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Welcome to Season 3

Are you a spiritual seeker, interested in the Quaker faith? Are you a Quaker looking to deepen your Quaker practice or that of your Meeting? Or are you just stumbling around on YouTube and ended up watching videos about Quakers?

Regardless, welcome to the QuakerSpeak channel. QuakerSpeak is a Quaker video project. We interview Quakers of all different backgrounds and post short videos of these conversations every Thursday.

If you’re just now joining us, there are plenty of videos from Seasons 1 and 2 that might interest you. You can find the full lists of our videos in these Season 1 & Season 2 playlists. And if you’re just browsing, you might check out our top ten videos of all time in this playlist.

If you’ve followed along from the very beginning, you can always feel free to browse our catalog… and we’ve also got some exciting stuff coming up.

So I hope that you’re subscribed to receive the QuakerSpeak videos. We can’t wait to get started and we would be thrilled if you joined us for this journey.

Before we get started with Season 3 though, just a few notes about what is going to be new this Season.

First of all, we’ve been hearing about a lot of Quaker Meetings using QuakerSpeak as a resource, so we compiled all ways that Meetings are using QuakerSpeak and made it even easier for you.

Second: we often get asked about transcripts and closed captioning. Each QuakerSpeak video from the very beginning has had closed captioning. All you have to do is just hit the “cc” button at the bottom of this video frame. Transcripts can be found on our website.

Third: We know a lot of you are watching QuakerSpeak videos on mobile devices, and that the links at the end of the videos don’t always work for you. That’s why, in Season 3, we’ll also be using YouTube’s “info” button, which works on smartphones and tablets. Just click on the “i” wherever it shows up on your screen and you’ll find all the links that we mentioned in each video.

Ok, also this Season we will start to make each episode available as a podcast so that you can listen to QuakerSpeak as you’re going about your day. The first one will come out this Sunday.

If you’re not already a subscriber to Friends Journal, we want you to get on that. Subscribers to Friends Journal not only get a great magazine every month, but you’re also helping to sustain QuakerSpeak through the Season. So please, take a moment and become a Friends Journal subscriber.

QuakerSpeak.com
We also offer DVDs of both Seasons 1 and 2. These make a great addition to your Meeting’s library and also help to support the project.

Ok, if you’re still with us and you haven’t hit that subscribe button, do it! We’re getting started with new videos every week starting next week. Don’t miss the party. Subscribe.

I’m Jon Watts, the director of the QuakerSpeak project, and I’d like to welcome you to Season 3!
My First Time at Quaker Meeting

TRANSCRIPT

Victoria Green: Well, one of the members, JoAnn Seaver, came up to me and, very friendly, started a conversation. And I asked Joanne, “Is it true that for worship, you sit in silence for an hour?” And she said, “Yes, why don’t you come and join us and see how it is?” I told her, “Well I don’t think I can do that. I don’t think I can sit for an hour.” And she said, “Well, just come and do the best you can.” And that’s how I started coming.

My First Time At Quaker Meeting for Worship

Robert Fischer: My first impression of Quaker Meeting was confusion. I could not believe that people really were uniting together in practice not in dogma. It was literally incomprehensible to me, the fact that people believed different things and used different language but could be a community – and such a great community – because they shared the same set of practices, and because they came together in the same space and through that shared worship – that waiting worship – they developed a kind of sense of community and a sense of body, a sense of integration.

Learning to Settle Down

Charlotte Cloyd: The first time I went to Quaker Meeting, I didn’t know how to listen, and I sat and was uncomfortable and noticed the silence and was too analytical of what the silence meant for the first time, and then I kept going, and I didn’t stop going. And then I understood the very beginning of what listening meant. I didn’t really understand what listening was, because I never listened in church before, and then I had to work on the process of figuring out: what am I listening for? Am I listening to myself? What's going on? What is everyone else listening to and how does that affect the community and me?

Victoria Green: At first it was quite different. It took a while for me to settle down, but then they had hospitality. The people were so friendly and gracious; there’s diversity there, and I just loved it. It was like two worship services in one. The silence, and hospitality is worship too.

Hearing a Message

Joseph Olejak: I just entered in and it was silence, and silence for a long time. And I thought to myself… you know, I heard about Quakers having a quiet meeting but I didn't really have a sense of what that was in reality until actually sat for an hour in quiet. And there was like one message in that first meeting, and I think it was Elizabeth Grace who actually stood up and said something at that meeting about what was going on in the war in Iraq, and and I thought, wow, these people are serious people. They think about stuff that's happening right now. And that was my first experience.

Anthony Smith: What impressed me about it was that there were people struggling. Not that
they had the answers, but that they had questions and difficult questions that they were wrestling with, and they were trying to do so in a spiritually informed but also very intelligent way.

*Scott Holmes:* It felt like coming home. I felt like I had been wandering around a long time and had come home. Before I went, I did that thing with the Bible, where you kind of flip through real quick and just kind of peg a passage, and I pegged Micah, “What does the Lord require of thee but to justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God?” And even though I was fairly familiar with the Bible in my tradition of Methodism, I had never run across that one before.

And so the only message given at my first Meeting was that, which became a very important passage for me. And the person who gave it, Cal Geigar, was an important person and was on my clearness committee. Turns out that’s the message he always gives, so it wasn’t like, you know… but it was still pretty cool. And it was coming home to me.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *Do you remember your first time at Quaker Meeting? What was the experience like?*

2. *Charlotte Cloyd says, “The first time I went to Quaker Meeting, I didn't know how to listen, and I sat and was uncomfortable and noticed the silence and was too analytical of what the silence meant for the first time”. What resources can we provide to newcomers so that they understand the silence of our worship and the concept of listening?*
Who is John Woolman?

TRANSCRIPT

“Here we have a prospect of one common interest from which our own is inseparable – that to turn all the treasures we possess into the channels of universal love becomes the business of our lives.”

Who is John Woolman?

John Woolman was a Quaker from colonial New Jersey. He lived from 1720 till 1772, so he died before the American Revolution. So it was the final years of the colonial experience and he lived through the the final years of William Penn's holy experiment in Pennsylvania.

John Woolman’s Writings

John Woolman’s writings have spoken to Quakers and many others ever since they were first published. I believe this is because he holds together two elements in the religious life that often are not so successfully integrated. In religious communities you find people who are very much of a contemplative frame of mind. Their inclination is toward prayer and meditation, toward exploring the inward dimensions of life. And then in religious communities you also find people whose energy is drawn toward remaking the world, reforming society, promoting a better, more just human experience.

John Woolman held these two together. He didn't make a choice between them. He integrated the two. He was on the one hand a very mystical kind of person. He felt a tremendous sense of nearness and intimacy with the divine and at the same time he gave decades of his life to reforming human society.

John Woolman’s Concerns

His concerns for social reform began with issue of slavery in his day, and in his work he tried not only to labor on behalf of the external freedom of those who were enslaved but he sought also to liberate those who held others in slavery from the greed that drove them to oppress others. So he wanted to liberate both the the enslaved and the slaveholders.

From that issue his concern for the world came to embrace also the the plight of the native peoples of North America who were mistreated by many of the English colonists and he also came to be quite concerned for the poor among the English colonists themselves.

And so he is model of someone who speaks very self-revealingly about his own inward life, who reflects courageously and deeply about one's own inward impulses toward good or evil as well as how society might be put together in a more just way, and he is a model for someone who can be who is who exhibits an openness to new leadings, because throughout his life, his concern for the oppressed only grew.
And so what I find in the words of John Woolman is an invitation. An invitation for those who are of a contemplative bent to embrace the life of an activist, and for those who lean more toward the activist side of the religious life, to cultivate their own inward experience.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *Michael Birkel points out that Woolman balanced two elements of the religious life: contemplation and activism. Where do you fall on this spectrum? How do you balance out the two?*

2. *Have you read any of John Woolman’s writings? How did they speak to you?*
Why I’m Not a Pacifist

TRANSCRIPT

I think that pacifism is like a fruit, and I would like to have a word that somehow describes that fruit of reconciliation grows from roots that are tended in the soil of worship.

Why I’m Not a Pacifist

In what we call Friends peace testimony now [George] Fox talks about living in that light and power that takes away the occasion for all wars. And I think that life and power part is the soil that we need to nurture—all of us—to be in that life and power that takes away the occasion for all sorts of violence and helps us move out of the comfort of the institutions we've built and into some new space.

Revolutionary Peacemaking

When I think of “pacifist” I think that the word is too small to hold what I would like to mean and not sure what the word is so I'm going to try and work it out. “Pacifist” implies someone who denies or abores or negates the use of physical violence and war—which I do—but it doesn't in my mind open up the truly revolutionary possibilities that are implied in peacemaking and especially in faithful peacemaking and more specifically, for me, in Christian peacemaking.

“There is enough”

There's some word—maybe it's reconciliation—to describe Jesus's ministry which he ministers to the pain and suffering not just of those affected by violence but by poverty and greed, other forms of violence that aren’t the physical violence implied by war which then gets me to pacifism.

So maybe, I was thinking about this, maybe I'm a “Shalomist”: someone who believes in God's shalom, God's peace and abundance for all… that God wills that everyone has abundance and peace and is doing what they are supposed to be doing.

Or maybe I'm a “Jubilee-ist,” who believes that we can work to a time when we have dismantled human structures and institutions as we're invited to by the description of the Jubilee year to lay down all contracts, to let the slaves go, to let the land lie fallow, to return all of the landholdings to their original owners, like a big cosmic reset button of possibility of an acknowledgment that there is provision. There is enough.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Most people identify Quakers as pacifists, but is that concept too limiting? Do you know other Quakers who don’t identify that way?

2. When Quakers say we want to work for peace, does that just mean the lack of war? Or
is it something greater?
Staying Engaged as a Young Adult Quaker

TRANSCRIPT

Annie Boggess: When I came to Quakerism, as someone who was already kind of a young adult in college, it felt like this beautiful coming home to a family that I didn't even realize that I had. There was no pressure. There was no, “Where have you been? You’re a little late.” It was just: “We’ve been waiting for you and we’re so happy that you found your way to us.”

Staying Engaged as a Young Adult Quaker

Anthony Smith: Some of my twenties… it was an interesting time because I'm traveling and living in different places. I think I lived a month or more in probably a half dozen states in the course of my twenties and then I have a different job every couple of years, and one thing I found was that—you know, I think this is a time, twenties and thirties, where people started to maybe fall off from religion—for me, it got deeper. Because one constant I had was that I was a Friend.

Something To Be Hopeful For

If I lived somewhere I was looking for a meeting. I was I was trying to attend, I was trying to participate. Particularly on things relating to their social concerns, their witness. Instead of my religion just being a part of my life, that my life was framed by my religion, and my spiritual sense was important to me and I felt it important to nurture that.

Emily Temple: What has kept me engaged as a Young Adult Friend and in Quaker institutions and Quaker life is the values that I have learned from those communities: despite how jaded you could feel by the work that still needs to be done in the world, there is something to be hopeful for. There's a lot that is worth working that hard for and quite simply there is no one else to do this work if we’re not going to do it.

Young adults can find community in Quaker organizations like FCNL.

Annie Boggess: I think when people are looking for other Quakers who are roughly young adult age, it can be a little difficult because we are spread out and many of us might be focusing on things that are not Quakerism at this particular moment in our lives. Having the opportunity to work at FCNL right after college was a really awesome way to transition out of this great Quaker community that I had at Haverford College into another great Quaker community.

Anthony Smith: And FCNL (the Friends Committee on National Legislation) was a constant for me. I knew that wherever I was, I intended to go to its annual meeting. They were just a part of that sense of permanency that I didn’t often have a lot of. I knew that no matter what I was doing, I would have that and I would be involved in that.

Emily Temple: These Quaker communities have given me so much in my life that it’s nothing for

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me to become more involved. That’s what I have to give at this point because I don’t have financial contributions to give yet, or much else, and so what I have is my time and energy to give towards things. I’m very happy to give it at this point because I’m ready to see it carried forward and to honor the work that everybody’s done that’s come before.

Anthony Smith: And in a sense, it’s kind of comforting. You’ll go to D.C. every year, maybe in a different location or something, but I’ll see many of the same people. I’ll be engaged in some of the same work. And it’s very intense. Especially being on policy committee, which I got onto the year after I joined the general committee. It does get very intense in some years, especially in the last 3 or 4, but I always feel nurtured at the end of it. The work we do: it is well with my soul.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your spiritual life like in your twenties? What are some of the religious opportunities that most spoke to you in that period of your life?

2. Anthony Smith describes living in a lot of different places and holding a lot of different jobs in his twenties but always coming back to FCNL Meetings as a constant. What was a spiritual constant that you’ve had in more transitory periods of your life?
Can There Be a Nonviolent Response to Terrorism?

TRANSCRIPT

As an experiment, because I was teaching here at Swarthmore College, I decided to offer a course called “Nonviolent Responses to Terrorism,” and see if anybody would come. We had to lottery the course, there were so many students who were excited about this different approach.

Can There Be a Nonviolent Response to Terrorism?

What their job was, was to write. Each student had to choose a country that is currently threatened by terrorism: get to know that country—its strengths, its weaknesses; and develop a defense strategy against the threat, a strategy that would be nonviolent in character. That was their term paper for the semester.

The 8 Tools of Nonviolent Defense

There were eight different tools that I discovered in my research that have been used, actually, by various nation-states as defense modes. For example, one of those tools—you wanted an example—one of those tools is economic development. Do economic development in the area where the prime recruiting ground is for terrorists, because terrorist are very often motivated by economic injustice, and economic oppression. If you turn that situation around and provide plentiful jobs, a lot of the people that would otherwise decide on a career of terrorism will get a job and, you know, be straightforward citizens. And so, that’s one of the eight.

Healing as a Strategic Tool

What terror does—even the threat of terror to some degree—but what the actual act of terror does is traumatize the people most affected and the people that know them. The trauma, then, takes political form and increases that nation’s likelihood of doing stuff to the attacker that increases the amount of the attack. That’s what happened on 9/11. The U.S., by its response to Afghanistan, and then Iraq, increased the total number of terrorists available in the world, increased Osama Bin Laden’s prominence. It was just amazing… the U.S. decided to be the primary recruiter of terrorists against itself. But it did that not because it’s so stupid as to want to recruit terrorists for Osama Bin Laden, not intentionally. But because the trauma itself forced the U.S. into doing this mad thing that anybody pragmatic would not want to do. So, another tool of these eight is to go right into a healing mode for the people who were traumatized. In this case, in the U.S., it was really the whole population that was traumatized by the 9/11 experience. So, that’s another example of a tool.

Implementing Nonviolence as Policy
It’s hard to summarize those tools, because it took a whole semester to really lay them out, so that students would have enough ability to operate with them. They did. They did fantastic papers. In the meantime, the Pentagon heard about this, and asked me to come down. And so, I went down and met with a policy unit of the Pentagon that had to do with responding to terrorism. These were professionals in the field. I’m not a professional in the field of terrorism, but there they were.

So, I laid it all out and I said, in the beginning, the one reason that I want to lay out these eight for you, is not only because the students—who are definitely not experts, they’re undergraduates—were able to make so much sense for the defense planning for the various countries that they chose, including Israel, including the U.S., including Indonesia and other countries that were threatened. Not only were the students able to write papers that made so much sense but also, you, as experts, I’m hoping for you to show more about how synergies will happen by the combination of the eight. Because, yes, there are countries that have tried number two and number five but what if you take all eight, and forget about the military response, just say, instead of a military response, we’ll have a nonviolent response. Use those eight synergistically with each other, so that the whole will be greater than the sum of its parts. I want you, as experts to give me that kind of feedback.

