# Faith in Action

How Quakers try to embody our beliefs through our witness in the world.



This unit invites you to find out more about how Quakers try to put faith into practice. Experience in worship leads us to a shared commitment to equality, peace, simplicity and truth, which we try to live out and foster in the world. This is often referred to as Quaker testimony and underpins a lot of Quaker thinking and work.

#### Faith in Action unit aims

#### This unit aims to help you:

- understand how Quakers feel called to live out our beliefs through witness in the world
- find out about the Quaker commitment to equality, peace, simplicity and truth
- reflect on your own experience of being called to live out your beliefs

# Overview

Quaker faith springs from a deeply held belief in living our lives according to our spiritual experience. Some of our spiritual insights, which we call our testimonies, spring from deep experience and have been a part of Quaker faith for many years. These Quaker testimonies arise out of an inner conviction and challenge our normal ways of living.

- They exist in spiritually-led actions rather than rigid written forms.
- They are governed by continuing spiritual experience and are not imposed in any way.
- They require us to search for ways in which the testimonies can become true for ourselves.
- They emerge and change over time.

The word 'testimony' is used by Quakers to describe a witness to the living truth within the human heart as it is acted out in everyday life. It is not a form of words, but a mode of life based on the realisation that there is that of God in everybody, that all human beings are equal, that all life is interconnected. It is affirmative but may lead to action that runs counter to certain practices currently accepted in society at large... These testimonies reflect the corporate beliefs of the Society, however much individual Quakers may interpret them differently according to their own light. They are not optional extras, but fruits that grow from the very tree of faith.

Harvey Gillman, Quaker faith & practice 23.12

## 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.

## Justice, equality and community

Quakers recognise the equal worth 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.

#### Peace

Perhaps Quakers are best known for our peace testimony. This arises from our conviction that love is at the heart of existence and all human beings are equal in the eyes of God, and that 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.

## Faithful living

Putting faith into action is not easy! But with loving advice and a supportive community, Quakers are encouraged to keep trying. A story about early Quaker William Penn shows that each of us has to find our own way, at our own pace, to living out our faith:

When William Penn was convinced of the principles of Friends, and became a frequent attendant at their meetings, he did not immediately relinquish his gay apparel; it is even said that he wore a sword, as was then customary among men of rank and fashion. Being one day in company with George Fox, he asked his advice concerning it, saying that he might, perhaps, appear singular among Friends, but his sword had once been the means of saving his life without injuring his antagonist, and moreover, that Christ had said, 'He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.' George Fox answered, 'I advise thee to wear it as long as thou canst.' Not long after this they met again, when William had no sword, and George said to him, 'William, where is thy sword?' 'Oh!' said he, 'I have taken thy advice; I wore it as long as I could.'

Quaker faith & practice 19.47

## Concerns

When individuals or groups of Quakers feel led to put our faith into action, we may call this 'acting under a concern'; this means more than the normal everyday sense of 'being concerned' about something, but refers to a powerful spiritual

experience of being compelled to act in a certain way. To ensure that we are clear within ourselves and as a community about the rightness of such action, Quakers have developed a process of deep reflection for testing out 'concerns'. In this way we support and challenge one another to really live in accordance with the 'promptings of love and truth' in our hearts (*Advices & queries* 1, in *Quaker faith & practice* 1.02).

#### Testimonies about faithful lives

Another way in which Quakers use the word 'testimony' is when we celebrate the faithful lives of individual Friends: we write an account of a Friend's life called a 'testimony to the grace of God as shown in the life of...'. These accounts are published as a source of encouragement and inspiration to us in living our own call to faith in action.

### Local and national Quaker work

Quakers try to put our faith into practice in many different ways, at local, national and international levels. In this unit you can find out about Quaker activities in your local community and about national Quaker work, including work organised through the Quaker Peace & Social Witness department of Britain Yearly Meeting.

## Quaker distinctives

#### Distinctives 1

#### Faith into action in Quaker faith & practice

Advices & queries 31–42 (in section 1.02 of Quaker faith & practice) offer thought-provoking guidance about how we put our faith into action as Quakers. If you prefer to listen to Advices & queries, there are mp3 audio files available in this unit of the online Becoming Friends course.

To find out more about particular aspects of Quaker faith in action, you could also read any of the following sections of *Quaker faith & practice*:

- Simplicity: *Qf&p* 20.27 and 20.35
- Truth and integrity: *Qf&p* 20.45, 20.54 and 20.56
- Equality: *Qf&p* 23.32, 23.33 and 23.36
- Peace: Qf&p 20.68, chapter 24 introduction, 24.04, and 24.11
- Personal peace witness: Qf&p 24.27, 24.37 and 24.38
- Social responsibility: *Qf&p* 23.22, 23.23 and 23.94
- Environment: *Qf&p* 25.02, 25.10 and 25.14

#### Distinctives 2

#### Acting under a 'concern'

Quakers sometimes speak of a specific call to action or lived witness as acting under a 'concern'. It may take some time to find out or discern exactly what it is that we feel led to do, though, so Quakers have developed ways of working out what our 'concern' is and supporting one another in taking action.

You could read about discerning concerns in an extract from Marion McNaughton's presentation to the Quaker Peace & Social Witness conference 2009. You'll find this extract on pages 159–160.

