

What Do Quakers Believe?

(A proposed statement of collectively held, core beliefs of unprogrammed Quakers in the Philadelphia area)

- Quakers believe that there is a living, dynamic spiritual presence at work in the world which is both within us and outside of us.

Those among us are comfortable with different names for this spiritual presence. Among them are: God, Creator, Christ, Spirit, the Light, Divine Presence, Love, Truth. Throughout this statement of Quaker beliefs, the name "God" is used to include all manifestations of this living, dynamic spiritual presence.

- Quakers believe that there is that of God in everyone.

We often refer to that of God in everyone as "the Light Within." It is a belief that each person is endowed with a measure of the Divine Essence, an Inward Presence which is the spiritual core of each person's being. We sometimes refer to the Light Within as the inward Presence, the Inward Christ, the Inward Teacher, the Seed.

- Quakers believe that each person is capable of the direct and unmediated experience of God.

Our belief leads us into a form of worship that does not rely on clergy, liturgy or creed. We often call our worship "waiting worship." We gather in the quiet to listen for the "still small voice of God" stirring within us and speaking to us.

- Quakers believe that our understanding and experience of God is nurtured and enlarged in community.

When we come together in community, each of us brings our own unique manifestation and experience of God. The diversity among us helps us to know God more fully. In some churches, God is experienced most fully at the altar. For Quakers, God is experienced most fully in community.

- Quakers believe that our inward experience of God transforms us and leads us into outward expressions of faithful living, witness and action.

Individually and collectively, we witness to our understanding of God's Truth in the ways we live and act in the world. Our witness is often expressed in testimonies which have changed over time. Today, many of us would affirm testimonies of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship.

- Quakers believe that the revelation of God’s Truth is continuing and ongoing.

We are clear that the Bible is not the final revelation of God’s nature and will. We believe that God has continued to reveal God’s Truth to humankind down through history and to the present day. When spiritually grounded and tested within the community, we welcome new understandings of God’s Truth.

- Quakers believe that the Bible is an important spiritual resource and that the life and teachings of Jesus are relevant for us today.

For many of us, the Bible is an inspired record of the workings of God in the world, one that helps to illuminate the nature of God. Friends have the experience that knowledge of the Bible deepens the spiritual power of both spoken ministry and inward listening. In a time of despair, George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, heard a voice that said, “There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition.” For many Friends throughout our history, and today, there is a continuing sense of the presence of this power, however it may be named.

- Quakers believe in welcoming spiritual truth regardless of its source.

Many among us have been inspired by spiritual Truth found outside of Quakerism. We have found that our experience of Oneness in the Spirit is enriched when spiritual Truth from other faith traditions is shared in our worship and community life.

- Quakers believe that modeling God’s presence in our lives is more important than espousing beliefs

We believe in the power of letting our lives, not merely our words, speak. We aspire to be living examples of God’s Truth in the world.

This paper is a work in progress.

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