Instead, what I got from their point of view was the U.S. government doesn’t operate that way, the U.S. government doesn’t operate in terms of systemic alternative approaches. There’s no way that our politics can handle that. It’s way too polarized. The way that ideas get before the president, and certainly an alternative of this scope would have to go before the president, the way that proposals get to the president trims them out, makes them subject to the lowest common denominator among the various agencies that are involved, and there’s no way that that kind of package, as promising as it is... In fact, what the experts said, “We have no problem with anything that you have said, but that kind of systemic shift is beyond the capacity of the United States government.”

So, I was grateful to the course, which I have taught a couple of times since, not only as an indication of how undergraduates can do brilliant work if they’re given a toolbox that’s appropriate, as opposed to the toolbox that’s inappropriate, called the Pentagon. And, also, that I learned second lesson, that the U.S. government is configured in such a way that it can not make a creative nonviolent response that would be far more effective than the response that we have been making.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. **What do you think of the idea that healing can be a successful defense strategy against terrorism?**

2. **George Lakey calls the Pentagon an “inappropriate” toolbox for dealing with terrorism. Do you agree? What would be more appropriate, consider the defense challenges we
face today?

3. George Lakey describes the U.S. political system as rigged against nonviolent alternatives that could better defend innocents against terrorism. What can be done to change the system?
The History of Quaker War Tax Resistance

TRANSCRIPT

Some Friends – a man named Wallace Collett, who was a member of this Meeting, Cincinnati Community Friends... he was a banker, and what he would do is he would send a letter saying, “I have put aside money in the amount of the taxes owed plus all the penalties and I put it in an account at this bank.” And then he would go to the bank – to people he knew – and he would tell them, “the government’s going to come and ask for that money. It’s there for them.” That gave him an opportunity to not just resist the war taxes – the portion of his income taxes he was estimating went to support the war – but to tell people in the business community and the banking community that he was doing it, why he was doing it, and try and prick their conscience; try and get them to realize that when you pay taxes to support the war, you earn a share of the guilt.

The History of Quaker War Tax Resistance

War taxes have been an issue for Friends almost from the beginning of the Society of Friends. It really becomes something that they need to deal with in a very immediate way in the 18th Century, in particular in Pennsylvania, where Quakers controlled the government and it was a colony of Britain. Britain got engaged in wars, and in those days when you had war, you passed specific taxes to pay for the war.

17th Century: Wrestling With the Question of War Taxes

The society of Friends had pretty much been able to ignore war, to just kind of say, “that was their problem,” but once they were in control of the government of Pennsylvania, it became our problem. How can we say that we as a people are not going to be involved in warfare, but we're going to pay money so that other people can be involved in warfare. They tried some subterfuges. They would pass a law that says that the citizens of Pennsylvania would be taxed for, I don’t know, their use of beer or, I don’t know – I don’t remember exactly what kinds of taxes they passed – but the tax would be designated “for the use of the King” or the “use of the Queen”. Now, they knew perfectly well what the use was going to be (and that was to support the military) but they could pretend that they were just doing their duty as citizens to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.

18th Century: The End of Quaker Participation in Government

It worked for a while, but then in the 1750s there was what we in the United States call the French and Indian wars, and there was sufficient resistance to this... frankly, lying– that Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (which covered the territory that most of Pennsylvania was in) made a statement that it was inconsistent for Friends to participate in any way, not just in supporting wars, but participate in any ways in government, and that they needed to withdraw so that we could remain a peculiar people: a people who would demonstrate a different way of living than the one that was represented by the wider society, by the wider society that got itself
involved in wars that we could not be part of.

19th Century: Saying No Publicly

After the Revolutionary War, the United States government also tended initially to have specific taxes for specific purposes, so when the War of 1812 came along, the United States government passed taxes to support the war. Individual states also passed taxes to support the war, and a lot of Quakers the time just said no, but they didn't say no by trying to hide from the tax. They would say no publicly.

The Practice of “Distrain”

Under distrain there be a tax, maybe there would be a tax on farm animals, and you’re a farmer. You would know that you were supposed to pay a dollar a head for cows (I'm making this up, obviously). You had 10 cows. You owe $10. You don't pay it. And you don't pay it publicly. You know that the local sheriff is going to come to your farm and demand the money, and if you refuse –which, if you're faithful to Quaker testimony you do refuse– the sheriff has the right under the law to distrain: to seize goods that, in the Sheriff's opinion, are worth that $10. So they would they would look around your house, and say “Well that table over there. That looks like it's worth about $10. I'm taking the table.” He carts it off, brings it into town and sells it.

Now the law said that if he sold that table for $15, he's supposed to give you $5 back. What Quakers said was, “No, you seized that table we're not going to take the five dollars back, because even in doing that we entangle ourselves in your war taxes. So take a table. We won't resist you, but we're done then.”

20th Century: Modern Tax Laws Become More Complicated

As we move forward in time – as we move into the 20th Century, taxes become less distinct. The taxes are raised for general revenue and then apportioned out to cover a multitude of causes and so it wasn't easy to identify specific taxes and say, “that's a war tax. I'm not going to pay that.” This really makes things much more difficult. The practice of distrain is also one that was largely abandoned in that manner. And of course many Quakers today don't resist war taxes or we do it in in some minor ways but… economics has become a lot more complicated. I think if the government were to pass individual taxes, we’d find it a lot easier but we deal in a real world that intentionally makes things complicated, so we compromise. And in exchange we need to bear our share of the guilt.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul Buckley reviews Friends’ attitudes on war tax in every century since the founding of the Religious Society of Friends. Was there anything he said that was particularly surprising or interesting to you?

2. Do you know of any modern war tax resisters? What do they do to avoid supporting war?

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The Quaker Practice of Discernment

**TRANSCRIPT**

*Christopher Sammond:* Discernment is really the heart and the core of everything we do as Friends. It's the core of our practice in worship, it's the core of our practice in worship for business, it's the center of how we make decisions in our lives, to marry, for our employment, for our work in the world, for our ministry...

*The Quaker Practice of Discernment*

*Niyonu Spann:* The process of discernment and being called, or having a leading or the deepest knowing—all of those feel like incredibly connected, if not the exact same thing.

*Walter Hjelt Sullivan:* For me, discernment is the core technology of Quakerism. It is the thing that we learn to do and that our faith supports. And that is to thresh through the complexity of life and find the kernel, find the root, find the way: the way for me today, at this moment.

*Patricia McBee:* Some people may call it seeking the will of God. Others may call it consulting their deep inner wisdom. I think a lot of people do discernment relatively spontaneously when they have a sticky issue to deal with, and they stop, they let it rest a while. They let an answer rise up in them.

*Walter Hjelt Sullivan:* …to tell the difference between the still small voice that's guiding me well and the many other voices—the many other fine, human voices—that are within me.

*Callid Keefe-Perry:* So, discernment is listening for God's will for us to move us more fully into God's understanding of the kingdom of heaven, of right order between all creation—humans and plants and animals and ideas, I would even say.

**Balancing the Spiritual with the Intellectual**

*Patricia McBee:* Of course, part of Quaker discernment is the rational, reasonable assessment of the pros and cons of the decision at hand. Discernment takes it a step farther than that and invites us to go to a deep place, a centered place, and to see how… how where our rational minds have led us sits in us.

*Christopher Sammond:* Discernment is accessing that place where God is at work in us, and it's well beyond rational, thoughtful weighing of the situation. It's not without an information gathering phase where we have to understand the parameters clearly, but then, after that, it comes down to accessing that same place that vocal ministry comes from, that place of deep faithfulness where we don't care whether it's this or that. We have no investment in which side of that question we fall on, and: “God what do you want me to do here?”

*Callid Keefe-Perry:* And so then we listen with the reason, we listen with emotion, we listen with inspiration, and, kind of, more than a touch of hope. And I’ll say, experientially, I know that it...
functions. It works. That when we trust one another, when we are able to be vulnerable with one another, when we allow ourselves to think that it might actually be the case that God is an actual thing that we might actually be able to hear and might live into actually better lives, well—lo and behold—something happens in that space.

Niyonu Spann: So, discernment, for me, is definitely a listening, but it also is this process of allowing and letting go.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Christopher Sammond talks about accessing a place of deep faithfulness, where we have no investment about which side of a question we end up on. Have you experienced being in that place in your own life? How did you get there? What did it feel like?

2. Some Friends use the Quaker practice of discernment for major life milestones like weddings and career changes, while others seem to use discernment, as Patricia McBee says, “relatively spontaneously” throughout their day. Which of these more closely resembles your use of discernment? How has it helped you when you’ve used it?
How I Survived the Ex-Gay Movement with Theater

TRANSCRIPT

No, but seriously: here in the Homo No Mo’ Halfway House, they never promise to make any of us actual heterosexuals—that would be a little ambitious for some of us—but they do promise that if we do our part and we work our programs, we’re going to come out of here as healthy, celibate ex-gays. Yeah, I’m excited about it, too.

My interest in gay reparative therapy was very much personal because at the age of 17 I got into my head that I would be far more valuable to everyone in the world and in heaven if I were a masculine-presenting heterosexual so I attempted to “de-gay” myself through a variety of gay conversion therapy treatments, exorcisms, support groups, even a residential facility that I lived in for two years where they promised to help me find freedom from homosexuality through Jesus Christ.

How I Survived the Ex-Gay Movement With Theater

My name is Peterson Toscano. I live in central Pennsylvania, Sunbury, Pennsylvania. I’m a Quaker and attend Pennsdale Meeting and Millville Meeting. So I’ve given myself the title “theatrical performance activist” because what I do is a number of things that overlap. So I’m a scholar, I’m a comic, I’m a storyteller, and I’m an actor, and everything I do really is to use comedy to address deadly serious issues.

Asking God to Be Fixed

And all of a sudden, they parade the kids in. You can’t go over to your kid and say “hi,” hug them, nothin’. Now this part, this was a hell of a thing. Because one by one, right, they made these kids stand up and tell us these stories about themselves. These disgusting stories. And listen, I don’t care. You could do whatever you want with whoever you want, all right? But you don’t stand up and say that shit in front of your mother. [AUDIENCE LAUGHTER]

And so when the gay thing began to raise itself in me I didn’t know what to do. Like, what was going to happen if I told my parents, because I couldn’t have them reject me? And so then I opted to take matters into my own hands.

So the overarching question I continued to ask God day after day was, “please please, fix me, make me straight, make me normal.” I never considered that maybe the answer that God was giving was, “no, that’s not what I want to do.” I just always assumed that’s the right question, and in pursuing that question, and in pursuing God in that way, I nearly destroyed myself. I mean, over time it became emotionally and psychologically damaging for me, and the levels of shame and self-hatred and confusion just grew to toxic levels.

Integrating Faith and Sexuality

So, I came out gay, which was more like just acknowledging that I had this terminal disease.
Like, you know, “you’ve got the gay. It’s not going away any time soon.” And I thought at that point then that everything was separate between me and God. Because I was told you can’t be gay and Christian. So now I was gay.

And I felt such a loss. It was like this emptiness came in. Because having God in my life is such an important, essential part of me. And I finally, one day, after attempting to live like an atheist and doing a bad job of it, I started praying, and saying, “God, I don’t know what to do about this.” And that began the very long, difficult journey to try to integrate my faith with my sexuality with the rest of me.

**Discovering Quakers**

I needed to find a place to worship. I was a refugee from those evangelical church years. I needed to go somewhere, and I started attending liberal mainline denominational churches and I experienced post-traumatic stress. Because even though there arms were wide open to a gay guy, they sang the same songs. The sermon sounded very similar, and the language, the scriptures were the same, the architecture was the same. I needed a radically different religious experience. And I met a lovely Quaker woman, Diane Weinholtz from the Hartford meeting, we worked at the same school and she was out and proud as a Quaker. And I'm so grateful that she was because she just would mention it from time to time and I attended.

Right after 9/11, I attended the Hartford friends meeting and it was an hour of absolute silence. No one had a message. And it was the most important hour I had in my life for years up until that point, because I had been pummeled with words and with images and ideas, and I just needed to be still. And I needed that, week after week after week, to just be there and not have to worry about what prayer I prayed or what's God saying, just be seen by God and be present.

**Theater as A Healing Practice**

I trained to do theater when I was very young, in my undergraduate work, but I was also struggling with being gay. And I ultimately gave that all up for Jesus, because it was too hard not to be gay in a theater department infested with homosexuals, so I put it aside for decades. I come out gay, I move to Connecticut, I'm working at a private school, I'm going to this Quaker meetinghouse, and I began to unpack all the other parts of me and began to tell my story about having gone through gay conversion therapy. And seeing people's reaction, like, “you did what?” And that's when I decided: Wow, I need to do something about this.

And it was through clearness committee and ultimately support committee that I began my first work as a performance artist, and it really came out of that Hartford Meeting. The love, the support, the listening encouragement, the coming to the shows. Helping me, you know, in my apartment, just bringing friends, like: “I'm going to do a little sample. Tell me what you think.” Getting that kind of critical feedback. It—definitely—the performance art grew out of my relationship with the Hartford meeting.

*Alright, hello everyone, how are you? Hello, my name is Marvin, Marvin Bloom. I’m from Long*  

[QuakerSpeak.com](https://www.quakerspeak.com)
Island, can you understand me?

This was a very personal story for me, and one that I needed to process for myself. I mean, it was traumatic. And in addition to going to trained therapists for help in undoing the damage, I also went on stage and began telling the story through characters. I couldn't even tell it as myself at first, because it was too close to home, but creating zany, interesting, bizarre characters I got to tell my own story through their words, and I created a play called “Doin’ Time in the Homo No Mo’ Halfway House: How I Survived The Ex-Gay Movement”. So it took something that was unbelievably tragic in my life, and I turned to comedy as a tool of healing for myself and as public witness about the injustice that was going on at that time in those sorts of programs.

And then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” So they took away the stone and Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus. Come out.” The dead man came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face. And Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.” To me this was the most dramatic moment in all of the gospels. I mean, think of it. For the first time in four days, light and air entered that dark, dank place and Jesus, with that voice of his, he somehow pierced the veil between this world and the next and Lazarus, wherever he was, whatever state of being he was in, he heard that voice and came out.

Early on in one of the clearness meetings that I had, somebody talked about how the work is prophetic. Which… I had a real negative reaction to that because it just sounds presumptuous to say, “Well, I do prophetic work.” But understanding a little bit more about the way that words and how they’re delivered can really crack somebody’s head open in a fresh new way, can move them to action, I like that. And if my work does that, or when my work does that, that is really a blessing. And, through the years, I’ve been able to embrace that part, that there’s some real power to this work. It’s not just cute and clever and well-structured, but there’s power there, and not to be afraid of that. Just acknowledge that that’s the gift, and to let it shine. Like we say in that song, you know, “Put it under a bushel? No!”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Peterson says that he prayed and prayed for God to “fix me, make me normal.” And never stopped to consider that God’s answer might be, “No, that’s not what I want to do.” What parallels do you see in your own life?

2. After all the trauma and turmoil of Peterson’s years of “gay reparative therapy”, a large part of his healing process has been to share his story onstage. What stories in your life are only healed when you share them out loud?
Quaker Spiritual Disciplines

TRANSCRIPT

Some years back, a Quaker friend and teacher of mine observed that many times Quakers don't realize the richness that our tradition has for helping us grow in the Spirit, and so Friends might take a yoga class or something in Buddhism which is very disciplined and very directed, and bristle if they are directed in Quaker meeting. So that intrigued me to think about what are the particular disciplines that Quaker have.

Quaker Spiritual Disciplines

I'm Patricia McBee. I live in Philadelphia and I have been active among Friends since 1970, which includes working for Friends General Conference, doing a lot of work around helping Quakers address spirituality and for six years, miraculously I don't know how, I managed the building at Friends Center.

The Discipline of “Retirement”

I think the Quaker spiritual discipline that most of us are most aware of is “retirement” (to use the old term), which is to step back from the busy-ness of activity and the busy brain work and just be quietly present. Present to God. Present to the present. Present to being here now, because in that place of quiet we can clear our systems and be more open to one another and to compassion and to compassion for ourselves.

