

Some historical information on the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Inner Light and Christ Within *As articulated in the Book of Discipline...Iowa Yearly Meeting, 1927*

The religious Society of Friends holds as the basis of its faith that God endows every human being with a measure of His own Divine Spirit. He leaves no one without witness, but gives the light of his truth and presence to men of all classes and races.

Peace Testimony *written by George Fox and William Pennington in 1660*

We do utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons...The Spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world...

No single official creed or concise statement of faith; beliefs are embodied in “testimonies”

Testimonies date from the beginning but vary from group to group. They generally include the following (in no particular order.)

Simplicity: live in such a way that “things” (activities, fashions, pursuit of wealth, addictions, etc.) do not interfere with following God’s leadings

Spirit-led worship: “unprogrammed” worship begins in silent, expectant waiting and proceeds as participants are led by the Holy Spirit, following no pre-planned liturgy or program

Integrity: consistently practice honesty, truthfulness, and faithfulness to the Holy Spirit in all personal and organizational dealings; do what is right, whether or not it is to one’s immediate or material advantage

Equality before God: no person is valued less (or more) than another, or is worthy of less (or more) respect or privilege than another, on the basis of worldly things such as ancestry, position or office in the community, wealth or poverty, or gender

Peace and non-violence: Jesus was a peaceable man, taught us to live in peace with one another, etc.;; expressed well in Fox et al.’s 1660 declaration to Charles II: “We utterly deny . . .”

A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF QUAKERS FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

- Originated 1650s in England, came together under leadership of George Fox, & immediately spread to North America, partly out of missionary zeal and partly to escape persecution
- Officially “Religious Society of Friends”; “Quakers” began (1670s?) as a mocking nickname that soon was adopted informally but widely by Friends themselves. (Other very early names used by Friends were “Children of the Light” and “Publishers of Truth”. “Friends” comes from John 15:15, “You are my friends if you do what I command you. I call you servants no longer; a servant does not know what his master is about. I have called you Friends, because I have disclosed to you everything I have heard from my Father.”)
- A Christian denomination based on our belief that there is “that of God” in every person, per the 1927 introduction
- Several branches exist today which vary considerably in theology and practice. Some maintain the unprogrammed worship tradition, and some are led in programmed worship by trained pastors; some are strictly Bible-based, and some are more all-inclusive. West Branch, Iowa, has meetings of both unprogrammed and programmed.