You might also like to read the following sections of *Quaker faith & practice* for an overview of 'concerns' and Quaker approaches to discerning and supporting a 'concern':

• a special inward calling: *Qf&p* 13.02

- a sense of 'rightness': *Qf&p* 13.03
- discerning a concern: *Qf&p* 13.05
- support from your meeting: *Qf&p* 13.09

#### Distinctives 3

#### Quakers talk about the testimonies

You might like to watch the video 'The Quaker Testimonies' made by Friends at Watford Quaker Meeting about the Quaker approach to living our faith. You can access the video in a number of different ways:

- online at
  - > www.watfordquakers.org.uk/videos.html
  - www.youtube.com as 'The Quaker Testimonies'
- on the DVD *An introduction to Watford Quakers*, available from the Quaker Centre bookshop (see Further exploration for contact details).

#### Distinctives 4

#### A Quaker view on ...

The Quaker Peace & Social Witness leaflet 'A Quaker view on...' gives a helpful overview of past and present Quaker approaches to:

- peace, conflict and violence
- human rights
- crime and punishment
- racial and religious prejudice
- the environment

You'll find the leaflet on pages 161–170 or you can access it online at: www.quaker.org.uk/education (click on the leaflet title in the left hand menu)

For more about the history of Quaker faith in action, see the Deep Roots unit.

#### Distinctives 5

#### Faithful lives

The Quaker custom of writing testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of Friends provides us with real examples of how individuals have lived out their faith: these testimonies can inspire us to action in our own lives.

There are testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of Friends in the following sections of *Quaker faith & practice*:

- Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845): *Qf&p* 18.08
- Katie Riley (20th century): *Qf&p* 18.19
- John Bright (1811–1889): *Qf&p* 23.07
- Stephen Henry Hobhouse (1881–1961): *Qf&p* 23.51
- Percy Cleave (1880–1958): *Qf&p* 23.59
- Joan Frances Layton (1908–1990): *Qf&p* 23.60

You could also read recent testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of Friends in local Quaker newsletters and documents for yearly meetings.

- You could ask your Becoming Friends companion to help you track down copies in your local meeting library
- You could look at the testimonies for Yearly Meeting 2008 at: www.quaker.org.uk/files/YM2008-Testimonies.pdf
- You can also see the current yearly meeting documents online by clicking the current year's page at: www.quaker.org.uk/ym

## Discovery

## Discovery 1

#### **Quaker Peace & Social Witness work**

QPSW publish factsheets about different aspects of their work, which give a good introduction to Quaker faith in action and offer ways of getting involved. You can look at an example of a QPSW factsheet by:

- turning to pages 171–172
- downloading one from www.quaker.org.uk/qpsw-factsheets
- requesting one from QPSW (email qpsw@quaker.org.uk or tel 020 7663 1000)

You could also go to www.quaker.org.uk/qpsw and select any subjects from the left hand menu that interest you, to find out more about Quaker work and resources in areas ranging from housing to disarmament.

You may be interested in the QPSW presentation 'Sustainable Security' at: www.quaker.org.uk/sustainable-security-display
To borrow this display for your meeting house, email: disarm@quaker.org.uk or ring 020 7663 1067.

## Discovery 2

## Exploring local Friends' experience of faith in action

If you would like to explore local Friends' experience of putting their faith into action, you could ask your Becoming Friends companion to help you set up a small group session. The questions below may be useful starting points for discussion, or you may prefer to discuss other questions with your Becoming Friends companion.

- How do you try to live out the Quaker testimony to equality, simplicity, peace or truth in your life?
- Have you ever done anything especially challenging or difficult in living out one of the testimonies?
- Are there elements of the Quaker testimonies that you do not agree with or find more challenging than others?

You could also join in a discussion about experiences of faith in action on a Quaker discussion forum:

- the Britain Yearly Meeting forum at: www.quakerweb.org.uk/forum
- www.friendlink.org.uk (aimed mainly at young Quakers)
- the Faith in Action unit forum

## Discovery 3

#### Discussion about issues of concern

You could consider the introductory questions below, then go to the Faith in Action unit forum and post your own thoughts on the issues raised. You might like to comment on other posts on this forum too.

Alternatively, you could discuss the introductory questions with your Becoming Friends companion, or others in your meeting.

#### **Introductory questions:**

- What is an issue that currently concerns you or that you feel passionate about?
- Do you have a suggestion for action that Friends could take? This could be something quite small and possibly happening online.

## Discovery 4

#### Find out about other Quaker faith in action

You might like to find out more about:

#### **Any local Quaker action**

Ask your Becoming Friends companion, or others in your meeting. Is there anything you feel led to get involved with?

#### **Circles of Support & Accountability**

This is a scheme that decreases the likelihood of sex offenders re-offending by using trained volunteers from the community: www.circles-uk.org.uk

Tel: 0118 950 0068

Email: info@circles-uk.org.uk

#### **Disarm**

QPSW disarmament programme: www.peaceexchange.org.uk You can download *Disarm* newsletters from: www.quaker.org.uk/online-resources

Tel: 020 7663 1067

Email: disarm@quaker.org.uk

#### **Living Witness Project**

Quakers for sustainability: www.livingwitness.org.uk You can download *Earthquaker* newsletters from the website.

Tel: 01865 725 244

Email: laurie@livingwitness.org.uk

#### The Retreat

A not-for-profit specialist mental health provider founded and run by Quakers: www.theretreatyork.org.uk

Tel: 01904 412551

Email: info@theretreatyork.org.uk

#### **Turning the Tide**

About non violent power for social change: www.turning-the-tide.org Download *Making Waves* newsletters from www.quaker.org.uk/online-resources

Tel: 020 7663 1064/1

Email: denised@quaker.org.uk or stevew@quaker.org.uk .