The Discipline of Prayer

Another spiritual discipline is prayer, which is an awkward subject for a lot of Quakers. If you don't believe there's somebody on the other end of the phone line when you call up and say, “Could you deliver me some health for my friend?” then what is prayer?

But I believe that many of us know that while there is a deep inner self, there is that of God in each of us, there is something bigger than me as well, some bigger reality. Some reality that encompasses all of us.

And so I see prayer as acknowledgement of that reality and living in the context of that reality.

The Discipline of Discernment

Discernment, the process of steering one's life based on retiring and opening oneself to the larger reality as part of decision-making about “how I’m living my life” whether it's a small question like, “Is my child old enough to stay out past 11 PM?” or something global, “Should I stop driving an automobile because of a concern for the environment?”
A Matter of Attitude

Some years back my meeting took a sabbath year, and we were encouraged to take on spiritual disciplines, and I knew that some people would say, “Like I have time to spend an hour every day in worship.” And so I put this little thing together about spiritual disciplines for busy people, like when you reach for the telephone, taking a moment to take a breath. Or when you’re stopped in traffic, taking a moment to feel gratitude for your life and the good things in your life. So it can be a big thing. It can be an hour every day of doing spiritual reading and then journaling and then settling into quiet, and when I’ve done that and when the people I know do that regularly, it’s an amazingly powerful thing. But it can be much smaller and more a matter of attitude than of some set of rituals you go through to get to a disciplined place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What keeps you spiritually grounded throughout the week?

2. At the end of the video, Patricia points out that a spiritual discipline can be a small shift in attitude rather than a sweeping time commitment. What small spiritual disciplines have you tried? How did it change your experience?
How to Listen for a Leading

TRANSCRIPT

Emma Churchman: So ideally the way it works is: you learn to listen to God. God communicates with you in some way. That can be words, that can be stirring in your heart, that can be dreams or song lyrics or conversations that you overhear. I personally preferred the giant billboards on the side of the road – that's how I need my communication with God. Very clear right? So you learn how to be in communication with God and then God asks something of you, invites you into a possibility.

How to Listen for a Leading

Marcelle Martin: Quakers have talked about being tender, being sensitive to what's going on inwardly. Inwardly in us and inwardly in other people, we can become aware that God is present in us and other people and everything and that all of life is sacred. It's actually mostly because of our loss of that awareness that we've been living in a way that's out of balance, so we need to regain that balance by returning to an awareness of the sacredness of everything and of the presence of God within each person and within ourselves. And as we learn to do that, we'll see more and more clearly how we need to change: what's not working, what's not right, and how God is calling us to live in a different way.

How It Feels

Leslie Manning: Each of us has a different sensation but for me the sensation is to feel a warmth across my chest that spreads deep into my center. It is a loving embrace and a lifting out of my heart. The image that comes to me is that of the Paraclete, which is the old Greek word for Spirit, where the fire of the heart is lifted up as purifying, cleansing, and anointing. So that's what it's like for me. When I feel that, I know true. I am a friend of truth.

Taking Risks

Brian Drayton: You have to take risks because you're operating under a sense of guidance which is an inward apprehension of a sense of duty: to go or to stay, to speak or be silent. And you can always be mistaken because impulses come from a lot of sources, and although any good friend over the years becomes practiced in sorting out those things, you're not always right. But sometimes you have to take the leap and trust that your friends will help pull you back in.

Pat Moyer: Well for myself, I had made a habit in my life of not disturbing the peace. But then there was this part of me that was always upset with the status quo, or thinking, “How could they not see this? How can this be happening?” and so the inner process is partly a personal habit
one: “don't mess it up” versus “this has to be messed up” and figuring out which one you’re going to listen to.

Emma Churchman: For me, there are no angels and bells and hallelujahs when that happens. It is friggin’ terrifying. It is terrifying what God asks me to do. To leave my home, to leave my community, to leave a job, to leave a relationship. There’s a lot of leaving that happens in this life by leading. We talk about it as if we are moving forward in the leading, but part of moving forward is closing doors and that is often what is most terrifying.

Grounding Our Leadings

Pat Moyer: Discernment really has to happen in a community, even if people think they don't need it. Because once you get started doing something, it has to fit wherever you are and whatever you're doing. It has to not be too far off the mark. I mean, there are prophets and they definitely have their place, but to really get something done in the here and now you need to have people who see what you can do and know whether you're fit for this or fit for that and know how this might go. So it's an inner process and it's a reflective process with other people.

Brian Drayton: And the inward guide also let's you know when you've gone too far a lot of the time. It takes—you know there’s a lot of different kinds of practice in Quaker spirituality and that may be one of the core pieces, is learning to separate wheat from chaff in terms of the substance of what you're experiencing inwardly, and how to translate that into your outward life. And so Fox’s line about “living experimentally”— although he didn’t mean it quite the way we do now—nevertheless, is the right word.

Leslie Manning: When our hearts are pierced—and I'm sure you've experienced this too—we're not being injured, we're being given the opportunity. It goes all the way through us! It isn’t stopped in our heart, it goes through, and the light pours through it. We become lanterns. The image I love to use (of course, from the coast of Maine) is the lighthouse. We become beacons of hope. Radiant gatherers and givers of Light. And we speak the truth insofar as we are lead, and—this is the danger — not beyond it.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *Leslie Manning describes the sensation of feeling a leading as “a warmth across my chest that spreads deep to my center.” Can you identify with the feeling she is talking about? What is the physical sensation you have when approaching clarity?*

2. *Pat Moyer talks about her inward wrestling with a sense that she didn’t want to “disturb the peace” and a feeling that things “have to be messed up.” What are the inward voices that you struggle with that might interfere with your hearing a leading clearly?*
Listening Each Other Into Wholeness

TRANSCRIPT

Based on my limited understanding, we are amazingly powerful, whether we get it or not. We are extremely powerful, and often, we feel powerless. Anywhere from depression to anxiety to whatever, we are “feelers.”

Listening Each Other Into Wholeness

When I listen—when I really listen—I am listening to hear God speak. I am listening for God's voice, God’s signal. What that means to me is the signal that moves me to alive-ness. The signal that allows me to feel the fullness.

And when I speak I am not frivolous with my words because I recognize that my words are power. “Henceforth Christ was known as the word of God” because my judgment is he truly understood the power of word, the power of speaking. So I listen so that I know where I am, where I don't want to be. What's possible. To be touched, called, formed. And when I speak, I speak knowing that I'm working with God's power. And when I speak I want to speak in a way that facilitates healing, that facilitates blessing, that facilitates wholeness, that facilitates creative possibility for integration.

When We Don’t Listen

My concern is that we don't listen to each other, and it creates the world we see. It creates the world we experience. People not being heard, not being seen, not being appreciated, not being valued, not being recognized. People not being recognized for that of God that dwells within them. Not seen. Not recognized. Not reclaimed and embraced. Whole-heartedly embraced. And so we fragment. We fragment. We become broken because we are not seen for who we really are. The body breaks. It just breaks.

Listening Each Other Into Wholeness

The positive news... (That's the sad news. That's the sad news, how about some happy news?) The happy news is at any point in time we can take our power back, we can fine tune, re-hone, calibrate our capacity to hear and recognize each other. And so my belief is there's a way of listening, that Quakers have this belief or this sentence: “Listening each other into wholeness.” That we have the capacity to listen each other into wholeness, and we can take that back at any point in time and feel the richness of deep listening, where our heart is actually touched. Deep listening. And deep speaking. It's exciting.
Did Quakers Invent Solitary Confinement?

TRANSCRIPT

Quakers did not invent solitary confinement. But Quakers were very involved in the organization that started the penitentiary, which was a place that people were supposed to go and be penitent. It was the reform. So it's a cautionary tale about reforms.

Did Quakers Invent Solitary Confinement?

Prisons up until that point had been dungeons. They had been horrendous places. Staff wasn't getting paid, people were getting all kinds of bribes just to get their meals. Children were thrown in with adults, and there was no sanitation. It was a horrendous, ugly situation, which Quakers became familiar with because they themselves were thrown in prison.

An Ecumenical Reform

This is really mostly going on in Britain, and John Howard is often cited as the person responsible for this idea of the penitentiary, but here in the United States, it was this other organization with a very long name, which is now still in existence, called the Pennsylvania Prison Society, and they propose this reform. About 50% of the people in that organization in 1790 were Quakers. It wasn't a Quaker organization; it was actually the first ecumenical organization that we know of in the country. Ecumenical in those days meant different kinds of Protestants. They didn't include Jews, they didn't include Catholics, and it was headed by an Anglican bishop for the first 49 years, believe it or not. No Quaker monthly meeting that I know of ever passed minutes to advance this reform, but a lot of Quakers were involved.

A Rehabilitation Model

So this reform was not just about solitary confinement. It was about taking people on the assumption that they could be reformed. It was a rehabilitation model. It included paid staff, it included trained staff, it included jobs... food... I don't know if I would call it “healthcare”... sanitation. It was a much cleaner, more sanitized version of these dungeons that they had before. Separation of women and men, taking the children out of that constellation... a lot of positive things that were really about helping people reform.

But very quickly, mostly because of overcrowding, this experiment (as they called it) failed, because things were chaotic they couldn't hold to the disciplines that they had started, and that kind of thing. So instead of abandoning it, people were very invested in this idea that they had, and so they just started doing it bigger and bigger. And that's when Eastern State [Penitentiary] got built, and I think one out in Chestnut Hill got built, and New York picked it up, and Massachusetts picked it up, and it proliferated.

Solitary Confinement

Now, if you go and take the tour at Eastern State here in Philadelphia, you'll see that those
solitary confinement cells about three times the size of the solitary cell today. They had skylights you could open and close yourself, to the real live sky. They had little gardens that people could grow things in. I mean they were really much more humane than what solitary confinement has become, but the notion that people would become penitent based on being alone and just you know between themselves and God (the Bible was really the only piece of literature they were initially allowed to have) you know, the monasteries had thrown off that idea in the 1400s. So the idea that it would be picked up again in the 1700s as a reform, as something that had any chance of really working, is faulty. But it’s also faulty, [in that] it was never considered to be “solitary” in the sense of our understanding of what silent worship is about. That was never part of the rhetoric about advancing this reform.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did you know about the history of the penitentiary and solitary confinement before watching the video? Knowing how Quakers were involved, what responsibility do Friends have today in reforming the prison system?

2. Laura Magnani calls the story of the penitentiary a “cautionary tale about reforms.” What do you think she means?
How Did Quakers Come to North America?

TRANSCRIPT

People associate Quakers primarily in the United States with Pennsylvania, and actually it wasn't the first place the Quakers came to in the American colonies.

How Quakers Came to North America

Quakerism began in England—1640s and 50s—as missionaries, those who went forth to share their experience, to lead others into convincement, first came to Virginia. The first known Quaker in the colonies, I believe, was Elizabeth Harris 1656 in Virginia. There were Quakers in the Carolinas by the 1660s. So they were washing ashore in various places, initially as missionaries, carrying the gospel message as Friends.

William Penn and Pennsylvania

But in the 1670s, William Penn was a convinced Friend and was offered a tract of land on what we today call “Pennsylvania” by the King of England, who owed his father, Admiral Penn, a large debt for Admiral Penn's having loaned a significant sum of money for the prosecution of a war.

Penn refused to accept the land until he sent his agents over to treat with the Native Americans who actually lived there on how they would live together, and Penn actually bought the land from the Native Americans. [In] 1681, 1682, in the treaty of Shackamaxon, painted by Benjamin West and Edward Hicks and those sorts of folks.

But whatever the historical details were, Penn did seek to live peaceably with the Native Americans in what became known as Pennsylvania. Penn didn't call it Pennsylvania. The king said, “I want to honor your father by calling it ‘Penn's Woods,’ Penn's-Sylvania, to honor Admiral Penn,” and so the name stuck.

The Holy Experiment

It became, for William Penn, and opportunity to display what became known as “The Holy Experiment”, which we understand in two different ways. It was an experiment in how to organize our political and religious and social lives around those testimonies of Friends, around the Quaker understanding of restoring original Christianity. So it would be a place where people could practice their religion freely, without the dictates of the crown, where all would be equal in the society, regardless of their class and their religious background, and a place that would not be organized around the military power and might, where anyone who believed in God could run for office and serve in civil society.

But it was also understood to be a place where you would go and you would experience the power of that life. Quakers talked about knowing truth “experimentally”, which meant experientially. So the holy experiment was not just “We're going to try this and see if it works,” it
was actually, “Come here and experience what life living as if the kingdom of God has come on Earth as it is in heaven” is like, and many did. So many Quakers settled in the Delaware valley, in Pennsylvania because of that.

**Expanding to Other Colonies**

So it wasn’t as a refuge. Folks didn’t flock to the colonies to escape persecution. In fact, if they got to Massachusetts, they were hanged. It was not a capital offense to be a Quaker in England. It was in Massachusetts, and several Quakers were hanged for the crime of “driving while Quaker” in Massachusetts. They came to bear truth, to bear witness—and before long, almost half of the original colonies has Quaker majorities, or Quakers in government.

Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania and the Carolinas all had significant Quaker governments, leadership well into the early 1700s.

Then from that center of the Delaware Valley Quaker culture, Friends started spreading out as it got expensive there or crowded there, in the mid 1700s, Quakers went down the Shenendoah Valley into the Carolinas, went north, went west, hit the Appalachian mountains and went south, eventually over the Appalachian mountains and into Ohio, Indiana…

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Max describes the founding of Pennsylvania as a “holy experiment” where the kingdom of God could be felt experientially. Have you ever been to a place that felt like a holy experiment?

2. What do you perceive as the geographical center of modern Quakerism? Where have you encountered the most faithful Quakers?
Quakers and the Kingdom of God

TRANSCRIPT

**Kody Hersh:** One of the cool paradoxes of Quaker spirituality that is really important to me is this idea that Christ (in my language and understanding) is here and is coming, that the Kingdom of God—this transformation to a world of justice and peace—is here, and it’s coming.

**Quakers and the Kingdom of God**

**Mark Wutka:** So the Kingdom of God, or the Kingdom of Heaven—in fact, I’ve seen other people call it the kingdom of love, the covenant of love, sometimes getting away from the “kingdom” idea—is not talking about where you go after you die, it was the idea of God setting the world right. That God created the world good, things went bad, God would make everything good again. Jesus was proclaiming, “That starts now.” That’s what the messiah’s job was, to say, “Hey, the time has started. God’s putting the world back together.” The sermon on the mount was sort of the blueprint for how the Kingdom of God works.

**What is the Kingdom of God?**

**Micah Bales:** The word “kingdom” in the greek is not a place. It’s not a place where a castle is and there’s land around it. A kingdom is a domain or a realm or the place where a monarch rules. So, the Kingdom of God is the reality in which we live in the ways in which God is calling us to live, and we live in the peace, beauty, and justice that God created the world to reflect.

**Vanessa Julye:** Well, for me, it’s a community where everyone has value and that we are actually able to see that of God in each person, and to be able to live in community sharing the gifts that God has given us with each other.

**Walter Hjelt Sullivan:** The Kingdom of God is… it is already and it is constantly becoming. So, it’s not that there’s some nirvana in the future that we’re going to move into, it’s that we have the moment and the opportunity to remember, to bring back into our body—this body, the community body, the larger body which we call mother earth. So, Friends believe that that is constantly breaking again fresh and anew into the world.

**Su Penn:** The idea that something could exist that was entirely in good order and that encompassed us all and that was just and loving and of course peaceful, and the idea that somehow this could be brought into being—and even more radically, the idea that it already exists and we just can’t see it—I think, is a powerful one. Sometimes there’s this rational part of my head that says, “Well that’s just a metaphor, right?” and then there’s this mystical, very God-connected part of me that says, “This is the Kingdom of God. I am in the Kingdom of God right now” and I believe it, all the way through me down to my very bones.

