

# Responses from the Jewels of Quakerism Internet Survey

7-5-09 to 7-9-09

**Historically Friends distinguished themselves as a peculiar people - refusing hat honor and titles, not taking oaths, lifting up the equality of women, natives, etc... In what ways do you see that Friends today have practices that set them apart "from the crowd?"**

It seems to me that most Friends today have consciously given up visible distinctives that would set them apart from others. (This is a position with which I respectfully disagree.)

*Lloyd Lee Wilson - Rich Square Monthly Meeting, NCYM(C)*

Quaker marriage practices, not swearing oaths, and Quaker meetings for business are have not become main stream yet. There is also something subtle about how Quakers dress and hold themselves that allows one to pick them out of a crowd.

*Kenn Harper, Rochester, NY*

Being in the world but not of it, was how early Friends would have named it. What's disturbing is the way in which some of these distinctives that started as testimonies hardened into rules and lost power thereby. Early on, Fox says that the hedge (a term later used for the boundaries on behavior of these peculiarities) was the power of God. However, by early into the 2nd generation (Penn, for example) Friends were using the term hedge as a boundary that defined groupness, that kept some in and others out. We see this in the interactions that developed during the first schisms. I don't believe we have any true distinctives now, and I'm not sure we should try for it. When we rest in the power of God, our individual and corporate behavior may perhaps once again develop in ways that set us apart from the world. But the goal should be in fact for those behaviors to speak so strongly that they will bring everyone into unity, not to set up walls or hedges between people.

*Lu from Rochester, NYYM*

Our refusal to condone warfare, racism, sexism, heterosexism, and many other social evils are central to our community. However, it is not based on being peculiar or apart, but rather about being *\*for\** something, i.e. the values I listed above.

*Charley Earp - Northside Friends (Chicago)*

It shows itself today in less visible but not less important ways. It shows itself in speaking to a secretary and a department head in exactly the same language. If you can treat Donald Trump and Donald Trump's secretary in exactly the same way, then you are a Quaker.

*Anonymous, NCYM-C*

I think a simple manner of living is the most separate thing we do. It takes many Friends out of common North American practices like:

- living beyond one's means, sustaining ostentation with borrowed money
- over consumption
- environmentally unsustainable habits of household management
- over scheduling the lives of ourselves and our children
- working too hard, which can bring on burnout and drug use.

As Quakers along with the wider society wake up to the adverse consequences of some of these, the adjustments necessary become simpler, given the support offered by our meetings and the ways of living that Friends have fostered for generations.

*Jay Thatcher, Corvallis Friends Meeting, North Pacific YM*

Decision making by consensus, actually by unity, is different from almost all mainstream decision-making concepts. The continuance of the peace testimony and the stand for peaceful ways of resolving conflict particularly as exemplified by the Nonviolent Peaceforce are powerful practices.

*Susanne Ratcliffe Wilson, sojourning in Homer, Alaska*

I don't know that Friends corporately have a common way we are distinguishable from the community around us. But in many Friends I see an integrity of living, a winnowing down to free up time for G-d and G-d's work, and a deep respect in their interactions with other people that arises out of the understanding that there is that of G-d within them.

*Judy Goldberger, Beacon Hill Friends Meeting & Jamaica Plain Worship Group*

i'm not sure that friends are doing anything to set themselves apart from the crowd.

*Anonymous, sandpoint friends meeting*

Today Friends like to wear Birkenstocks. Friends drive Priuses since they destroy the world less and require slightly less war than other cars. Friends like to give money to professional organizations that then try to make the world a better place--Not "the poor will always be with you," but "the poor are out there somewhere, so give the AFSC some money to empower them." Love to listen to NPR, be white, get degrees, get proud about their humility, and live simply in a way that is out of reach to 90% of the world's population. Oh, and make an idol of electoral politics, as though salvation was to be found there.

*Carl Magruder, Pacific Yearly Meeting*

~"These aren't just our rules; it's how we are, what God has brought us to see!"

*forrest curo, San Diego Meeting*

Primary insight: There is that of God in every human being, and each human being, because of this can be in touch with the Divine on their own.

SEcond Insight: Corporate/ silent waiting on God is an amplification process that makes our hearing sharper, and our willingness to listen deeper.

AFTer that: Simplicity (so clutter doesn't create static on the connection between you and Spirit

Peace: All have that of God in them so harming or killing is wrong

Integrity: That of God that is within you needs to be held in honest authentic vessel of your life. Integrity is crucial in that.

Community: Insights we have that we believe are divinely inspired should be tempered through corporate clearness

Equality: William Penn says the soul has no gender. I would add that it also has no race, no sexual preference, etc.

*Sue Tannehill Buffalo, NY*

Evidence of God's work on a human being. In order to stay right with God, I have to live a certain way: move away from violence, stay humble, try hard to say only the truth, seek to co-operate and include, use conflict creatively to learn and grow, stay on the side of the oppressed, cut back to the living Word, mind my words and avoid saying anything to the detraction of another person.