## Discovery 5

# Talk to a Friend about putting Quaker values into action

You might like to ask your Becoming Friends companion or another Friend in your meeting about how they put their Quaker values into action. You could ask them:

- Think of a time when you put your Quaker values into action.
- What did you do? Why was it important to you?
- Was it easy or difficult?
- Why did you do it? Did you want to do it?
- Did other people ask you about what you did? How did you explain it?
- How does being a Quaker generally affect your life and the choices you make?

## Discovery 6

#### **Quaker Tapestry on faith in action**

Many of the panels from the Quaker Tapestry deal with faith in action. You might like to look at these and follow up panels that interest you by discussing them with your Becoming Friends companion, or others in your meeting, or by finding books and information about them in your meeting house library or online.

#### You could:

• visit the Quaker Tapestry exhibition at Kendal, or contact them for more details:

Tel: 01539 722975

Email: info@quaker-tapestry.co.uk Website: www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk

• find out if there's a book with pictures from the tapestry in your meeting house library, or you could order a book or postcards from the exhibition

Quaker Tapestry panels about faith in action include:

- A7 Conscientious objection
- B8 Quaker Peace Action Caravan
- D2 Simplicity
- D5 Innocent trades and D6 Merchants
- E4 Criminal justice and E5–E6 Elizabeth Fry
- E10 Unemployment and poverty
- F3 The slave trade
- F6-F7 Relief work
- F16-F17 Peace work

# Deepening

## Deepening 1

#### Your own experience of living out your beliefs

You might like to spend some time on your own or with your Becoming Friends companion reflecting on your experience of living out your beliefs.

Think of a time when you put your values into action.

- What did you do? Why was it important to you?
- Was it easy or difficult?
- Why did you do it? Did you want to do it?
- Did other people ask you about what you did? How did you explain it?
- How does this experience fit with any of the Quaker testimonies?

## Deepening 2

#### Reflecting with Advices & queries

You could look at *Advices & queries* 31–42 (in section 1.02 of *Quaker faith & practice*), taking time to read them slowly and meditatively. If you prefer to listen to *Advices & queries*, there are mp3 audio files available in this unit of the online Becoming Friends course.

- Is there one that particularly speaks to you at the moment? It may be one that you feel passionately about, or perhaps one that challenges you in some way.
- You could write or print out that advice and put it somewhere that you will see it over the next few days or weeks, so that you can allow it to speak deeply to you.
- You could also reflect on this with your Becoming Friends companion when you next meet.

## Deepening 3

## A Testimony to the grace of God in your life

Advices & queries 27 (in section 1.02 of Quaker faith & practice) invites us to 'Live adventurously' and to 'Let your life speak.' If you imagine the Testimony that would be written to celebrate the grace of God in your life, what would you want or hope it would say about how you put your faith into action?

- You might like to write out this Testimony about your own life in a journal or record it creatively in some other way.
- Does it have anything to teach you about how you may be led to live?
- You could also share some of your reflections with your Becoming Friends companion when you next meet.

## Deepening 4

## A fourfold blessing

The 'Fourfold blessing' comes from the Franciscan tradition. You might like to read it and let it speak to you at a deep level. It can be a focus for prayer or spiritual practice over a period of time, inviting these blessings into your life as part of living out your faith.

You'll find an adaptation of the blessing on page 173.

If you would like to take some time to reflect deeply on your own response to these blessings, you could:

- respond by drawing, painting, or using another creative method
- respond in music, song or movement
- respond in writing
- go online and blog about your response
- discuss your response on a Quaker discussion forum:
  - > the Britain Yearly Meeting forum at: www.quakerweb.org.uk/forum
  - www.friendlink.org.uk (aimed mainly at young Quakers)
  - > the Faith in Action unit forum
- share some of your reflections with your Becoming Friends companion when you next meet.

## Deepening 5

## How have other people's lives spoken to you?

You could talk to your Becoming Friends companion, or you may prefer to write in a journal or book of spiritual discipline, about people whose lives inspire you, either now or in the past.

- In what ways do/did they live out their faith or principles?
- What are the everyday or extraordinary things that they do/did which inspire you?
- Are there ways that you could act on this inspiration?

# Further exploration

If you would like to explore further how Quakers put our faith into action, here are some suggestions for reading, listening or viewing.

Advices & queries 31-42 in Quaker faith & practice 1.02

*Beyond the spirit of the age,* Jonathan Dale, Quaker Books, 1996 (Swarthmore Lecture).

Circles UK website: www.circles-uk.org.uk

*Engaging with the Quaker testimonies: a toolkit,* Quaker Peace & Social Witness Testimonies Committee, Quaker Books, 2007.

'Finding the prophetic voice for our time', Marion McNaughton and Lizz Roe, *Woodbrooke Journal*, Autumn 2007, No 21

Forgiving justice: a Quaker vision for criminal justice, Tim Newell, Quaker Books, 2000 (Swarthmore Lecture).

*Good lives* study pack, Pam Lunn and Lizz Roe, Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre, 2009

An introduction to Watford Quakers (DVD), 'The Quaker Testimonies', Just Film, 2007. Also available at: www.watfordquakers.org.uk/videos.html (or at: www.youtube.com as 'The Quaker Testimonies').

Living Witness project website: www.livingwitness.org.uk

New light: 12 Quaker voices, edited by Jennifer Kavanagh, O Books, 2008. Individual themes such as Twelve Quakers and Peace, Twelve Quakers and Simplicity also available in the Twelve Quakers and... series, Quaker Quest 2004–2007.

*No extraordinary power: prayer, stillness and activism,* Helen Steven, Quaker Books, 2005 (Swarthmore Lecture)

Peace Exchange website: www.peaceexchange.org.uk

Pictorial guide to the Quaker Tapestry, Quaker Tapestry at Kendal, 1998.