**How Friends Manifest the Kingdom of God**

**Christopher Sammond:** Martin Luther King talked about the arch of the universe being long but
bending towards justice. Well, I think that’s his way of saying something similar to what I’m experiencing, which is that it is the ultimate reality. We can access it through worship and through mystical practice. It’s almost like it’s beneath the current reality. Another analogy would be tuning a radio dial to the right frequency. You don’t know that the music is right there until you tune to it, and there it is.

**Kody Hersh:** It’s important to recognize that the reality of what’s around us is often more than what it seems to be, and that there’s change that’s still possible and is still arriving—is still in the process of being birthed—and that we can participate in that. So I think when what I experience as the place that we arrive at in a gathered meeting for worship is a kind of lifting of the cloud cover that keeps us from seeing the ways that the kingdom of God is here.

**Mark Wutka:** Perhaps it’s still like the mustard seed that hasn’t really grown into the great plant that it eventually would, but I feel like the best I can do is to follow the Spirit and do what I’m being guided to. And that is a small way of helping to manifest the Kingdom, and that’s really what we’re called to do.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *What’s your idea of the Kingdom of God?*

2. *Do you find the words “kingdom” or “God” to be troublesome? Why or why not?*
Why I Still Say “Kingdom of God” Despite the Baggage

TRANSCRIPT

I want to claim “Kingdom of God” to say that there is something at the top of this world for me that is not just the world. There is a call to being a spiritual being in the world, and something, some force, some power, some great love is in charge.

Why I Still Use the Word “Kingdom” Despite the Baggage

So when I think about the Kingdom of God, one of the first things that pops up is the voices of many Friends who are saying, “Kingdom? Yeesh. Not so much into the patriarchy there, bro. Can we back a little bit off of the Kingdom and call it the commonwealth of God, or maybe the Kin-dom of God (drop the ‘g’)?” And I don’t do that. I say the Kingdom of God, and I say that because I think that by virtue of our baptism in the Spirit by which we become convinced to be Quakers or Christians of any stripe, when we say yes to God we are saying no to Caesar, and therefore we do have a King, it is a hierarchy, and God is at the top.

Colonial Baggage


But to give up on the lordship of the Kingdom of God means that I’m not sure there’s anyone in charge up there, and that’s fine if it’s not any one, but there’s nothing? No one? Then what is this power that we have? What is this power that we have in a covered Meeting? What is a gathered Meeting if something isn’t mediating us?

Pledging Allegiance to the Kingdom

It is to that thing that I claim allegiance. It is to that power that’s above all powers, that holy power that I name as God, that I name as king—Christ the King—that I say I’m pledging my allegiance towards. And so it is to the Kingdom of that God, the Kingdom of heaven and the Kingdom of God that I endeavor to work, so that the Kingdom on Earth may be realized as it is in heaven, that the lion can lay down with the lamb and we can have relationships that are less full of strife and less ordered on shark capitalism and the consumptive models of what makes a good person a good person—what makes someone proud and healthy and successful—and instead, we order our lives on loving and compassion with one another, the way that I think God would have us do.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you find the language “Kingdom of God” to be meaningful for you?
2. Do you find it to be problematic? Why or why not?
What Can Quakers Do to Combat Islamophobia

TRANSCRIPT

Naveed Moeed: There is a reason we are called the Society of Friends. Friends reach out. They take care. They are custodians. They bring love where they go. As Quakers, we are deeply called to react against hate emanating from within our society.

What Can Quakers Do to Combat Islamophobia?

Layla Razavi: In general, I am fairly conscious of my identity as somebody who is Middle Eastern, whose family is Muslim, and I’m very conscious of how and when I present that identity. So especially if I’m going through an airport or riding on a plane, I’m pretty aware of whether I have a book that has Arabic script on it.

I remember a flight attendant once asked me, she complimented my necklace and it had an Allah symbol on it and it had the prophets listed in Farsi, or in Arabic writing, and she asked me if it said my name, and I said no and she asked what it said. And I froze a little bit because I felt so uncomfortable, and I thought, “Is she going to call security on me? Am I allowed to answer honestly?” And I find myself always navigating those places with some trepidation.

What is Islamophobia?

Raed Jarrar: Islamophobia is a term that was coined a few years back to describe anti-Muslim sentiments. It’s not really just Islamophobia. It’s more anti-Islam sentiments and anti-Muslim hatred. So “Islamophobia” makes it feel like, you know, some people in the US try to avoid Muslims or Islam. It’s more pro-active, destructive forces that try to kill, and discriminate, and destroy Muslims whether they’re inside the U.S. or abroad.

So, unfortunately, these anti-Muslim sentiments have been on the rise since 9/11, and hate crimes are on the rise since 9/11. Some presidential candidate debates have added fuel to the fire of anti-Muslim sentiments in the U.S., and so we are living in this moment now where this is happening parallel to events in the Middle East that the U.S. is also involved in.

So keep in mind that the destruction of Iraq and Syria also comes from the same mentality of being anti-Muslim, and hating Muslims, and treating Muslims as second-class human beings.

Islamophobia as Anti-Immigrant

Layla Razavi: The United States is not a stranger to fear mongering. Unfortunately, it’s been a part of our contemporary history to fear immigrant groups and waves of immigrants who have entered the country. But we’ve also always had a history of people who are welcoming, right? So alongside this dominant narrative that’s always occupied our political spaces, alongside that, there have been faith groups and activists and community organizations that have received and welcomed immigrants with open arms.
Confronting Islamophobia

Naveed Moeed: When we see acts of racism and Islamophobia, we should be called to reach out and say, “Hey. That’s not right.” It should be within the very DNA of Quakers to fundamentally react against the loathsome rhetoric that comes out of the highly institutionalized racism that we still have in the United States and in Europe.

Raed Jarrar: Many people in our community, the AFSC community, or the Quaker community at large ascribe to views of our cities and the world at large where people are treated equally and respectfully. For those that ascribe to beliefs of treating everyone equally, we have to act on it. And within our safe spaces, we have to be very vocal, and we have to be very active in acting on these principles at a time that it really matters.

How Quakers Can Make a Difference

Layla Razavi: I think allies are incredibly important, and I think this really stretches across from movements that are trying to counter Islamophobia to broader movements against racism. All of these movements really benefit when there are allies that are engaged, and what I mean by engaged isn’t leading those movements per se; what I mean by “engaged” is people who are holding their peers accountable.

Read Jarrar: We are living at a political moment where it really matters to act. It really matters to speak out, and to reach out to American Muslims or refugees or immigrants and to engage in discussions with groups or individuals who are disseminating anti-Muslim or anti-Immigrant rhetoric.

Naveed Moeed: There are a plethora of ways that Quakers can help in all of the different Quaker communities across the United States. Wherever you are, there is probably a local Muslim community, and a Muslim community that may increasingly feel that it is isolated and fearful. Establishing links with local Muslim communities is something that I believe Quakers in particular are adept at doing, and should be encouraged to do.

We are not a huge movement. We are not large but we are powerful in our own ways, and our power and our strength comes from being able to cross cultural barriers and divides.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you know about the Muslim population in your area? How might you learn more about them and what can you do to reach out and support them in this challenging time?

2. Naveed Moeed says, “Friends reach out. They take care. They are custodians. They bring love where they go. As Quakers, we are deeply called to react against hate emanating from within our society.” Does this resonate with you? What does it mean for how your Quakerism manifests in the world?
Why I Am a Quaker and a Muslim

TRANSCRIPT

How would I define myself? I was born into a Muslim family, and I grew up in a Muslim tradition and I still keep to many of those Islamic traditions, but I am a Quaker and I’m a Quaker by conviction.

Why I Am a Quaker and a Muslim

There is a verse in the Qur'an that goes:

_Qu l kullun y ya’malu ‘alaa shaakilathee fa rabbukum a’lamu biman huwa ahdaa sabeelaa_

Which translates loosely as “Let everyone act according to their own disposition. It is only God who knows who is truly on the right path.”

And to me, that embraces both Islam and how Friends think about coming to the Light. As Friends, we know that there are multiple, legitimate ways to the Light, and personally I don’t see a conflict between that and what Islam teaches.

The Gathering of People

The ability for people whose individual beliefs may differ to be able to sit in silence and to bring a sense of “Gathered Meeting,” that relates to some very Islamic principles of the “Jamia,” the gathering of people, and the gathering of people for a spiritual purpose.

To me, being a Friend and being a Friend in worship is about listening not just to my still, small voice, but to discern within the silence and the messages, the still small voice of others.

Sacred Texts

Whether it’s the Bible or the Torah or the Qur'an, religious texts (and even some non-religious texts) are inspirational, and in my life I have drawn a lot of inspiration from the Qur'an. And, as Quakers believe in the messages that come from the divine, so I believe that that book also came as a message through Mohammed (peace be upon him) the messenger. Being able to open my heart to the Qur'an and the Bible was probably one of the biggest leaps of faith that I’ve had to make.

Practicing Islam in a Quakerly Manner

I came to Quakerism when I was 23, 24, and I proudly label myself as a “Muslim Quaker.” I choose to practice Islam in a Quakerly manner. I still subscribe to the tenets of Islam, the pillars of Islam. I still give to charity and that is no less Quakerly. I still establish a declaration of faith, and that is no less Quakerly. I still establish an observance to God on a regular basis, and that is no less Quakerly.

QuakerSpeak.com
In looking at the Islamic teachings that I was brought up with, and in looking at Quakerism, I found that—and I still find—that there is no difference in the fundamental principles of loving your fellow human being, of being able to walk in the Light with others and of seeking the good in others.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you know any Friends who identify with other faiths?

2. Are there other religious traditions that deepen your spiritual life?
How to Serve on a Quaker Clearness Committee

TRANSCRIPT

Chris Mohr: Very few people have an experience like Saul on the road to Damascus where we just get blown over by the Holy Spirit and, suddenly, everything’s changed. So we have to listen to nudges and leadings and little quiet steps. So my experience is of feeling small nudges that feel like they are from God and that I need to pay attention to, and if I stop and slow down and have others sit with me to reflect on those nudges, I can sense whether they’re really something pushing me in a direction I need to go, or is it just a momentary fancy?

How to Serve on a Quaker Clearness Committee

Greg Woods: Clearness committees are formed when an individual, a couple, a group comes to a Quaker body and says, “We are wrestling with this issue and we want to discern the way forward.”

Robin Mohr: It’s important to know how to help people do their discernment because it’s not something that we learn automatically in our society. It’s not always something that we learn at home. So it’s a skill that can be learned, but we have to practice.

Preparing for a Clearness Committee

Ashley Wilcox: The prep work for the committee is to hold the person in the light and be prepared for the questions that may come up, and read the writing in advance to be prepared for holding this person in the committee meeting.

Greg Woods: Before the meeting, I find a grounded place and I would pray for that person, or, to use the Quaker saying ‘hold them in the Light.’ And, for me, holding people in the light, I visually try to see them being surrounded by a halo of light.

Listening

Robin Mohr: The first thing I would say is just to let the person talk. And I find that often, we don’t have a space to be able to talk about the things that really matter to us, and so just holding a space where somebody actually just gets to tell you the whole story—and why it’s important to them—is a gift.
Margaret Webb: So when you serve on a clearness committee, the first piece of that is listening deeply to the person who is requesting a clearness committee. So the first piece is to listen deeply and not just to listen deeply to that individual and to their story, but also to listen deeply for the still, small voice—that of God in that person—and how the Spirit might be moving.

Aj Mendoza: We’re all listening to the same Source; the same God is speaking to all of us. So, if I’m saying that, like, there is a leading that is coming from God that is telling me to do something, I have no doubt at all that another Friend, would be able to, like, with enough listening, totally hear that.

Asking Questions

Ashley Wilcox: Asking each other queries is powerful because it stops us from giving advice. It’s an opportunity for us to ask open and honest questions of a person who has the wisdom within themself to find an answer. And so, instead of saying ‘oh, a similar thing happened to me,’ or ‘I know what you should do in this situation,’ we sit and listen to what the person is asking, and then we ask questions about things that they already know but haven’t discerned yet.

Aj Mendoza: Questions make the space for the Spirit to speak and to be listened to, rather than, like, kind of laying the options on the table and saying: “select, choose wisely; here’s which one I would choose.” It’s really—that’s not what Quaker discernment is supposed to ideally be, and, like, the questions open the door, I think, for just really exciting possibilities.

Monica Walters-Field: I always consider them as a gift. It’s the gift of another experience, and so you look at whatever you’re thinking about from that point of view. It might never have occurred to us, or to me, to look at it in that way, but hearing someone else ask a question allows us to broaden how we look, how we consider what it is we’re doing.

Margaret Webb: So you could say something like: “when you imagine yourself in five years, and you’ve taken that job that you’re discerning around, how does that person that you are in five years feel?” Or you could say something open-ended like: “if the Spirit closed that door, and you weren’t offered that job, how would you feel about that?” So those kinds of open-ended questions that help the individual imagine the various possibilities.

Letting Go
*Greg Woods:* Even thought I might have my own desires for them, I try to acknowledge I have them, but I do try to keep them from influencing them. I ask them open-ended questions to really find out more about them and what they are asking for clearness for. And then, worshiping with them, and praying with them for guidance.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *Have you ever had a clearness committee? What did the members of your committee do that was really helpful? What could have gone better?*

2. *Ashley Wilcox says that we ask each other questions because it helps us hold back from giving advice. What is your experience of getting advice from people? Do you find open-ended questions to be more helpful?*
Steve Woolford: Friends, or Quakers, believe that God is present in everyone, and they believe in the Christian value of loving the enemies. And in Quaker House, people are trying to live that out in a way that comes to terms to being in the middle of a warmaking society, and what does it mean to love our enemies?

Lenore Yarger: My name is Lenore Yarger, and I’m a counselor with Quaker House and the G.I. Rights Hotline.

Steve Woolford: I’m Steve Woolford and I’m also a counselor with Quaker House and the G.I. Rights Hotline.

Lenore Yarger: Quaker House is a nonprofit located in Fayetteville, North Carolina, home to Fort Bragg. We have many different programs, and one of them is to counsel people through the G.I. Rights hotline. We also have a domestic violence counseling service for survivors of military domestic violence. And we also speak out against drone warfare and torture and other aspects of war, publicly.

The G.I. Rights Hotline offers free, accurate, non-directive information about issues of conscience, discharge, medical, psychological and other regulations.

Steve Woolford: The G.I. Rights Hotline is a collection of groups that have done counseling for people in the military. Service members and their families can call our toll-free number and get free information about a wide range of issues.

Lenore Yarger: And a good number of people who call the hotline I think are actually questioning their role in the military and are actually seeking discharge to get out of the military, but there’s also people who have grievances and complaints and they need help working through the proper procedures to get help with a particular issue. We also deal with people who are AWOL: Absent Without leave, and are seeking to resolve their situations.

Steve Woolford: Part of the strength of the information we have is that a number of counselors have been handling cases for years, and we’re able to give people a pretty good
idea of what are likely outcomes because we've just seen so many cases. We know what the regulations say. A lot of times we talk to commands about situations and how they handle them. We’re getting a lot of information that allows us to give people a pretty clear idea of how things will be handled or what strategies will be most effective or what kinds of things are going to work best.

**Together, Quaker House’s two counselors currently handle an average of 3,450 calls each year.**

*Lenore Yarger:* When we came into this work as peace activists, we had been protesting war for years, we had committed civil disobedience at times, we’d been to jail at times. Our experience with people in the military was literally on the other side of the fence at protests, or we might go to a military base and there they were, and here we were. It was very limited. Quaker House gave us the opportunity to start to counsel people, and it was really an eye-opening experience for both of us to learn that our own military members are also victims of war in their own way. Because we were so moved by the stories, I think it really inspired us to try to get as much information into their hands as possible, to empower them to make their own decisions to take back control of their lives, because that’s not what you have in the military.