*Anonymous*

## What are the Quaker Testimonies?

Harmony  
Equality  
Simplicity  
Community

*Lloyd Lee Wilson - Rich Square Monthly Meeting, NCYM(C)*

The Quaker Testimonies are the expressions of the experience shared by Friends of basic ways in which living in The Light will show in our lives. They are not like doctrines, imposed from without, but what understanding each individual will come to about conducting life in The Light when contemplating how to implement the love we share. For that reason each person will have a personal understanding of each testimony, but also for that reason the testimonies should serve as basis for self-examination.

*Nate Swift, Medford Friends, NWYM*

Quaker Testimonies started out as individual leadings of the Spirit that became widely accepted as guidelines for Quakers. They have changed over time. For example there used to be a testimony about how one decorated pie crust. Relatively recently they have been formulated in to a short list. This concise list makes it easier to teach the Testimonies but also makes it easier to think of them as rules, which they are not. Someone trying to follow them as rules runs the risk of practicing the very thing that Fox taught against - i.e. professing something that they do not profess. Testimonies are a sign post but not the destination. The destination is walking a Spirit filled life. When one does that then one tends to live into the Testimonies as a byproduct and as one lives into the Testimonies one walks more deeply in the Spirit

*Kenn Harper, Rochester, NY*

The testimonies arise individually and corporately out of our life in the Spirit. Individually, they are what we testify to as demonstrative of the working of Spirit within us, Truth as we have been given it, how our lives speak. Corporately, they are what we understand to be demonstrative of living in gospel order, what we try to live into. A dynamic balance holds both the individual leading and the corporately discerned wisdom that we can name when we are in unity.

*Lu from Rochester, NYYM*

I embrace eight core values, which are similar to the Quaker testimonies. They are love, freedom, equality, peace, justice, wholeness, truth, and empowerment.

*Charley Earp - Northside Friends (Chicago)*

I understand that the testimonies are called "testimonies" because we can testify that God wills us to act in these ways. We do not say that we have decided to act in these ways. We say that we know by personal experience (not by thinking about it) that God wants us to act in these ways. (Readers might want to go back and read how Fox actually talks about the peace testimony for an example.)

The main testimonies are that God wants us to be peaceful--we are not to use violence to accomplish our goals. God wants us to be truthful--to say exactly what we believe to be true and not to embellish or engage in idle speculation. God wants us to keep it simple--making things complex is to depart from God's will and to follow our own. God wants us to see all people as equals--we should not flatter the rich, powerful or famous. We should not treat them as in any way more special or more important than ordinary people. In fact the whole idea of special people and ordinary people should be thrown out.

*Anonymous, NCYM-C*

Friends have found that a relationship with God has led different Quakers to similar expressions in our lives of the faith and truth that He offers us. The way we live testifies to our relationship with God.

Friends have found that they are called out of participation in wars and into a life that treats all people evenly. The manner of life is simple and all aspects are considered and held up to the Light. This leaves minimal impediments to relationship with Christ. The life found in the community of a Friends meeting can help us in responding faithfully to the calling of Truth in our hearts.

The testimony of our lives is described in different ways, but the importance of having a life that reflects our experience of God remains.

*Jay Thatcher, Corvallis Friends Meeting, North Pacific YM*

Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, Unity (with God, with each other and all of creation). I know I missed one and it escapes me now! These are guidelines for living - easy to list and I feel much more complex than is apparent. For example, just figuring out what it means to live in simplicity can take a life-time of thought, behavioral change, and de-conditioning.

*Susanne Ratcliffe Wilson, sojourning in Homer, Alaska*

I understand testimonies as the accumulated experience of Friends: when we give our will over to G-d, this is where G-d leads us.

- Integrity is a linchpin or keystone, foundational to the others: Are we living our lives in accordance with what we understand to be true?
- Simplicity is another foundational one: Are we freeing ourselves up to follow G-d?
- Equality (respect) and Peace (encompassing justice, reconciliation, and nonviolence) flow out of our understanding that we all have a seed within us from G-d that grows in relationship with G-d.
- Community: an understanding that G-d's gifts and leadings are given to communities and are most fully realized in community.

*Judy Goldberger, Beacon Hill Friends Meeting & Jamaica Plain Worship Group*

the testimonies i've been told are integrity, simplicity, equality, community and peace. at the beginning of my quaker journey these were beautiful, these were enough. now i see them more as a precursor to what i consider to be the singularly most important thing we can do as quakers, as humans and that is to stay in the light, to remain connected to god and all of creation throughout our day, throughout our lives.

*Anonymous, sandpoint friends meeting*

Early Quaker Testimonies were very specific guidelines for living a faithful life. They were usually prohibitive, and made Friends quite "peculiar." One was the Testimony Against Mince Pies. Mince pies were seventeenth century fast food. They were a meat pie, made of mince meat (better not to ask), and they were baked in dough. Whatever dough was left over after the pie was closed was cut off and fashioned into an angel which was put on top of the pie to become a crispy treat. Or else a graven image! So, Friends would not eat the mince pies. This may seem silly, but Howard Brinton accidentally created the modern Testimonies in his book, Friends for 300 years. These testimonies could better be called "Friends Glittering Banalities," since they are so general as to be nearly meaningless. The Peace Testimony is NOT the core of modern Quakerism. Oh, no.