Quaker faith & practice, chapter 18, 'Faithful Lives'.

*Quaker faith & practice*, chapter 20, 'Living Faithfully Today'.

Quaker faith & practice, chapter 23, 'Social Responsibility'.

Quaker faith & practice, chapter 24, 'Our Peace Testimony'.

Quaker faith & practice, chapter 25, 'Unity of Creation'.

Quaker Peace & Social Witness pages on the Britain Yearly Meeting website: www.quaker.org.uk/peace-social-witness

Quaker Tapestry website: www.quaker-tapestry.co.uk

Searching the depths: essays on being a Quaker today, edited by Harvey Gillman and Alastair Heron, Quaker Books, 1996

Spirited living: waging conflict, building peace, Simon Fisher, Quaker Books, 2004 (Swarthmore Lecture).

*Testimony and tradition,* John Punshon, Quaker Home Service, 1990 (Swarthmore Lecture).

The Retreat website: www.theretreatyork.org.uk

Turning the Tide project website: www.turning-the-tide.org

Woodbrooke's website or brochure for details of courses about faith in action or testimony: www.woodbrooke.org.uk

Many of these titles are available from the Quaker Centre bookshop:

Friends House 173 Euston Road London NW1 2BJ

Tel: 020 7663 1030 Fax: 020 7663 1001

Website: www.quaker.org.uk/bookshop Email: quakercentre@quaker.org.uk



Many of them will also be in your local meeting house library. You could ask your Becoming Friends companion to help you track down titles that interest you.

# Closing activity

As you finish your exploration of how Quakers try to put our faith into action, you are invited to reflect on what you have gained through this unit, how your understanding of both yourself and Quakerism has changed, and what areas you would like to explore further.

This closing reflection can be a very good opportunity for sharing with your Becoming Friends companion, or you may prefer to write in a journal or book of spiritual discipline (there's guidance for journalling in Appendix 2 – Guidance on page 282), or to reflect using creative methods such as drawing, collage, modelmaking or working with materials such as textiles or wood.

- You might like to use one or more of the following questions as a focus for your reflection:
- What have you gained from your work on this unit, whether as a result of positive or more challenging experiences?
- In what ways has your understanding changed as a result of your work on this unit?
- Are there areas that you would like to explore further either as part of your own spiritual journey or relating to Quakerism?
- Has anything arisen that you would find it helpful to reflect on with your Becoming Friends companion?



# Extract from Marion McNaughton's presentation to QPSW Conference 2009

#### Discernment

How is it that we as Quakers collectively, and all of us individually, come to know what it is that we are called to do to in response to all that is wrong in the world? Where do we start? We hope we can perhaps play a small part, with the gifts we have and the resources we can call on, though most of us will always feel our efforts are inadequate.

There are many factors involved in determining and carrying out a piece of Quaker work, whether it is central or local, small or large, individual or corporate. We will hear the origins and the growth of some of our central work tomorrow. But in all of them, we say, the work must be rightly discerned.

Discernment is a word that is often used casually in everyday speech, a matter of choosing or selecting what seems to be appropriate. But to Quakers discernment is a spiritual discipline, because it is about the spirit, or the divine, or God, – whatever we choose to call it – being there, and being active, all of the time, in every aspect of our lives, and guiding us. And about our learning to notice this, to pay attention and respond to it. Someone has said, it is about 'God being up to something' in our lives. Discerned work is God's work.

If we turn to *Advices & queries* and listen to advice number 7, it sounds very simple, but if we stop and let it in, it is breathtaking:

Be aware of the spirit of God at work in the ordinary activities and experience of your daily life.

#### That's it.

Be aware of the spirit of God at work in the ordinary activities and experience of your daily life.

It is inescapable. And it is addressed to all of us, not just a few special, 'spiritual' people. And notice that these are the ordinary activities and experiences of our daily life – this is not about thunderclaps or lightning flashes, or a voice speaking out of the clouds. It is about God, at work, all of the time. God at work in the mundane, in the ordinary, in the everyday. Sometimes hidden, sometimes manifesting for a second, and then disappearing again. In my life, and in yours. It

helps me to understand this by looking at the tangles of wool and yarn that seem to appear regularly at the bottom of my sewing basket. Here is one.

Discernment acknowledges that the divine and the worldly always come to us intertwined. We have to concentrate to know which is which. The dictionary tells us that discernment means to separate, to distinguish and to determine, what is of God, from what is not of God. So our task, in the ordinary activities and experiences of our daily life, is to take on the tangle of our lives and do three things. To notice and separate the different elements. To learn to distinguish one from the other. And to determine when one comes from a divine source, from God. You will see that there is a slender gold thread in this tangle. It appears and it disappears, but even when you can't see it, you know it is always there, at the heart, running right through the whole. And when you catch sight of it, it is unmistakeable.

This glimpse of the divine is what we wait for in meeting for worship, what we listen for, what we search for in our lives. And when we find it, we stop and pay attention to it, though we may not know exactly what we are meant to do with it. All the threads are important in their way, all are valuable, but one will carry a spiritual charge. It stands out, it seems to prompt us, it may disturb us, and sometimes require something of us that we know we must carry out, even if we don't quite know how. We call this situation 'being under Concern'. All QPSW work, all Quaker work, is work carried out under Concern.

