because they study participants' evaluation forms, because they regularly give each other candid feedback, and because they gain experience as they repeat their cycles of classes.

In London, Friends House's sessions last from 7:00 to 9 PM and run year round; doors open at 6:30 PM for refreshments, socializing and pamphlet browsing. Elsewhere, monthly meetings decide for themselves how many sessions to present, what topics to address, and when to begin and end. In general, meetings offer three or four topics and repeat the cycle one or more times.

Publicity

Extensive publicity is a key to the success of Quaker Quest. One of the benefits of offering multi-session cycles of classes is that one round of publicity promotes numerous events. Some seekers attend every session in a cycle; others might attend one session in the first cycle and another in the second. Quaker Quest publicity prompts some to visit a Quaker meeting without ever attending a class.

Each meeting offering Quaker Quest has to figure out the best approach to publicity in its particular area. The core group provides leaflets and posters to meetings electronically. In the United States and Canada, Friends General Conference will provide this service for meetings. The meeting then enters its times and location and

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Friends General Conference

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pays to have the materials reproduced locally. Effective publicity can be expensive; meetings see this as an investment in the future.

For more information about Quaker Quest go to the British site, www.quakerquest.org and the FGC site, www.quakerquestfgc.org.

Message and Language

In the web site, and in posters and leaflets advertising Quaker Quest sessions, the core group uses language attractive to contemporary seekers. Quakerism is referred to as “a spiritual path for our time” or “a spiritual path that is simple, radical, and contemporary.” The leaflets and the web site describe Quakerism in this way:

- a search for the sacredness of each person
- an encounter with the divine through the power of stillness
- a journey together in shared responsibility
- a commitment to the ways of equality and nonviolence
- an engagement to build an inclusive society
- a celebration of life in all its wholeness.

Refreshments and Socializing

When planning for the sessions at Friends House, the core group realized that people in that area would likely be coming directly from work. To make life easier for these inquirers, “light refreshments” are offered beginning at 6:30 PM—bread, cheese, fruit, cake, tea and coffee. (Simpler refreshments might be appropriate in other areas.) Refreshments are an important part of the evening because they allow seekers to mingle with each other and with Friends. Socializing also takes place following the two-hour session.

Pamphlets

Before and after each Quaker Quest session, inquirers have an opportunity to browse one table with free literature and another with pamphlets for sale. Responding to questions raised by seekers in Quaker Quest sessions, the core group created a series of pamphlets: “Twelve Quakers and God,” “Twelve Quakers and Worship,” “Twelve Quakers and Pacifism,” “Twelve Quakers and Simplicity,” and “Twelve Quakers and Evil,” and “Twelve Quakers and Jesus.” Each pamphlet contains a brief introduction followed by twelve personal statements. In addition to avoiding the difficulty of reaching agreement on a single statement or appearing creedal, the pamphlets show the diversity among Friends while allowing each writer to express his or her own spiritual understanding.

Building Community

The core group believes that, “there is no better way for a local meeting to develop its sense of community than to take on a Quaker Quest project where every member and attender can play a part.” If meetings use the name “Quaker Quest,” the core group asks that the Quaker Quest principles be followed; they can be learned in a one-day workshop.

Because of the success of Quaker Quest in England, its power and simplicity, a number of North American Friends are wondering whether it could work here. The Friends General Conference Advancement & Outreach Committee is looking for meetings interested in launching pilot Quaker Quest projects. Members of the committee who have received Quaker Quest training in England will be happy to answer questions. We can also provide a workshop and a booklet of guidelines. We invite Friends to consider this new, spiritually-based approach to Quaker outreach. Let it shine!

For further information, including how to arrange for a Quaker Quest workshop with your meeting, contact

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