*Carl Magruder*

San Francisco had a fine meeting-house in what had come to be an expensive district, with a beautiful view of the bay. They sold it and bought a place in a lively, economically-mixed area downtown.

*forrest curo, San Diego Meeting*

Gandhi's epiphany on the train to St. Moritz

*Sue Tannehill Buffalo, NY*

**Can you share about an action in the world that inspired you - one that you understand to be born of faith?**

The voyage of the Woodhouse from England to the New World - a boat so unseaworthy the crew jumped ship, and the Quaker passengers sailed across the Atlantic without sailing experience, sextant or compass, holding meeting for worship each morning to discern how to set the sails. Each of these Friends, led to travel in the ministry in the American colonies, would suffer persecution and even death for their faithfulness.

*Lloyd Lee Wilson - Rich Square Monthly Meeting, NCYM(C)*

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's work in India was clearly faith based.

*Kenn Harper, Rochester, NY*

The reconciliation & healing work with victims of trauma by the African Great Lakes Initiative. Alternatives to Violence work and work with prisoners. Work by Friends Peace Teams in Indonesia. These have in common roots in upholding that of God in everyone, in healing, forgiveness, in holding up an alternative to oppressive systems.

*Lu from Rochester, NYYM*

Dr. King's leadership in the civil rights movement is a pivotal example of a faith-based endeavor for me.

*Charley Earp - Northside Friends (Chicago)*

Here's one. I was walking along the street when a taxi made a quick right turn in front of a pedestrian who became angry and pounded on the car door. The cabbie got out and they started yelling at each other. It looked like a fight was soon to break out. I stepped closer to both putting my face within inches of their faces not saying a word. Both of them began to calm down a bit. The cabbie got back in his cab and drove away shouting a few more angry words, but the conflict was over.

*Anonymous, NCYM-C*

The work of the Christian Peacemaker Teams in dangerous places in the world inspires me even though I don't share many of their particular religious beliefs. I know their work is born of faith.

*Susanne Ratcliffe Wilson, sojourning in Homer, Alaska*

Julia Butterfly Hill sat in the ancient tree, Luna, on the northcoast of California through an El Nino winter, and for about two years, to save the tree and call attention to old growth logging. Awesome. Great book, called Luna. It should be subtitled, "Anatomy of a Leading."

*Carl Magruder*

A Friend from my meeting has been finding herself professionally drawn to the practice of Focusing. As I understand it, this mental health discipline relies on settling the mind and directing one's attention to felt senses in the body that can be relied on to help guide one's life. The similarity of this to Quaker practice, particularly the Experiments with Light--explicated by Rex Ambler from some writings of George Fox--has not been lost on Friends.

This local Friend has been called on a few occasions to take her skills in focusing to Afghanistan, with all its strife and civil unrest, to help those in psychosocial helping work, along with others striving to hold societies together that are in great turmoil.

Our meeting helped by providing a committee for her clearness in undertaking the work, corresponding with her as she labored and hearing from her on her return home.

I think this effort is cool because:

--it came from a life time calling,

--it used technique that echoes one used by early Friends, and

--it kept the local meeting in relationship with the work.

*Jay Thatcher, Corvallis Friends Meeting, North Pacific YM*

Two of the many people who inspire me are Hazel Harrison and Al Starr (may he rest in peace). Hazel's grandson and Al's stepgrandson, Cerrone, was murdered 11 years ago when he was 15 years old. Shortly after his death, Hazel, at another funeral, discovered she was talking to the mother of the young man imprisoned for his murder. She reached out to this mother in recognition of their common loss and they have become close friends. She has become active in the community in supporting families in their loss. Al, out of his pain, developed a deep empathy for others who suffer. A year after Cerrone's death, he took in a refugee family from Kosovo while they got on their feet, and in the years before his death devoted himself to the support of an orphanage in Kakamega, Kenya taking in and nurturing the overwhelming number of young people orphaned by AIDS. For both Hazel and Al, their faith allows them to recognize and act on humanity in "the other," and gives them the strength to give from their wounded place.

*Judy Goldberger, Beacon Hill Friends Meeting & Jamaica Plain Worship Group*

there are so many big examples. every time someone stands in the face of injustice and demands change it's an act born of faith is it not? but there are little ones too that are just as inspiring. every time a child refuses to participate in bullying. every time someone gets off the treadmill and visits an elder. these are also acts of faith.

*Anonymous, sandpoint friends meeting*

Some of them have a refreshing willingness to be personally "apart from the crowd" in one individual way or another.

Practices--aside from being willing & able to sit still for an hour--mainly the prevalent rejection of military means of achieving alleged safety. Being willing to demonstrate, for anything at all, is a fairly unusual trait in the general population & a little more common among Friends.

*forrest curo, San Diego Meeting*

The testimonies above, if followed, force us to be non-participants in media laced, consumer driven culture.

*Sue Tannehill Buffalo, NY*