So clearly this habit of seeking and developing awareness is something we must practise, because the more we practise it, the better we will become at it. We must practise it individually in our daily lives, because only then can we practise it together when we try to discern corporately what we are called to do in the world as Quakers. We cannot live our daily lives shut down and unaware of God, and then suddenly come together in a business meeting or a committee, hit the Discern button and come up with the right answer. The right answer grows from our patient, persistent sifting, individually and corporately. All of the work you will hear about this weekend is work carried out under Concern, and it has grown from this inspiration and this discipline, has been discerned, tested, and lived with – faithfully and patiently.



The following is the text of a leaflet published by Quaker Peace & Social Witness.

A Quaker view on...

peace, conflict & violence

crime & punishment

the environment

human rights

racial & religious prejudice

Members of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) try to put their faith into practice. Our inner experience leads us to a commitment to equality, peace, simplicity and truth, which we try to live out in our lives. This is often referred to as Quaker testimony and underpins a lot of Quaker thinking and work.

There are no declared creeds or statements that you have to believe to be a Quaker. Our understanding of faith is that true fulfilment comes from attempting to live life in the spirit of love, truth and peace, and by seeking and acknowledging that of God in everyone. The concept of 'that of God in everyone', by which each human being is considered both unique and precious, is a key tenet of Quaker belief. Interpreting what or who God is, and how God manifests in individuals, is for personal discernment.

This does not make Quakers unrealistic. We know and feel the often unjust and painful world we live in. But in our worship we are led to recognise and foster in our hearts a vision of a world of justice, peace and equality. We strive to let our lives speak to these and try to build that world in the ways we live and act.

## Peace, conflict & violence

#### Quakers believe...

A commitment to peace lies at the heart of Quaker faith and practice. It is part of our striving to live faithfully and is one of our testimonies to the world. Quakers believe that conflict can be a positive force for change, if handled creatively, but it is the use of violence, or the threat of violence, as a means of dealing with conflict, that is problematic.

Quakers think of peace as an approach to living in the world and working for social change, rather than simply an ideological opposition to war and to violence. The use of violence to bring change may create temporary good, but also increases the chance of violence becoming a permanent way of resolving conflict.

Peace is not simply the absence of direct violence, such as murder or domestic violence. Structural violence and cultural violence must also be dealt with for true peace to be present.

Structural violence is present when poverty and hunger are prevalent alongside great wealth. United Nations statistics on the Millennium Development Goals for 2007 show that the seven richest people in the world have a total wealth greater than the combined GDP (gross domestic product) of the world's 41 poorest countries. Cultural violence is present in a society when a dominant culture asserts its position and symbols to the detriment of others, e.g. attacking or otherwise disrespecting the symbols of their identity, language, dress or forms of worship.

For Quakers, such situations represent an unjust and violent world system.

We consider suffering, as a result of both direct and structural violence, to be an avoidable tragedy. When governments and citizens devote significant resources to tackling the root causes of conflict and injustice, the use of violence as a force for change can be greatly reduced and possibly even eliminated.

#### Faith into action

We strive to practice peace in our own lives, both as individuals and as a community. A key element for Quakers is that we seek to live what we believe. Our work on peace is rooted in the Quaker testimony to peace and to equality.

Corporately, Quakers in Britain have always opposed the use of violence in any form, for any end. Instead, we work to build the conditions of peace that 'take away the occasion of all wars'. Therefore, a central part of the work of Quakers is to respond to human need in the belief that if the problems of poverty and injustice are not attended to, there will not be peace.

In our relationship with others, be they friends, family or strangers, we aim to recognise the dignity of the other alongside our own. This means working to manage conflict with others without seeking their destruction or subjugation.

We also consider the impact of our actions and life choices on the world, for example considering both how we make and how we spend and invest money.

#### **Past**

Quakers are probably best known for their stand against war as conscientious objectors. In times of war, Quakers have refused to take up arms and instead tried to help the victims on all sides of the conflict. During past wars, Quakers have participated in war relief work, with many Quakers joining the Friends Ambulance Unit. Quakers have also been involved in humanitarian work in parts

of the world where there is violent conflict. In recognition of this work, Quakers were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947.

#### **Present**

Quakers work together as a community, at local, national and international level. Locally we work to introduce peace education, conflict resolution skills and peer-mediation to schools. We organise peace vigils and Nonviolent Direct Action, as well as promoting and supporting the understanding and use of active nonviolence. Information on these can be found at: www.quaker.org.uk/peaceexchange and www.turning-the-tide.org

Quakers support and provide training for groups that are working creatively to build a more peaceful world by challenging injustice and overcoming oppression. Quaker meeting houses are used as community resources, hosting public events to raise awareness of current issues that challenge a peaceful society.

Friends have been involved internationally in highly delicate and sensitive negotiations and mediation, and have worked to support local peacemaking initiatives across the world. Quakers were also involved in developing the Alternatives to Violence Project training, created to assist prisoners in handling personal anger.

Many Quakers join in nonviolent protests against weapons, particularly nuclear weapons. Quakers work for disarmament and against the arms trade, sharing the belief that the more weapons there are in a society, the more likelihood there is of war. Many Quakers believe that war is also made more likely if the military have a strong influence on governmental policies.

## Human rights

#### Quakers believe...

Quakers recognise the equal worth and unique nature of every person. A Quaker statement in 1991 said, 'Our concern for human rights arises from our understanding of how God works in the world and our understanding of God's will for humankind. We believe that all human life has a sacred bond with God and that all people have a holy duty to live the will of God. To develop and grow into the persons God would have us be requires a social environment which provides security and protection for life and personal liberty.'

#### Faith into action

For many Quakers, a core principle is to try and live what we believe. Our work on human rights is rooted in the Quaker testimony to equality and to peace. These values underpin much of Quaker work.