*In addition to providing resources and information, Quaker House staff also provide moral support to military members facing difficult situations.*

*Steve Woolford:* Yeah, a big part of our job is just listening to each person and hearing what the details of their case are, and looking for issues in their case that might make a difference and might be leads on some avenue for getting them the outcome they’re looking for. We get a lot of people calling us who have gotten so fed up with military life that they’ve already gone AWOL, which is absent without leave. That’s what they call it the Army and the Air Force. In the Navy and the Marines they call it UA, or unauthorized absence. So we get a lot of people who left, sometimes in a calculated way, sometimes they just got so fed up that they left without really thinking about what they’re doing, and they’re calling us trying to minimize the damage they’re in: how do I resolve this, ideally without going to jail and ideally without ruining the rest of my life?

*Lenore Yarger:* And another piece of what we’re doing when we talk to someone in the situations: they’re under a lot of stress, they feel the whole culture of the military is to make them feel that they are exceptional for feeling the way they are, that they are bad for feeling that they can’t do this, that they don’t belong there, that there is something wrong with them. So a big part of what we’re trying to do, just in our conversation with them or with
their family member is to reassure them that this a very normal reaction to a very stressful environment; that there's nothing wrong with you.

**How to Call the Hotline**

*Steve Woolford:* If you are someone in the military, or a family member of someone in the military, and you're looking for help with issues you're having, either you're trying to get out of the military, or you have grievances or problems with the way things are going, you can call one of our counselors, you can use our toll-free number: 877-447-4487, and speak with a counselor about what's going on. Our services are free, they're confidential, and we'll do what we can to try to help you look at different options you would have to look at different options to move forward with your situation.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. **As lifelong peace activists, Steve and Lenore were surprised to find themselves wanting to support members of the military, since “military members are also victims of war in their own way.”** When have you experienced an enemy turning into an ally?

2. **Steve Yarger says that Quaker House is “trying to live… in a way that comes to terms with being in the middle of a war-making society, and what does it mean to love our enemies?”** How do you balance these competing forces in your life?
Listening in Tongues

TRANSCRIPT

Robin Mohr: For Quakers, especially for Quakers in unprogrammed worship, I think it’s important, because we have so much freedom in who speaks, that the practice—the discipline of interpretation, of discernment for yourself; of what did that mean? what did they mean? what does that mean for me? What does this mean for this community?—is a really important spiritual practice.

Listening in Tongues: Being Bilingual as a Quaker Practice

My name is Robin Mohr. I’m the executive secretary of the Friends World Committee for Consultation Section of the Americas. The Friends World Committee is the association of Quaker Yearly Meetings around the world, across all the branches of Friends, and I work with the Section of the Americas, which runs from Alaska to Bolivia. I think that listening in tongues is our spiritual discipline of listening beyond the words for the message of the Holy Spirit in the words that fallible, ordinary human beings have to use to communicate, and it acknowledges that the words that I use to mean this message may be different than the words that you would have used to express the same message, and so our ability to listen for what was really meant is an important practice for people in any spiritual tradition. Listening for what people meant is an important practice.

Learning to Talk to People Who Are Not Like Us

I think that it’s important for people to learn to talk to the people we think are not like us. To be able to talk to people who are insiders and outsiders. To talk to Evangelical Christians, and Buddhists, to military families and pacifists, and to people who are older and younger than we are, to people who are of our same racial background and of different racial backgrounds, people who come from different parts of the country, and from different theological understandings. That all of those can be like speaking a different language.

The Metaphor of Learning Another Language

Learning to talk to people who we think are not like us has a lot in common with learning to speak a second language. It has a lot of the same pitfalls, and it has a lot of the same joys of being understood and understanding. The first time that you actually understand a conversation in your new language is an amazing joy. To be able to be able to speak
anti-racist language, to be able to speak Christian language, is a way of saying the same thing in new words.

The metaphor of learning another language can be really helpful to us in knowing that we’re going to make mistakes, that we have to practice, that we are beginners. I need to be listening really intently, and it can be exhausting to have to be listening that hard when you realize that you don’t actually understand what’s going on around you. It’s really a skill, but we will feel better, we will be happier in our lives, if we understand what people are trying to tell us and we are understood when we are trying to express ourselves.

Growing Our Meetings

I think that every Quaker meeting would benefit by growing, by being more accessible to the community around it, by welcoming people into our Quaker meetings for that deep experience with the Holy Spirit, that experience of worship with the Divine. And if we are able to speak with people in the language that they can understand, then they will feel more welcome.

Deeper Than Words

I think it’s an important part of being a Friend to be able to communicate, and to be able to communicate with people we think are not like us because the message is deeper and richer and more important than the words we could possibly use.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Robin gives the examples of talking to* “Evangelical Christians, and Buddhists, to military families and pacifists, and to people who are older and younger than we are, to people who are of our same racial background and of different racial backgrounds, people who come from different parts of the country, and from different theological understandings.” *When have you had to speak with and understand people whose differences made it feel like they were speaking another language?*

2. *Are you bilingual? What was the most difficult part of learning another language? What were the greatest joys and blessings?*
What Does a Quaker Pastor Do?

TRANSCRIPT

Margaret Webb: Quakers believe that each person has a ministry, has a call, has something that the Spirit is calling them to do. Because of that we believe that each of us has gifts and we each have a role in our meeting community. So we each minister to each other within a Quaker community. So I’m one of many ministers, which is why I’m called a “pastoral minister.”

What Does a Quaker Pastor Do?

I’m Margaret Webb. I’m the pastoral minister at New Garden Friends Meeting in Greensboro, North Carolina. I grew up in an unprogrammed meeting, and we loved one another and we cared for one another but I do think that it's useful to have one person who is paid (released) to do that work, to tend to those connections, and to also help alert the wider community to needs.

Providing Pastoral Care

Some pastors take deep joy in worship planning, and reading spiritual works and preparing their hearts and their minds for worship, and that's the center of their ministry. Some pastors find their center in religious education, in helping people learn about faith and explore faith. For me, the center of my ministry is really pastoral care. So I start there with my week and then I build outwards from there.

So a lot of what I do during the week is I visit people. I visit elderly people, who maybe can’t make it to meeting every Sunday, or who can’t come to meeting at all anymore. I visit people who are sick and I visit people who have been hospitalized, and I visit people who are in crisis. I provide a presence with those people.

So a lot of the work that I do as a pastoral minister is helping be with people who need somebody to be with them.

Providing Programming

I put together pieces for meeting for worship, so if we have music as part of our worship, I help with the selection of music and I prepare a message—which is usually quite short—that helps deepen our silence. I also prepare other pieces of programming as needed, so baby dedications or vow renewals, if a couple wants to renew their vows, I’ll prepare those pieces as well.

Supporting Committees

Business gets done in Quaker meetings by committee, and that has been my experience in unprogrammed, silent meetings and also in programmed meetings where there’s a pastor who helps with worship. Still, all of the work of the meeting is done by committees.

So my role as pastoral minister is to just support that work: to provide whatever kinds of tools
those committees might need, to do the work that they’re doing for the meeting.

*Making Connections*

So I can’t do all of the pastoral care of the meeting. That would be impossible. But we have committees that also help with that care. It’s my role to be intentional about people’s needs, and that also, people who have gifts of pastoral care—which, there are a number of people in this meeting who have those gifts—that they’re being connected to people who need the nurture.

So I’m the person who makes connections a lot of times. I’m also, in some ways, like a gardener. I provide the space of nurture when it’s needed and also empower other people to step into that gardener role. And I think some communities do best when they have someone who has been released to be their gardener. That is one of the ways that communities have found a way to thrive in the modern world.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *How does pastoral care get done in your meeting? Do you feel that your meeting could benefit from any of the roles that Margaret described?*

2. *Margaret says, “We each minister to each other within a Quaker community.” How do you minister to your Quaker community?*
How to Become a Conscientious Objector

TRANSCRIPT

Imagine if 3 years from now, there was a draft. And you got a draft notice to report for induction and you realized that you were a conscientious objector. What you would do is you would fill out a form requesting a deferment and you would be scheduled to meet with a local draft board to substantiate your position. One of the 3 definitions of being a conscientious objector is that it's sincere and deeply held. So if you had not done any kind of documentation and you went to that draft board, the first question they would say is, “Well, are you really a conscientious objector, or do you just want to get out of the draft? Because you've just turned this thing in 10 days ago.”

How to Become a Conscientious Objector

Conscientious objection, legally, fits into three terms: a person has to be personally against their own participation in any and all wars. It must be based on religious, moral or ethical beliefs and training. And the third is it must be sincere or deeply held. And that third one really equates to documentation.

A Spiritual Conviction Against War

One of the things that Quakers early on held as a testimony was the testimony of peace and honoring “that of God” in every person. When you’re killing someone in war, you’re not recognizing that there is that of God in that person. George Fox talked about taking away the occasions for all war, and I think what he was trying to do was stress the fact that every human being is a child of God, and therefore respected.

The Origin of Conscientious Objection

I think conscientious objection evolved not because of a government making a decision down, but you had Quakers—who were rather stubborn about their religious views—and they asserted that they would not go to war. And I think that force, early on during the colonial period, pushed legislators and state legislators to recognize the fact that this group is not going to go to war.

The Hidden Registration for Selective Service

Virtually every male living in the United States—even illegal immigrants—need to register for selective service 30 days before or after their 18th birthday. That process has become pretty much seamless and hidden in that, in about 45 states across the country, it’s now automatic when people sign up for a driver’s license. So you people, young men really aren’t even aware that they are signing up for selective service.

Oddly enough, right now for 18 year olds, there’s no place on their selective service form to
document a position for conscientious objection.

The Importance of Documentation

So if the draft board said to you, “Prove that you’re a conscientious objector. Show us that you’re sincere and that these are deeply held.” The best answer you could say is you could look them right in the eye and say, “Three years ago, when there was no draft and I didn’t have to do this, I signed up for selective service and I wrote a letter to my faith or my support community indicating that I wanted to be a C.O. I think that shows my sincerity.”

How to Support Learning About Conscientious Objection

To take a position as a conscientious objector, it’s basically a communal decision. It starts with the individual, but they need the support of the entire community. If you’re interested in documenting a position for conscientious objection when you’re 18, or if your meeting is interested in nurturing your young people so that they can make this decision and documenting it, you can go to the Quaker House website, that’s QuakerHouse.org (one word) and this is the curriculum that you’ll find.

It’s got everything that you could possibly want. So basically we put this curriculum together for people who may not have any experience about teaching, who may not know anything about this subject. Just about anything you could want, rather than getting it from 20 different sites on the web, it’s all within this curriculum, so please go to the Quaker House website and inculcate your meeting with the importance of doing this.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you consider yourself a conscientious objector? What would you do if there was a draft?

2. Do the young people in your community understand their options when it comes to claiming conscientious objector status? What support do they need?
Looking to Let God Out

TRANSCRIPT

Anthony Smith: I think what keeps me going back to meeting is that helps bring a sense of peace. I’ve done both indoor worship, and outdoor worship, and in both of them, it involves taking a point in the world, carving out a space, and creating peace. And looking for that of God within, both individually and as a corporate body. And I always leave meeting with such a sense of serenity. I like to call it serenity-inducing. And it’s hard to find that other places. You can, but it’s much easier to find it there.

Looking to Let God Out: One Quaker’s Story

My name is Anthony Christopher Smith. I currently live in Newark, New Jersey, I am a New Jersey native, and I am a member of New Brunswick Monthly Meeting, part of New York Yearly Meeting

Finding Friends

I was one of those probably rare few who actually went to college and found their faith. I always knew I had some faith that was very unformed, and attending and becoming a member of the Religious Society of Friends actually helped institutionalize that for me, because in my teens I would sometimes have these really, especially if I was in nature, have these really intense spiritual experiences. And I think as I was in college and started going to meeting and doing things in an organized fashion, I didn’t always feel them as strongly, but I felt them a bit more regularly. And it started to help the development of my spiritual understanding and my personal theology.

Tools of Quakerism

I’m trying to think now about some of what about Quakerism, what kind of tools does Quakerism bring that matter to me and that I find useful. I know that it certainly made me more comfortable in my identity as a liberal Christian. I think the idea that we are looking within, and I remember once I was visiting a meeting, and I remember; it’s one of the few times I really remember something I said in meeting; that it’s not about looking to bring God in, it’s about looking to let God out and searching for leadings of the Spirit seeing see where that takes you. Also understanding that God loves everyone, and that God is omnipresent. God is present within everyone, God loves everyone. And coming from that perspective, I think, is one of the most valuable things that Quakerism offers.
God loves us, God has already forgiven us of our shortcomings and our sins, and our failings, and that we must love one another as God has loved us.

**Coming from Love to Come to Peace**

I mean there are different forms of love: agape, eros, philia. And love for one and other, philia, us Philadelphia, of all things… it means that we don’t always agree. It means that I care about you as a person, that even if we have different perspectives, and Quakerism can lend itself to some fairly strong views on some things, and more moderate ones on others, but the point is, even if we have a disagreement, I still love you and so does God. As a matter of fact, God always loves you, therefore I must. So even if we disagree on war and peace, if we disagree on political issues, if we disagree on social issues, if we are coming from Love, we will be able to come to Peace. I think that’s one of the things that comes from the Quaker perspective. The work that we do, we do because we love, because we care. It may bring us into tension with people, but that’s not important. I mean, what’s important is that we must follow our faith. We must go where the Spirit leads us.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *Anthony Smith says that discovering the Religious Society of Friends was an opportunity to develop his personal theology and become more comfortable in his identity as a liberal Christian. Have you had a similar experience? Why or why not?*

2. “*God loves us, God has already forgiven us of our shortcomings and our sins, and our failings, and that we must love one another as God has loved us. ” What does this mean to you? Do you agree with it?*
How Many Quakers Are There in the World?

TRANSCRIPT

There are 400,000 Quakers in the world, about half of those live in the Africa section. So we’re a very small communion, and yet we’re across the world; you know there are Quakers in most countries you can find a group of Quakers, and I think that surprises most people when they first see the map.

How Many Quakers Are There in the World? (And Where Are They?)

I’m Gretchen Castle, I work for Friends World Committee for Consultation. I’m the general secretary. Friends World Committee for Consultation is an organization that helps bring Friends together around the world.

A Map of Friends Around the World

So, Friends World Committee publishes a map of where Friends live and worship. Understanding where Friends are in the world is really really useful, and this map gives us a visual, helps build Friends’ understanding of where Friends are.

How Many Quakers Are There in the World?

There are approximately 400,000 Friends around the world, and Friends World Committee for Consultation thinks about it and divides it into four sections of the world. The section of the Americas has about 140,000 Friends and that includes all of North America and Central and South America. Europe and Middle-East section has approximately 25,000 Friends, and then the Africa section has about 200,000 Friends; it’s the largest section. Then there’s the Asia/West Pacific section which has about 25,000 Friends from many countries. So, Friends are all over the world, literally.

Each section is unique and has all kinds of Friends in it, so our variety of ways of worship exists within each of those four sections.

Which Countries Have the Most Quakers?

It’s often surprising for people to notice on the map, and to learn, that the most Quakers, the country with the most Quakers, is Kenya. After that comes the United States, following that would be Burundi, Bolivia, and Guatemala, and then—rather surprising—is the UK
would come after that, and then Taiwan and Nepal. So, I think it’s often surprising to people
where the most Quakers are located.

**Do Quakers From All Over the World Ever Gather?**

Throughout all of Quakerism really, there’s always been intervisitation. There’s always
been Friends who have really made a difference when they were worshiping in other parts
of the world. And, since 1937, and before that, really, there have always been conferences,
world conferences, bringing people together, so that has had a big impact on our help, to
help us build understanding and to understand how we are in various parts of the world.