#### **Past**

Quakers were instrumental in setting up Amnesty International. Using his contacts, experience and position, Quaker Eric Baker campaigned for the humane treatment of political prisoners. He wrote an article for *The Observer* entitled 'The Forgotten Prisoner' in 1961. This article called for 'the amnesty of all political prisoners' and began a campaign that resulted in the founding of Amnesty International in 1962.

Many Friends continue to be involved with Amnesty International, both as members and as volunteers.

By meeting with MPs, Quakers worked for the introduction of a Private Members' Bill to raise the age of recruitment into the armed forces to 18 years old. This bill was then used to press the UK government to ratify the optional protocol on the rights of the child in relation to armed conflict.

#### **Present**

The work of Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW), the department which works on behalf of Friends in Britain to translate faith into action, and Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO), based in Geneva and New York, is focused at a variety of levels – from grassroots to global – on supporting the promotion and protection of human rights.

Human rights protection has been a core aspect of the work of QUNO since its inception in the 1920s. Current work focuses on: women in prison and children of imprisoned mothers; child soldiers; refugees and conscientious objectors.

QPSW programmes in Palestine and Israel, and in the post-Yugoslav countries, work on monitoring, reporting and opposing violations of human rights and international law. Ecumenical accompaniers, trained and supported by QPSW, travel to Israel–Palestine to provide a peaceful and supportive presence to both Israeli peace groups and Palestinian communities. They offer protection through nonviolent presence, advocacy and human rights monitoring.

Our Statement on Torture states that 'British Quakers are deeply concerned at the continued existence of torture and at recent attempts to justify it, in the context of the 'war on terror', by countries that would previously have condemned it.' Quaker Concern for the Abolition of Torture works to raise awareness and campaigns to end the use of torture.

In Britain, Quakers raise issues relating to the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers with their MPs. This includes highlighting how changes to legislation, and the rhetoric used in Parliament when debating these changes, impact upon refugees' day-to-day lives. We believe that we have a duty to challenge some of the bills that are brought before Parliament and pursue dialogue with MPs. Quakers have a long tradition of working in this way, which we call 'speaking truth to power'.

## Crime & punishment

#### Quakers believe...

Our Quaker belief that there is that of God in everyone prompts us to see criminals as human beings with dignity and rights and to care for their welfare regardless of their crime. We believe no one is outside of God's love and that both justice and forgiveness are needed in dealing effectively with crime. In a world of increasing violence, we still believe in the Christian principle of overcoming evil with good.

This perspective has led Quakers to be at the forefront of penal reform, emphasising the need for rehabilitation rather than retribution in the criminal justice system. We believe that by working towards rehabilitation it is possible to heal not only those directly affected by the crime/offence but also to have a positive impact on the community.

Quakers oppose capital punishment. Our Statement on the Death Penalty states that 'private vengeance or judicial execution serves no purpose but to perpetuate... the trauma. Killing... as a judicial act, brutalises a society that kills.'

#### Faith into action

Putting their faith into practice, many Quakers work to support people in prison and their families, and are involved in working for change in the criminal justice system.

Too often, the needs of the victim tend to be ignored and the offender is punished without reference to the victim. Equally, no redress is made to right the wrong committed.

Quakers feel that 'punishment is useful only when it helps people to realise the hurt they are doing to [the] sense of worth in themselves and others.'

#### **Past**

Quaker George Fox was imprisoned under the Quaker Act of 1662, which made holding and attending Quaker meetings illegal. Following this experience, Fox identified the 'corrupting influence of prison life', whereby prisoners learn about a life of crime from other prisoners.

Another Quaker, Elizabeth Fry, is well known for her work on prison reform during the early 19th century, especially with imprisoned women and children, as depicted on the back of a five-pound note. As well as setting up a school for the children of prisoners, Fry also campaigned against capital punishment and against the deportation of prisoners to Australia.

#### **Present**

Quaker prison ministers work as part of multifaith chaplaincy teams to offer spiritual support and friendship to prisoners.

The Quaker Crime, Community & Justice Group is involved in supporting and working for restorative justice in the criminal justice system. Restorative justice is based on dialogue and negotiation, rather than the adversarial process of the criminal justice system. It respects the basic human needs of the victim, the offender and the community, and is based on the principle that victims desire recognition of the harm done. Restorative justice requires the offender to take responsibility for their crime and to make amends to the victim and the community.

Quakers also work to introduce the principles of restorative justice to schools, in the form of peer-mediation, conflict resolution and restorative conferencing. This work is aimed at prevention as well as resolution. The language used doesn't refer to victim and offender, but rather acknowledges that conflict can be more complicated and that no one is completely blameless or wholly responsible for the harm caused.

## Racial & religious prejudice

#### Quakers believe...

Endeavouring to see that of God in everyone translates into a testimony to equality. We believe that our common humanity transcends our differences and leads us to work for a society where difference is respected and celebrated. We do not believe it is reasonable to expect assimilation or to ignore difference by claiming to treat everyone the same, as this denies the value of variety.

Quakers understand that prejudice can be caused by ignorance and fear. We work to teach tolerance and understanding so that all forms of prejudice are recognised and challenged.

We believe that a community which values the good in everyone and respects the diversity of faiths is essential for a peaceful and just society, where everyone can live without hostility. We assert that achieving such a society requires a long-term commitment by everyone, through the building of good relationships.

#### Faith into action

The Society of Friends was founded in Britain, by George Fox, during the turbulent mid 17th century. Quakers were seen as subversive and faced discrimination, ridicule and hostility and were imprisoned and persecuted for their beliefs. They published a peace testimony, knowing that there can be no peace without justice and equality for all.