I felt in this last conference that that there was quite a lot of understanding about our
diversity and that that was just accepted. There was a lot of love and a lot of sense of: we
are just together, and isn’t this just remarkable? For me, this is the hope of the world. If we
can love our Quaker family, if we can love others in our family who look very different than
we do, who worship very differently than we do, then we can learn to bring love to the
world.

**Celebrating World Quaker Day**

World Quaker Day is an event that Friends World Committee created. It’s a way of
appreciating that as the sun comes up over New Zealand, Friends are worshiping there.
Then it goes across Australia; Friends are worshiping there. And all around the world, just
in that one Sunday, that one day, we’re all worshiping in our own places, our own locations.
World Quaker Day is always the first Sunday in October. And so, it’s a way of not only
appreciating that, but then sharing with each other what we do on that day. We have a
website where people can send to the world office. So I’m very moved by what people
share, what they do on World Quaker Day. And it’s a marvelous way to appreciate how
we’re all worshiping God on the same day.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Did you already know how many Quakers there are in the world? What are your
   thoughts, knowing that there are 400,000?

2. Were there any surprises in this video for you? What did you learn?
How Do Quaker Meetings Do Outreach and Welcome Newcomers?

TRANSCRIPT

Leslie Manning: It’s a practice among us. We treat hospitality as a sacred obligation. That doesn’t just include the food on the table, but it includes the welcome that’s in our hearts.

How Do Quaker Meetings Do Outreach and Welcome Newcomers?

Sue Rockwood: At Midcoast Meeting, I think we felt as a group that we had something very special and it was not something anyone was content to just practice with themselves in this small little group, and so they wanted to find a way to let their light shine.

Angela Hopkins: I believe that welcoming and hospitality and fellowship are the responsibility of everybody in our community. We may have a committee that prepares the food, but we’re all responsible for welcoming newcomers. It’s a committee of everybody.

Practicing Quaker Outreach

Beth Collea: Quaker outreach is almost a reflexive response to the love and the joy that we have as Friends, and sort of a deep gratitude that bubbles up and says, “I want to share this with people!”

Morgan Wilson: I feel like Framingham Friends Meeting has done a really good job of responding to a growing concern of outreach by taking on thinking about it in all the committees and the work of the community, and thinking about it not just as an objective to draw new people in, but thinking about ways that the community might need to change or be prepared for growth and new people coming in.

Outreach Strategies

Sue Rockwood: Some of the first things we did was to set up the infrastructure at the meeting to deal with the fact that we’re not listed in the yellow pages under “religious organization,” to open up a lobby room to create a rental brochure so that as people would come into the building, they could see its beautiful space, they could enjoy its literature… get to know us a little bit as what we are.

Beth Collea: Wellesley Meeting has done a variety of things that have helped open the doors to newcomers. One is having low-threshold social events. We’ve found that some Friends who had sort of drifted away—for one reason or another—used those sort of “low voltage” social occasions to come back.

Eric Palmieri: Well, one thing that the meeting does and has done for the past fifty some odd years is that we have an annual book fair… annual book sale. It’s not only an event in our community, but it’s an event for the entire Westport community. When you do something together in a faith community that services the wider community, I think it’s nearly impossible to
not feel not only close to the wider community, but to your faith community.

*How We Introduce Ourselves*

*Leslie Manning:* We believe that we have something precious to offer the world—hope and healing—and that we cannot keep it to ourselves. That we must bring it forward in our daily lives and practice, in our schools and in our communities, and into the wider world.

*Beth Collea:* The other thing that we found really helpful was to have a pamphlet or a flyer. When people coming into the door just knew: We will mention God. We will mention Jesus. If that's a problem, you may want to keep going with your spiritual search. It's a lot like dating in mid-life. You really just want to say, “This is who I am. I’m pretty clear about that.” You know, you really want to leave that desire of you can be all things to all newcomers. The more distinct you are, the better it will be for all concerned.

*Actively Welcoming Newcomers*

*Leslie Manning:* We’re rooted in a tradition both in Christianity and Judaism that says that you welcome the stranger, for you may, in welcoming the stranger, be in the presence of an angel unawares.

*Greg Williams:* Well, if you come in off the street there are people that take it upon themselves to go greet newcomers. I think more of us need to do that on a more regular basis, but there is a group of people who will relate to people.

*Eric Palmieri:* As a new person coming in just recently, a couple of years ago, not really knowing what to expect, I was welcomed so warmly and with such an ease that I immediately felt like I was home. Like I was at home.

*Jeremiah Dickinson:* It is really important to watch for the newcomers but not have a preconceived notion of “I’m going to do this. This is what I do with newcomers.” but really respond.

*Greg Williams:* Be friendly. Be welcoming, but don’t be overpowering. And don’t walk in and say, “Oh! Would you like to serve on a committee?” If I walk through the door, I don’t want to serve on a committee. I want to know what you’re about. Maybe offer me something to read to give me a little history of Quakers, or ask, “Do you know anything about Quakers? Have you read anything?”

*Jeremiah Dickinson:* One helpful question to ask is, “What brings you here?” You know, it's not like oh, well... if they say, “I came on the bus,” you know that they’re wanting something that’s a little less intense. But if they say, “You know what I’ve had this crisis in my life...” You know how to respond to that, and offer help or say, “What’s going on?”

*Beth Collea:* After the joyous entry of a new family into a meeting, we need to be ready to help them get traction on their own Quaker journeys. So to help people really possess it for
themselves. I think the gold standard is: can we help them have their own experience of the Light. Then they own it. I think George Fox was the one who said, “Bring people to their guide, and then leave them there.”

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *How does your meeting do outreach and welcoming newcomers?*

2. *What attracts you/attracted you to Friends? How do you like to be greeted when you are venturing into a new religious space?*
How I Went from Being an Anarchist to Quaker

TRANSCRIPT

I'm Ben Pink Dandelion. I'm a Quaker writer and teacher.

Well, I first went to college to study hotel management, but I was also very involved with a series of left-wing groups and ended up dropping out of college and going to live at an anarchist peace camp. Now, anarchism is an ideology which is very much in favor of individual power, that nobody should have power over anybody else. And we were a group of great individualists, in a sense, living at this peace camp. We had different colored hair, different hair styles. Eventually we would all change our names to something rather ridiculous, like "Pink Dandelion" as a protest of the way that the father’s name is always passed down.

So I like to be called Ben but my legal name is Pink Dandelion and this was a deliberate ploy to come up with something that was, again, pushing against other people defining who you will be.

Revolutionary Hope

This was in the early ’80s and it was a year of great revolutionary hope in Britain. We had a miner’s strike on. We thought we had Margaret Thatcher on the back foot. Life was about protest.

But after about eight or ten arrests, you know, and really not feeling like we were moving forward at all, I began to think that there probably wouldn’t be a revolution in England. And so at that point, you give up a revolutionary strategy. The anarchist strategy had been to hope that everyone would withdraw their labor from the labor market and the system would collapse. So I looked for groups that were working from within the system.

Similarities Between Quakers and Anarchists

I had known the Quakers because I had been to a Quaker school, and I found them again, as it were. And I saw there a group that was committed to peace, a group that didn’t take votes (just as was true of the anarchists) and who didn’t have any fixed leadership, just like the anarchists. And I thought, “Here’s a group that looks just a little bit like the anarchists but working within the system.” So I originally came along to Quakerism in terms of it being a peace group.

Understanding the Spiritual Dimension of Quakerism

And it was only later, when I had a powerful spiritual experience on a Greyhound bus, that I really understood Quakerism, that I could begin to see the spiritual dimension, that meeting for worship made sense for me, that meeting for business made absolute sense. So it was a different kind of process from the anarchist consensus. We were being “talked through” in Quaker meeting in a way that just wasn’t true in the anarchist campfire meetings.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Ben Pink Dandelion* says that he came to Quakerism because it was a social change group working “from within the system” that shares some values with anarchism, including non-hierarchy and peace. What attracts you to the Quaker approach?

2. *Ben* says that once he started having spiritual experiences, meeting for worship made more sense to him, and he realized that what Quakers don’t share in common with anarchists is that we’re being “spoken through.” What do you suppose he means by this? Do you agree with it?
TRANSCRIPT

*Peterson Toscano:* Early on in my time with Quakers I learned about this thing called a “clearness committee.” Basically the way it was described to me is that you’ve got something that you need to figure out, you have a problem you need to solve, or a question you need to answer. You don’t necessarily need advice. You probably know what you need to do, but you need to clear through all the things that are interrupting your ability to access what, in your heart of hearts, you know you need to do. So you can then have a clearness committee.

*How to Have a Quaker Clearness Committee*

*Leslie Manning:* I have a personal prayer: I am the clay. Mold me. I am the vessel. Fill me. I am the instrument. Use me. But in trying to decide how best to be used, I need the prayer and support and listening of others.

*What is a Clearness Committee?*

*Roger Vincent Jasaitis:* A clearness committee is a small group of Friends that gather and basically ask you tough questions about what your leading is, what your concern is, what’s happening inside you. What do you feel?

*Pat Moyer:* Well people regularly have what’s called a clearness committee for marriage. We have clearness committees about whether people are actually called to do a ministry that they’re thinking about. We have clearness for membership. Are you ready to join the Religious Society of Friends?

*Anthony Smith:* A clearness committee, I think, in Quaker terms, very much involves humility. You are submitting yourself, generally voluntarily, to an entity that is part of your Meeting, your congregation.

*Cherice Bock:* And so a lot of people will convene a clearness committee if they’re getting married, if they’re choosing what college to go to, or choosing which direction to go in their career, or that sort of thing.

*Margaret Webb:* So that’s where we get the name “clearness committee.” It’s about clearness. Becoming clear about a decision.

*Who to Have on Your Committee*

*Gil George:* When we call this group together, we’re looking for very specific kinds of people. We’re looking for people who are good at listening, and who don’t have a tendency to give advice.

*Cherice Bock:* These should be people that are important in your life and in the life of your...
community, but not so close to you that they’re going to be influenced by your decision one way or another.

*Roger Vincent Jacaitis:* They’re not there to provide answers. They are there to try and help you see clearly what the situation is, what’s happening, and what you should do about it.

*Monica Walters-Field:* It’s a gift of your spiritual community, saying, “you don’t have to struggle alone. Here are your companions that can work with you and go on this part of your journey with you,” which is, to me, phenomenal in this day and age. That we could be so blessed that our community says, “You don’t have to do this alone. We’ll help.”

**Preparation for a Clearness Committee**

*Ashley Wilcox:* The prep work for a clearness committee is that the clerk will find a place and time and put together the committee, and then the person who is the focus person of the committee will write a page or two in advance.

*Gil George:* And so you start off by actually describing the situation. Like, really sitting down, writing it out so that everybody has access to it and you can say, “Ok, this is what’s going on, and this is why it’s confusing to me. These are what I perceive my options to be in this situation. What am I missing?”

**What Happens in a Clearness Committee**

*Cherice Bock:* The steps involved in the actual clearness committee are to come together and for the person who is asking for the clearness committee to state what it is that they want clarity on. So they state their problem or decision point.

*Gil George:* Even though it’s been passed out beforehand, I say in my own words, “This is the situation as I understand it.”

*Chris Mohr:* Then the committee should ask clarifying questions that are really just about facts. Like, “Did you mean you’re moving to Georgia in the U.S. or Georgia in Asia?” That kind of thing.

*Gil George:* After this time of questioning, we sit and we wait. I’ve been in clearness committees where sitting and waiting lasted for 20 minutes, and I’ve been in clearness committees where sitting and waiting lasted for 3 hours.

*Cherice Bock:* So usually people will just listen and hold the space together, and ask the Spirit to bring to them clarity.

*Chris Mohr:* The committee starts listening together and asking deeper spiritual questions. Do you feel that God is calling you to do this? How do you see your life evolving if you follow this path? How do you see your life evolving if you turn away from this opportunity?

*Margaret Webb:* So the questions that a clearness committee asks are all going to be questions

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that are open ended and that lead to greater self-reflection, and to deeper prayer and to a more imaginative engagement with the problem or question.

Chris Mohr: At that point, the committee’s role is to step back and listen and let the focus person for the clearness process really respond to those questions at a deep mind, heart, and spirit level.

Cherice Bock: So out of that time, a lot of times people will share things that they noticed. Maybe they’ll share, “I noticed your eyes really light up when you talked about this idea,” or “I noticed a change in your body posture when you talked about this decision.”

Gil George: But my experience in this is when you’ve got this group of people gathered to listen around this issue, each person is going to hear a little piece of God’s voice. Of a way forward.

Cherice Bock: A lot of times the person themselves will start feeling that clarity in themselves and will be able to name it to some degree, and will be able to say, “Yes, when you shared that, I really felt like that rang true,” or “That felt right in my body or my spirit.”

Results from a Clearness Committee

Gil George: I’ve come into a clearness committee with a preconceived notion of what’s going to happen, and it gets blown out of the water every single time. It’s kind of hilarious that way.

Pat Moyer: I’ve been on clearness committees where the group found that people weren’t clear to get married, for instance, or that membership might need to take a little more time, or that there might need to be 2 or 3 more meetings spaced out over a number of months before we get at the clearness part of things.

A.J. Mendoza: I think that’s helpful in a couple of ways. It’s helpful in the “yes,” like: “Ah yes, so this was a leading. Okay, self-doubt, take that! There’s a committee of other Friends who have listened and heard!” It’s also, like, I can rejoice in the “no”. When a clearness committee ends in a “Wait.” or, “That wasn’t what I thought it was,” then that’s coming from God, and I can feel so much more comfortable in that “No” or in that “Wait” than just like, “I really said no, or wait, but it was my own self-doubt.” That’s gone. That’s out of the picture at the end of a clearness committee.

Cherice Bock: Sometimes you don’t come to clarity, so that’s kind of a bummer when that happens. But it definitely is not uncommon, so if that happens to you, don’t worry. You’re not a failure at Quakerism. You can try again or you can allow the wisdom that did emerge out of that community to inform your decision.

Gil George: In this space of faithful waiting and listening, and frankly listening with love for the person who has the question, means that when we bring that love together in the different ways each individual holds that, even if no clarity comes from it, there is a sense of being held in love
by our community that can make the lack of clarity not as scary as it used to be.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *Have you ever had a clearness committee? What for? How did it go?*

2. *Gil George emphasizes the role of members of a clearness committee to listen and not give advice. Why does this feel important?*
The Top 10 Reasons I Am a Quaker

TRANSCRIPT

I came to Quakers, I came to Friends growing up in a lot of Evangelical Christian denominations and when I showed up at George Fox then College, now University, I began to be exposed to Quakers, and there was a lot of life there that I hadn’t experienced before in other Christian traditions. We all come from our own perspective, so I came from an Evangelical Christian perspective and was introduced to Quakerism and loved it, so my top ten list reflects the things that I loved coming from that environment.

The Top Ten Reasons I Am a Quaker

I’m Gregg Koskela, I’m a Quaker here in Newburg Oregon, and these are my top ten reasons for why I am a Quaker:

Number 10: I’m put off by hierarchy and I’m energized by community. I think what that means is that I really want to be a part of a group of Christ-followers who are taking responsibility themselves to listen to God and to obey God. I want to be part of a community that challenges each other, that engages with each other. I want to be a part of a group because that’s how we do life better. I think that’s the Quaker vision of community.

Number 9: I believe nobody has it all and I believe nobody is a lost cause. What Quakerism has really brought out of me is this recognition there’s nobody who has their stuff all together. It reminds me of my own struggles, my own weaknesses, my own sinfulness. But it always holds on as well that none of that overwhelms us, none of us is a lost cause. God can work in any of us, even pastors.

Number 8: I believe God can and does show up in every human experience, and worshiping with Quakers reminds me that in this moment I can look and expect for God to show up. And not only in this moment, but in the moment I’m gonna have washing my dishes or driving in my car or going about my regular life. I can pay attention to God present. And that’s one of the big reasons I’m drawn to Quakers.

Number 7: Most influential people in my life are Quakers. When I think about the people who’ve affected me, who have changed me for the better, a huge percentage of them are people who are in the Quaker tradition, and that’s one of the reasons it draws me in.
Number 6: Silence speaks to me. I used to be one of those people who thought prayer was about getting your words right before God, and Quakers have helped me understand to listen for that Still Small Voice of God. And I don’t think silence is the only way to hear God, but I cannot imagine or fathom hearing from God without taking regular time to be in silence.

Number 5: I believe every person on the planet can hear God’s voice and can be a part of God’s plan. And this means that I look to work for justice and equality in every human relationship because there are no fundamental differences between us as people, and it means that I am challenged to not have nationalistic blinders on when I look at the world. It means that there is something inside of me that screams against capital punishment or war because all people have value; all people can play a part.

Number 4: I don’t want to be called ‘reverend,’ and as a pastor, I don’t want to be separated from the people with whom I live life, who I live community with. I think that only God should be revered, and I love that that testimony is part of Quakers.

Number 3: I want to be challenged to a life of simplicity and integrity. I want to be challenged to a single-minded focus on obedience to God. And I want to be removed, released, from the endless distractions of stuff. I want my focus to be on Christ.

Number 2: I believe the passionate power of God unleashes faithful, joyful, vibrant followers of Christ. I really want to be a part of being called to radical obedience. Out-of-the-box risk taking, ’cause that’s not part of my personality. I want to be challenged to live out vibrant life with God in ways that I haven’t otherwise done, and I’ve found that worshipping with Quakers helps me do that.

And the number one reason that I choose to be a Quaker is that I want to join Christ in transforming this world, and as Quakers, we believe God is alive and vibrant in every part of this world. Transforming people, working to reconcile creation, restore creation. God is at work breaking systems of injustice. I want God to enliven me. That’s one of the reasons, the best reason, I think, why I choose to name Quakers as my own.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Gregg Koskela comes at his list from an Evangelical Quaker perspective. Were there any things that surprised you about his list? What resonated with you?

2. What would be on your own top 10 list?
How to Deepen Quaker Meeting for Worship

TRANSCRIPT

Debbie Humphries: Sometimes our silence is silence, and sometimes it’s “gathered.” And when it’s gathered, sometimes there’s messages, and sometimes there are not messages, but there’s a different quality in the room, that is alive.

How to Deepen Quaker Meeting for Worship

Brian Drayton: When our meeting has tried to, has grappled with, the question of how to deepen its worship when we’re in a dry spell, a thing that has worked more than once is to take a deep breath and to ask each other—set aside some time and ask each other—what we mean by deep worship. What are we missing? What are we longing for? What do we mean by worship? And any Friend will tell you that if you get into that conversation, you’ll hear really wonderful stuff and really surprising stuff.

What is Deep Worship?

Roger Vincent Jasaitis: Deep worship in the Quaker meeting is about possibility. It’s the possibility of the Divine breaking in. And in order for that to happen, there’s a certain level of openness that has to be there.

Abby Matchette: When I feel I’m in deep worship, I feel like my feet are grounded, as if in, like, the sand; I’m on the ocean shore, and the sand has really sucked my feet in but the waves are continuing to crash at my waist or chest and that crashing—that uncertainty—my feet are just grounded.

Brian Drayton: There’s a sense of freedom, and openness, and complete safety. It starts, I think, with a feeling of my moving out of a sense of my own quietedness to a real awareness of the other people in the room.

Honor Woodrow: One of the things that I value so much about Quakerism in particular is the way in which I think that we are all on this journey together and that we can hear God more clearly when we’re in worship together. So I think I come for communion with the other people of the meeting and looking for guidance and wisdom in how to most fully do the work of God the rest of my week.

Greg Williams: And maybe you’re not thinking about anything in particular, but you just have this peace, this calm, this sense that God is with me, Spirit is with me, Christ is with me—however one wants to name the Divine. And you’re quite comfortable just sitting there. And there are some days they start shaking hands and you’re like, “Oh, that was quick.”

Holding Care of Meeting

Roger Vincent Jasaitis: In Putney Friends Meeting, we have a custom of having somebody host
the meeting, which is basically closing the meeting, but also being a worshipping presence
during the meeting, even before the meeting begins. Many times, Friends will come and sit and
ground themselves, and act as an example for Friends walking in that now is the time to settle.

*Greg Williams:* So if you have care of meeting you’re sort of holding the gathered meeting as
your ministry. I’m holding everybody in prayer. I’m focused on the community.

**Cultivating Vocal Ministry**

*Callid Keefe-Perry:* There are times in Fresh Pond where there’s vocal ministry that kind of, like,
swoops out of the corner, and I wasn’t ready for it, and it makes me go “uh-oh.” And then there’s
the response to say, “Oh, I’ve got some work to do.” But I think that’s part of what the power is in
that meeting. It’s not just a quiet gathering. It’s the fact that we expect, and then experience, that
sometimes the words we’re given are bigger than us.

*Pat Moyer:* I think the key to the deepening worship part is letting the messages sink into the
silence and letting the whole meeting begin to digest it. It allows the group of people to begin to
sink into the spiritual realm and absorb whatever has been said in their own way. We’re not
really listening—we’re listening to each other, but we’re listening to God through each other.

*Honor Woodrow:* I think it’s really important to talk about the vocal ministry that happens in
meeting for worship. I think particularly when people who are giving vocal ministry are able to
talk to one another about it and to talk about the experience of “What was that like? How did you
know that you were supposed to speak? How did you know when to stop speaking? How did you
know when was the right time to speak? Did you feel that you were faithful in your
speaking?” Because I think that helps us to understand for ourselves what vocal ministry feels
like, and what it looks like, and how to develop that as a skill.

**Deepening Your Own Spiritual Practice**

*Debbie Humphries:* When I think about a depth of worship, it starts with every individual. And if
you are struggling with it and hungering for something deeper, the first place to start is with your
own spiritual practice. My own experience is that we are hungry and we’re all waiting and
jumping in—diving in. There’s a wealth and a richness there.

*Abby Matchette:* I think there’s just, like, an acknowledgement in knowing that my personal
spiritual practice greatly influences and deepens my worship in meeting, and that if I’m able to
have those times individually with God, within community, and when I’m one-on-one with
someone, that those three aspects really create a deepening worship.

**Other Ways of Deepening Worship**

*Debbie Humphries:* Some of the things we’ve done include having a period of “joys and
concerns” so there is a definite space for people who feel a need to speak but whose messages
may not rise to the level of ministry.
Callid Keefe-Perry: If you want to talk about deepening meeting for worship you have to ask: “Is the Gospel present?” Well, you don’t have to use that language, but: “Is there good news, and is there power here?” And I want to say, if you want to really talk about deepening worship, blow the lid off of what it looks like and seek after the power, do whatever you need to do to get after that power. That’s what’ll deepen it. And it’ll look different in Poughkeepsie, it’ll look different in urban Detroit, it'll look different in a worship group somewhere tucked up in Alaska, but that’s what you want to do. If you want to deepen worship, go after the Power of God, and keep playing with stuff until you feel like you touch it. And then do that more.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Debbie Humphries opens the video by saying, “Sometimes our silence is silence, and sometimes it’s ‘gathered.’” Is this your experience? What does a deep meeting for worship feel like to you?

2. What have you noticed makes for a deep worship experience for your meeting? What are the contributing factors?
Behind the Scenes at QuakerSpeak

TRANSCRIPT

I want people to be drawn to a Quaker meeting because they're drawn to the truth. So that's what we try and demonstrate with QuakerSpeak videos, they're not all about how a Quaker meeting is perfect for everybody and you should come into worship on Sunday morning because it's just the greatest.

One of the first videos that we published about meeting for worship was how challenging it is to sit in meeting for worship on Sunday morning, and how you face your demons. It's like this isn't for everybody, this isn't going to be an easy journey. But it's going to be real, and it's going to pull down some of the curtains that are keeping us from being real with each other.

Behind the Scenes of QuakerSpeak

My name is Jon Watts. I direct the QuakerSpeak project here at Friends Journal in Philadelphia. QuakerSpeak is a weekly video project. We release videos every Thursday.

What was the origin of the project?

Before I started QuakerSpeak, I was watching a lot of different YouTubers and seeing what they were doing with their creativity. A lot of YouTubers just speak directly into the camera, and they either say their thoughts or they're sort of doing a stand-up comedy routine. And watching YouTubers do their thing and having it be so entertaining and so easy to connect to and so concise and succinct, I really said to myself, "Why aren't there Quakers in the world doing this? There should be a YouTube channel, where Quakers basically vlog their ideas about Quakerism and their spiritual journeys." And then I realized that Quakers are too humble to do that. Most Quakers are not going to flip open their laptop, and think that the world really wants to hear what they think about spirituality. So it takes someone like me calling them up and saying, "I really want to hear what you have to say, and I know that my audience really wants to hear what you have to say." And so in some ways, QuakerSpeak is the Quaker vlog that never happened.

Where did the title “QuakerSpeak” come from?

The term Quaker speak is a word that Quakers often use to say insider language or jargon, something that only Quakers would understand. We kind of wanted to play with that term a little bit, by calling this project QuakerSpeak. Often, our videos are discovered by people who have never heard of Quakerism before. So in our version of Quaker speak, we try and avoid jargon. We try and avoid insider language that's going to lose a newcomer. But we still do want to go deep with it, so we're kind of trying to redefine this term “QuakerSpeak.” How do Quakers speak? We speak authentically, we speak from a grounded place, we listen deeply and we speak from our heart.

Is QuakerSpeak an outreach project?

QuakerSpeak.com
When Quakers took so strongly to the printing press in the seventeenth century, it wasn't to build a religion. They weren't trying to fill up their churches or to keep their churches open. They were publishers of truth. They were trying to talk about what's real. They were trying to talk to people's real spiritual conditions. And they were trying to tear down everything around them in the world, whether it was theology or government, or just conceptually things that were keeping us from telling the truth to each other and from being authentically connected with God.

So we can talk about Quaker outreach. We can talk about getting more people into our meetings. But Quakerism is more than that: it's more than keeping our meeting houses going, it's more than meeting once a week on Sunday. It's about being publishers of truth. And my hope is that QuakerSpeak—in whatever corner of the Internet it lives in—is at least real.

**Is conducting interviews a spiritual practice for you?**

I kind of think of QuakerSpeak interviews as an opportunity for ministry, and Quakers have always believed in supporting people in their ministry. When someone is trying to talk from the heart or trying to be a vessel for the Spirit, they need somebody praying for them. And so I take on that role when I'm interviewing someone, of sort of being their elder in that moment. I'm trying to ground the space, I'm trying to empty myself, I'm trying to really pray for them, and I want this person to give the best possible answer that they can. I don't know what that's going to be, I don't know what that looks like or sounds like. I can't guess at the content of that, but I want it to be grounded in the Spirit. I want them to feel really good about the answer that they gave.

**How do you cut down lengthy interviews to just be 4 minutes long?**

The way that I edit the QuakerSpeak interviews is kind of interesting, because I don't always agree with the things that my interviewee said during the interview.

Because of the broad diversity of Quakerism, just in North America alone, you can't make any real generalizations about Quakers that all Quakers are going to agree with. But you can start a conversation. And so for my editing process, I pick the moments that seemed most faithful, most passionate, most clear-headed, concise and bold.

**How do you balance deadlines with faithfulness?**

We release a video on QuakerSpeak every Thursday. What's really fun about that, is that I'm often unclear about what it is that we should publish or if it's edited well, or if it's the right thing. But the joy of working for Quakers, is that I get to sit back and pray with that. That's sort of part of the job here, is saying "What am I supposed to do here?" But mostly what I find is that things miraculously come together. I think that I have the wrong edit, or the person isn't quite saying it in the right way. But I show it to the rest of the staff here at Friends Journal, and we take this one piece and move it over here and we cut this other piece out, and we change the intro. And bam, its ministry. Whereas before, it was just a jumble of thoughts. And that's been sort of the continuing magic of this job is that when it does go out, I almost always feel like this was faithful,
this was well put together.

**How can viewers support the project?**

The people who share QuakerSpeak videos on Facebook and who forward them to their friends, are really the reason that we're getting close to a million views on the channel. And we really appreciate everyone who supports us in that way, and everyone who donates to the projects. We wouldn't be where we are without our viewers and our donors, so thank you.
A Quaker Vision for Political Activism

TRANSCRIPT

*Marge Abbott:* Friends have always had this sense that the Kingdom of God can be realized here on Earth, and so for early Friends, sometimes that vision was taken from Isaiah with the image of the lion and the lamb living side by side without doing damage to the other, this sense that we can all share this Earth together if we treat each other with respect.

*A Quaker Vision for Political Activism*

*Noah Merrill:* The systems that we create as people, the systems of government and systems of power and the way that we distribute resources are all inhabited by people, and at its most powerful, this prophetic work is about relationships.

*Marge Abbott:* Friends always been very active in addressing our government and its rule. They had started out in the earliest days having to try and change laws that were affecting them directly. As time went by a century later they were among the most active lobbyists to end slavery, active in women's suffrage, in temperance movements... many, many places where they were lobbying over the centuries.

*Waiting in the Broken Prison*

*Noah:* There's a story in the Book of Acts that I really love where these two traveling ministers, Paul and Silas, are in this jail...

*Marge:* Paul in his travels had been thrown in jail and in the middle the night there was an earthquake or something that broke open his jail cell...

*Noah:* ...and everybody's chains come off. So they're sitting in this broken prison...

*Marge:* ...and he could have easily walked away, and never been seen again, and never have to deal with the consequences...

*Noah:* ...and the jailer comes in and he starts to kill himself, because he's afraid to get executed because his prisoners have escaped, and Paul and Silas call out and say, “Don't harm yourself. We are all still here.”

*Marge:* He stayed and faced his jailers and said, “You guys are doing it wrong. You can't be imprisoning me. You're taking away my rights as a Roman citizen.”

*Noah:* So that image is really important in terms of understanding what it means for Quakers to be engaged in prophetic work, that we can touch that experience of everybody's chains coming off and then we stand and we wait in the broken prison and we bring that message to others, and invite others to live in that reality as well.
Marge: And Friends were known for doing things like singing in jail. They were there with joy, knowing that they were being obedient to God. They even convinced some of their jailers to become Quakers, which is something I've always loved.

The Power at Work in Every Heart

Noah Merrill: To live in that life and power—as Quakers have said—that takes away the occasion for war. It's not that we're setting out to destroy war. It's that we're turning our eyes and turning our hearts and the directions of our lives into the channel of love, and knowing it's that power that arises, the power that holds the planets in place, that we're responding to.

So we're a small group. We're politically insignificant in so many ways, but it's not our power that we're bringing to these conversations. We're being as faithful as we can be to the truth that's being revealed to us, and we're trusting that if we follow that through, that that will speak in others as well, you know, that that same power that we're encountering is also at work in every heart.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Marge Abbott says that Friends have always had a sense that the Kingdom of God can be realized here on Earth. Do you share that vision? What does it look like personally for you to work towards that?

2. Noah Merrill says that Quakers tap into a prophetic power when standing up and engaging with authority—even when they don't need to. What do you think he means? Have you experienced what he is talking about?
How Do Quaker Meetings Support Ministry?

TRANSCRIPT

Viv Woodland: The expression “It takes a village to raise a child” can be applied to many endeavors. Rarely does one person actually go out by his or herself and change the world. Positive changes happen because communities work together to do good.

**How Quaker Meetings Support Ministry**

Benigno Sanchez-Eppler: Quakerism has ambitions about everyone being a minister. Another way of saying that, that I like a lot, is that there’s no laity here.