Our experiences have reinforced our belief in the importance of religious freedom, the freedom to worship without state interference and the freedom to form and express one's own beliefs. We consider hastily crafted legislation and short-term measures devised to prevent extremism to be not only unhelpful but also counterproductive. Such legislation frequently risks alienating and radicalising those we need to reach out to.

#### **Past**

The problems of racism and religious discrimination are not new. Quakers have been involved with demands for reforms and justice over the past 280 years. For Quakers, the subject was first discussed with regard to slavery in 1727. London Yearly Meeting (Quakers in Britain) stated:

It is the sense of this meeting, that the importing of negroes from their native country and relations by Friends, is not a commendable nor allowed practice, and is therefore censured by this meeting.

In the years that followed, Quakers were instrumental in ending the slave trade in Britain.

Quakers also recognised that 'the roots of racial prejudice lie deep within us, and in seeking a solution to the evil results of racial tensions we need to search our own hearts.' (Yearly Meeting, 1952).

In 1988 Meeting for Sufferings, a nationwide Quaker committee, made a Statement of Intent on Racism. In this they stated:

...there is incontrovertible evidence that people who belong to ethnic minority groups... are subject to a variety of disadvantages. In addition to discrimination... our fellow citizens are often subjected to abuse, harassment and violence. The Religious Society of Friends has a duty to play its part in ending these abuses.

In 1992 they set up a working group to explore racism in the Quaker Society in Britain – Britain Yearly Meeting. Searching our own hearts, a video and study guide, was produced in 1997 for use by meetings to provoke discussion and deepen awareness among Friends.

Some Quakers regularly played a part in local initiatives such as a series of multifaith public vigils and the nonviolent escorting of people going to vote in an East London local government by-election.

#### **Present**

Quakers continue working to create and maintain a society which lives at peace, promotes harmony, values difference and nurtures each individual.

We are aware that global migration brings with it major challenges, which are not likely to ease in the near future. Many who arrive in Britain face uncertainty, isolation, separation from family, loss of familiar ways of living and, frequently, poverty.

Quakers wish to embrace the diversity that immigration brings and see it as a gift, not a problem. We wish to support the receiving communities, often themselves under strain, and to encourage local Quakers to welcome and nurture those who arrive here, to meet that of God in them and to enable them to live fulfilling lives.

In March 2008, Northern Friends Peace Board held a conference on 'Building Peace – Tackling Racism'. Although academic in focus, a study guide with DVD is planned, looking at more practical skills such as responding to casual racism at work and the need to tackle racism nonviolently. To find out more, visit the website: http://nfpb.gn.apc.org

#### The environment

#### Quakers believe...

We do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will. Show a loving consideration for all creatures and seek to maintain the beauty and variety of the world. Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature is used responsibly, with reverence for life.

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Compassion and a sense of that of God in the other point to a path of nonviolence towards other people, other species and the earth. We seek to understand and reduce the real and potential harm caused by our lives and actions. This means moving to a way of life that does not cause ecological damage or depend on violence to secure resources.

#### Faith into action

Simplicity is a component of the Quaker testimonies, and is connected to sufficiency: knowing how much is enough. Quakers try to live simply, by resisting the urge to buy what we do not need and by avoiding the clatter of fashion and consumerism, and by focusing on what matters. This means keeping ourselves informed of the effect our lifestyle has on the environment and the global economy, as well as reminding ourselves that we do not need very much in material terms.

#### **Past**

Quaker witness to sustainability and the environment has deep roots. During the 17th century, Friends wrote of their concern for the human relationship with the earth and all its inhabitants. In the 18th century, John Woolman wore undyed clothes, partly because of his concern for the environmental damage caused by the dyeing process.

He expressed his concern for the soil and animal husbandry of the time, noting that:

...landlords... by too much tilling, so robbed the earth of its natural fatness that the produce thereof hath grown light.

John Woolman was also conscious of the duty that one generation had to the next, in how they cared for the natural resources of the earth. He noted in early writings that:

The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.

Since the 1920s, British Friends have produced many minutes and epistles of their annual meeting, highlighting the urgent need for action to halt ecological decline and declaring a sense of unity with all creation.

This is a rapidly developing area of Quaker testimony and one which prompts us to question assumptions we have always taken for granted; the needs of the earth can sometimes seem at odds with our own needs.

#### **Present**

Many Quakers are making individual decisions regarding the impact of their own lifestyles on the environment. Several Quaker meetings have run 'EcoTeams' sessions, looking at issues such as household waste, recycling, energy and water use, and travel. They found that participating Quakers had waste production levels of approximately one quarter of the UK average.

The Living Witness Project aims to support the development of Quaker corporate witness to sustainable living, and explore ways of taking it to the wider community in Britain and elsewhere, via a growing and vibrant network of Quaker meetings. The project explores corporate witness through study groups and practical activities. They produce resources for individuals and meetings. More information can be found on their website: www.livingwitness.org.uk

QPSW has done some exploratory work on the concept of human security: examining the links between environmental degradation, economic injustice and violent conflict. We believe that human security differs from the prevailing global security model in that it puts safeguarding people, rather than territory, at the centre of security concerns.

QPSW also carries out research on the ethical policies and practices of multinational corporations, on behalf of their partner organisation, the Ecumenical Council for Corporate Responsibility. An example of this is the recently published report Water Sustainability: Meeting the Challenge, a comparative analysis of water consumption in the food processing and beverage industries. Information on this and other such projects can be found on the website: www.eccr.org.uk

### Want to know more?

Quakers are formally known as the Religious Society of Friends and hence often refer to each other as 'Friends'. The public more commonly refer to them as Quakers.

The information in this booklet refers specifically to the beliefs of Quakers in Britain and the work done by and on behalf of them. Quakers around the world

vary in how they worship and in their theology, though the testimonies are lived out in the lives of Quakers everywhere.

To find out more about the centrally managed work of Quakers in Britain, check out our website: www.quaker.org.uk

For information on our work for peace and justice check out: www.quaker.org. uk/qpsw

For information on Quakers as a religious and spiritual movement have a look at: www.quaker.org.uk/different

This booklet has been written specifically for use by secondary schools and pupils, but will be of interest to anyone wanting to know more about how Quakers translate faith into practice.

#### To contact us:

Jaci Smith
Peace Education Advisor
Friends House
173 Euston Road
London
NW1 2BJ

Email: pea@quaker.org.uk Telephone: 020 7663 1000

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# Quaker Peace & Social Witness



Faith into action on behalf of the Religious Society of Friends in Britain

## **Economic Justice**

QPSW's Economic Justice work seeks to promote a fairer and more equitable international economic system that meets the needs of all. We work to influence the policies of governments, companies and international economic institutions and to encourage greater popular understanding of these issues.

Multinational corporations have a huge impact on the lifestyles, livelihoods and environment of people all over the world. Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) challenges the practices of multinational corporations to ensure this impact is positive.





A community in the Philippines says 'No' to mining that threatens their food security

Corporate Responsibility (ECCR), QPSW carries out research on the ethical policies and practices of a number of corporations in which the churches have investments. ECCR encourages its members to use this information to enter into dialogue with multinational companies and exert pressure on them to improve their practices in areas of concern.

ECCR's latest report 'Vulnerable migrant workers: the responsibility of business' considers the vulnerable position of many migrant workers employed in the UK and Ireland and offers a comparative analysis of the extent to which nine food production, manufacture and retail (supermarket) companies address this vulnerability.

#### **Ethical Trade**

Under the auspices of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), QPSW works with British high street retailers and trade unions to improve the working conditions of the workers, who manufacture the goods that we buy. The highly competitive and dynamic nature of modern retailing means that many retailers now have complex, multi-layered supply chains.

The tripartite nature of the ETI brings together different perspectives and experiences and NGO participation in the initiative is an important way to hold companies to account; to ensure that they are fulfilling their commitments and to challenge them to go further.

www.quaker.org.uk/economics

#### Our Witness

The belief that justice in our economic system is a necessary condition for peace is informed by Quaker testimonies to simplicity, truth and equality. Quakers try to avoid unnecessary consumption and advocate living simply in the belief that economic opportunity and advancement should benefit the whole community.

Some Quakers act from within the established economic system and others work for radical change of the system itself.

"Economics is presented as though it has unchanging laws, but it is a human creation.

As Quakers we must believe that we can make a difference. Where do we start? We can encourage each other not just to doubt the conventional but to know where differences have been made."

Tony Weekes, Ferguson Fellow at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre

## Supporting action for economic justice

**QPSW** supports Friends advocating greater international economic justice.

Through our membership of the Trade Justice Movement and the Jubilee Debt Campaign we provide resources and information to help Friends to get involved in campaigning for trade justice and debt relief.

As a Fairtrade Churches Stakeholder we encourage Friends and meetings to support Fairtrade and take action in Fairtrade Fortnight.



We are a part of Stand Up and Take Action Against Poverty - an annual global event in mid-October in which millions of people take action to demonstrate their support for the fight against poverty – and can provide support and resources for Friends to take part.

The Economic Issues programme is also currently considering ways in which to support Friends, who are, or are interested in, supporting migrant workers in their local communities.

## Keeping informed

QPSW is committed to keeping Quakers informed of important international economic issues and supporting those campaigning for economic justice.

We have a range of educational resources to help Quakers and others gain a better understanding of issues such as trade and debt.

These include a regular newsletter Better World Economics and an introductory briefing pack on economic issues and institutions and campaigning materials such as postcards and posters.

We can provide speakers for Meetings who wish to learn more about the Economic Issues programme.

A large print version of this resource is available from qpsw@quaker.org.uk or call 020 7663 1158

Quaker Peace & Social Witness works with, and on behalf of, the Religious Society of Friends in Britain to translate our faith into action. As Quakers we are impelled by our faith to make our lives an active witness for peace and justice. Our historic testimonies to equality, justice, peace, simplicity and truth challenge us to alleviate suffering and seek positive social change.

This work is overseen by QPSW's Economic Issues Group, which sets policy and determines priorities.

#### Get involved

Visit

www.quaker.org.uk/qpsw to see the full range of our resources and materials for campaigning.

Ask to receive our introductory guide to international economic issues and institutions

Subscribe to the Better World Economics newsletter.

Read Responding to Climate Change - a briefing to help Friends learn more about, reflect and take action on climate change.

Ask about the latest economic justice campaigning opportunities.

Support this work with a donation.

Ask about a speaker for your Meeting.

Contact

Suzanne Ismail **OPSW** Friends House 173 Euston Road London NW1 2BJ 020 7663 1055 suzannei@quaker.org.uk

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# Extract for Deepening 4: A fourfold blessing

## Fourfold blessing

May God bless me with discomfort – at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that I may live from deep within my heart.

May God bless me with anger – at injustice, oppression and the exploitation of people, so that I may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless me with tears to shed for those who suffer from rejection, starvation and war, so that I may reach out to comfort them and turn their pain to joy.

May God bless me with enough foolishness to believe that I can make a difference in this world, so that I can do what others claim cannot be done.

adapted from a traditional Franciscan blessing