Callid Keefe-Perry: We’re all called to ministry. That’s true. It’s kind of the full embodiment of the priesthood of all believers. And, at times, we think God calls some of us, more than others, to greater service.

**What is Quaker Ministry?**

Callid Keefe-Perry: It’s a movement of love. It’s a realization that we couldn’t all lift up and go and live lives either in traveling ministry or in site-based ministry… whatever it is. It wouldn’t necessarily be viable, we might not able to pay rent or do things like this. So yes, base-level, all called to ministry. And at some times, some are called to a greater ministry for a season.

Ralph Greene: And within the context of the old Quaker concept of what ministry was all about, the old idea was that a recorded minister had the responsibility to speak to the wider world. So not just be confined to the meeting, but speak truth to power.

Viv Woodland: We have these beautiful examples of Friends who have traveled outside of this community in order to share their gifts with others, and yet have been grounded in this community while doing so.

**Why Meetings Support Ministers**

Doug Gwyn: As Tom Gates says in his Pendle Hill pamphlet on membership, you know, it’s the responsibility of the meeting to bring people to an expectation that they will have leadings. It enriches the life of the meeting, obviously, to have a good array of voices speaking the truth as it has come through them.

Viv Woodland: The experience of Friends for hundreds of years has been that a system of support from one’s religious community is incredibly useful as a check and balance on doing God’s work.

Jan Hoffman: For me in particular, I have had a hard time discerning voices in me. What is the message? What is not the message?
**Ralph Greene:** I’ve always felt a sense of affirmation by the fact that I was recorded. And I’ve worked with most of the pastoral meetings in New England—mostly in Maine—and there’s been an appreciation of that. It’s an access into the wider community.

**Benigno Sanchez-Eppler:** So in other denominations, you have a seminary, you have a particular course of preparation, you have missionary experience. And we have less of that, but most of all we have the possibility of supporting individuals to break out in freedom in a particular direction for their gifts, for their calling.

**How to Support Quaker Ministers**

**Jan Hoffman:** My oversight committee has supported me—and this is actually within the last three years, that I’ve had some heavy-duty struggles with the adversary. A scripture came to me, probably two years ago when I was in one of these places, and it’s “cast all your anxieties on God because he cares for you. Your adversary, like a roaring lion, is prowling around looking for someone to devour. Resist, steadfast in faith.” And my oversight committee will repeat that to me. Resist. Steadfast in faith. And you are steadfast.

**Viv Woodland:** The meeting’s main resource for supporting a specific ministry is human resources. Establishing a support community of individuals who meet regularly with the Friend who has a leading.

**Benigno Sanchez-Eppler:** And so that comes with a process that is also rooted in the yearly meeting structures, and therefore they have given the monthly meeting an opportunity to say, “Oh! How do we do that?”

**Kathleen Wooten:** So, Fresh Pond Meeting often has discerned travel minutes for various members who have had a leading to travel among Friends. They may be called to do specific work—work for peace or work to bring a specific message, or to give a plenary talk or a workshop. Others may be called to just visit in gospel love among Friends, and the travel minute itself feels that this is a leading and the work not just of that Friend but the work of the meeting.

**Support Committees for Quaker Ministers**

**Kathleen Wooten:** So at Fresh Pond meeting I have a support committee which has been named by the meeting—sort of a working group of the meeting—and those three Friends meet with me about once a month for worship and listening for where the Spirit might be leading me.

**Benigno Sanchez-Eppler:** One of the things that a clearness committee, or a ministry support committee, helps you to do is to help you to say “no” to certain things for the sake of being more faithful to the things that are yours.

**Jan Hoffman:** I have had an oversight committee since 2000. It has changed in membership but there are two people who have been on it for a very long time. My ministry just has grown.

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exponentially with that oversight committee.

*Kathleen Wooten:* Sometimes there are more logistics and sometimes there are more long-term, and it's comforting and helpful to hear other voices tell me what I'm saying without my opinions in the way.

*Benigno Sanchez-Eppler:* It is very enabling. Something that even allows me to take some risks, because I know that they sat me down, they asked me questions. They heard me. They have a sense of where I'm coming from, what my gifts are, and they have a sense of where I might walk more faithfully than not.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *Have you ever had or served on a support/oversight committee? What was it like?*

2. *How does your meeting support members who experience leadings into greater ministry?*
Quakers and Sustaining Life on Earth

TRANSCRIPT

David Millar: My great hope is that we are at a point—and this is what the Kabarak call itself says—where all people of good faith, whether or not they’re Friends, can work together and say, “This is our only home.” And take the steps that are necessary, in diversity. There will be lots of differences of opinion, but believe me, there will be so many thousands of things that need to be done that every little bit counts.

How Do Quakers Approach Sustainability Work?

Rachel Madenyika: I think when we talk of Quakerism, we look at our inner selves. I think the whole issue of sustainability, or sustaining life on Earth is a challenge within ourselves. Sustainability means simplicity. How do we live in our own home? Sustainability means peace. If we want peace to be lasting, it means we need to work on how we can make it sustainable and lasting.

David Millar: I like to think of ourselves as an ecosystem. We need the diversity of cultures and languages and thoughts, and we have to stop and slow down and pay attention. So speaking as a Quaker now, the very first step we take is to listen to other people, to the still small voice.

The Kabarak Call for Peace and Ecojustice

David Millar: The Kabarak Call for Peace and Ecojustice was itself almost a miraculous thing. It emerged from this worldwide consultation and we asked people in Bolivia and the Pacific Islands and India and Nepal and Hong Kong and Alaska, Central America, the United States, Canada, Norway, Netherlands, Great Britain. It was an amazing experience, and they all lead to the same conclusion: the way out is not more weapons; the way out is not building higher walls; the way out is not beggar your neighbor. It’s the golden rule: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. And we’re now looking at a situation where we have to do that at a planetary scale.

How Do Quakers Approach Sustainability Work?

Rachel Madenyika: It’s about thinking of our Earth and thinking of where we live. I think of community. How do we as Quakers work within—not only our own community. But what makes Quakers unique is the ability to work across divides, and bring people together and talk about those areas of concern.

David Millar: I see this as the peace testimony written at the level of the planet. In a sense, earthcare began with the Beatitudes, and when Jesus said, “You know there are really only two commandments: love God and love your neighbor,” I think that speaks to the very heart of the spiritual tradition of which Quakerism is a part. To me that’s what earthcare is, but a lot of people are still seeing it in terms of, “What type of lightbulb should I choose? Do I drive a car?”

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Do I eat a hamburger?” Those are important questions.

**Working on Sustainability Beyond North America**

*Rachel Madenyika:* Sustainability is not only a North American issue. I think it is a global issue.

*David Millar:* What this is about is something that affects equally indigenous people around the world, who are on the front line right now at this very moment, and it will eventually come home to our children and grandchildren in their homes, where they live right now.

*Rachel Madenyika:* What we really try to do in the consultations, it just shows that how we work as Quakers is to listen and to be present, and to hear everybody's perspectives.

**The 2016 World Gathering in Pisac, Peru**

In my capacity at the Quaker UN office, I was asked to attend the Friends World Plenary in Peru. The World Plenary is a meeting where all Friends from all over the world descended in Pisac, Peru. And then when I did this consultation, we had about 60 Friends from all over the world and we wanted to see what they do in their communities on sustainable living.

A young woman from Bolivia said, “We’ve been trying to work with kids on a daily basis so that they know the value of water.” And then we had a gentleman from Kenya saying, “We’re trying to have our government plant more trees, because people are cutting down trees because they need that to cook, and the cycle keeps going.”

It was kind of interesting to see that there were people from all walks of life that were doing small little things that were important within their community.

**What Can Local Quaker Meetings Do?**

*David Millar:* There are two answers to, “What can my meeting do?” One is the Pisac Minute. The Pisac Minute simply asks each monthly meeting to set itself two goals. Its own goals. Nobody’s going to impose on it. It’s an exercise, fundamentally, in listening to your own conscience. I think it’s really exciting because it means everybody can do something.

*Rachel Madenyika:* Start with what works within your community, and introduce it to your meeting. Say, “This is what my neighborhood is doing. We’re starting a community garden and would want our meeting to be a part of the process.” and bring people together. Because you’d be surprised that everybody’s doing small things but they’re not connecting with everybody else.

**How to Join Quakers in This Work**

*Rachel Madenyika:* If you want to get involved with what Quakers are doing on sustainability, contact your local meeting. Friends always have open arms to anyone who is interested in their work.

*David Millar:* Everybody is welcome. This is a common task. We are all living together on this
planet that is our home. Welcome. Welcome and let's work together.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *What is your family or meeting doing in response to the Pisac Minute? What are other faith groups in your area doing for ecojustice?*
2. *How do we honor life in all living things? What impedes and affects our stewardship?*
Why Quakers Value Process Over Outcome

TRANSCRIPT

It is radical to be more concerned with the process than outcome, especially in today's culture, but I trust—I completely trust—that if our processes is on, if we're really looking for the God Way or God's will for our group, we're going to to come to the right place. It's like Abraham Lincoln was asked, "do you hope God's on your side?" and Abraham Lincoln replied, "No, what I hope is that I'm on God's side" and that's what we're looking for.

Why Quakers Care More About Process Than Outcome

I'm Dorsey Green. I live in Seattle, Washington. I go to University Meeting in North Pacific Yearly Meeting and I was the clerk of FCNL's general committee and executive committee about seven years ago.

Finding the “Sense of the Meeting”

When we're doing Quakerly business we are looking for the "sense of meeting." Many people assume that's the same thing as consensus. The sense of the meeting is looking for God's way, God's will for this group on this issue at this time. So everybody—or almost everybody in the room—is praying and looking for guidance: what are we led to do? And it's like the space opens up and there's God. Or Jesus. Or a sense of where we're supposed to go. A door. Something.

And it's like this, "whoa" and I can feel it in my chest, it's like a "oh really! really!" It's very... it's most exciting when I didn't expect it because it means that—well, certainly not I—but other people's agenda probably, we're not pushing agendas. We're all looking around for each other and we find it! We may come in in the dark and we find it, and there it is.

So our job as Quakers is not to figure out, what does everybody think will work, it's what we feel led to do as a group and what that means is we're not doing a competitive voting system. We don't vote with sense of the Meeting. We are looking for—you can tell when it happens in a way, people go, “oh. Right. That's right.” Even if no one thought of it before we walked in the room.

The Friends Committee on National Legislation is governed by its General Committee.

Composed of over 180 Quakers, the committee meets annually and conducts its sessions in the manner of Friends.

One of the highlights of my Quaker career was clerking FCNL. Somebody asked me once was it hard and I said it was like driving a Cadillac. It is the deepest spiritual experience I think I've ever had as an ongoing piece, and to be part of some of the decisions that FCNL made and to be blessed to have been clerk at the time is like a gift.

Serving As Clerk

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Clerks are not like CEOs. We are there to help the group discern what the group is called to do, led to do, what God's will for us is. I love clerking, and I love it because I'm more attached to process than outcome and that's crucial with some of the issues that Quakers deal with.

We're looking for, “what are we supposed to do here?” and I think you’re right. I think it's pretty radical. And it's doable! That's the most exciting part about it, it's really doable. And when you do it in a group as large as FCNL's annual meeting, which is 180 to 200 people, it's like the whole room shimmers. It's pretty exciting.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *Dorsey Green discusses Quaker business process as finding the “sense of the Meeting” rather than coming to consensus. What is the difference between the two? What is “sense of the Meeting,” in your understanding?*

2. *Dorsey talks about having the experience in Quaker Business Meeting that “the whole room shimmers.” What do you think she means? Have you had that experience?*
Was Nixon a Quaker?

TRANSCRIPT

Formally, Richard Nixon was a Quaker. He was member of East Whittier Friends Church, and he had Quaker heritage from his Milhous ancestors, represented, for him, by his mother. The other things—whether he’s a pacifist or not, whether he lives by the testimonies or not—are really not important, in his view of things, apparently. At least if you look at his memoir, in which he devotes three paragraphs out of, what, a 670 page book. Three paragraphs to his religion! That’s all he needs to say. That’s all he says.

Was Richard Nixon a Quaker?

My name’s Larry Ingle. I live in Chattanooga, and I go to Chattanooga Meeting. I wrote a biography of George Fox, called First Among Friends, the first scholarly biography of Fox in ’94. And soon after that, I began work on studying Nixon and his religion, and that produced a book published by the University of Missouri Press last June. It’s entitled Nixon’s First Cover-Up: The Religious Life of a Quaker President.

Who Was Richard Nixon?

Richard Nixon was the 37th president of the United States. He liked to keep a list of the first things he did. The first time any president had ever done “x,” he would note that. I don’t know that he noted that he was the first president ever to resign, but he was.

Was Richard Nixon a Quaker?

If Nixon had been sitting here, and you asked him the question, he would say, “I’m a Quaker because of the Quaker heritage of my mother.” Who was Hannah Milhous. She came to California, to Southern California, from Indiana, and they had a long Quaker heritage going back to the 17th century. He didn’t attend, he never attended after his mother died in ’67. He lived until 1994, so that’s, what, 28 years or so? A third of his life he didn’t attend.

How Politicians Use Religion

Donald Trump simply announced, a few weeks ago, two months ago or so, that he was a Presbyterian. I heard a report last weekend that that probably is not true, although I don’t know that. He certainly proclaims to be a Presbyterian. Well, Richard Nixon was much the same way. He didn’t make a big thing of his religion. He was a Quaker, and that was it; he didn’t talk about anymore. It seems to me that they are treating religion very much the same way, which is to say, as a vehicle for their political aspirations. I think that Richard Nixon saw that the popular appeal of a certain variety of Quakers would redound to his political advantage. He did this because those actions in support of the underground, in resisting the war, and supporting slaves, that

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those positions would redound in 1959 and 1960 to his benefit. They would remind people that Quakers were people who opposed slavery, who not only opposed it but aided slaves to escape.

**The Testimony of Integrity and Nixon’s Enemies List**

Quakers have no creed. You can’t go anywhere and say Quakers believe this. Therefore Quakers have developed “testimonies.” The most basic of these testimonies is the testimony of integrity, because that testimony assumes that we will do and be what we say we are. After looking at Richard Nixon’s life, and studying as many memoirs, as many recollections as you can find that have been kept and produced, the one that I have found most valuable talked about Richard Nixon setting up in the White House an “Us versus Them” category. That we’re different from everybody else. We’re doing what’s right. Everybody else is doing what’s wrong. That’s the basis of the enemies list, a list of enemies of the administration. For me, the testimony of integrity undercuts and destroys any enemies list. Everyone is a human being to be respected. Quakers insist that there’s something invisible in human beings that we call “that of God” in people. Nixon seldom saw that of God in everyone.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Larry Ingle says, “the question of the testimony of integrity undercuts and destroys any enemies list.” What do you think he means? Do you agree?

2. While Richard Nixon maintained his membership at his home meeting, he did not continue to attend, and yet he still claimed to be a Quaker. What is your definition of Quaker? What qualifies someone to call themselves that?
How Mysticism Informs Quaker Activism

TRANSCRIPT

A great bit of my help in understanding the difference between mysticism and activism came from reading a bit of Rufus Jones, when he explains that the Christian mystic is fundamentally frog-like in nature, traveling between land and water—and maybe that's all of Christian identity, actually—that people of faith are required to take that faith and come to places of not-faith and live faithfully.

How Mysticism Informs Our Activism

So I used to have a pretty bad attitude about activists. Even during my involvement with Quaker meetings, I have run away from the people coming coming to me to get me to write political letters and I have made fun of bumper stickers in the parking lot. I now have bumper stickers, but that's another story! But there's a bit of conversion that has happened in my sense of the mystic and the activist aspects of being a person.

The Spiritual Impulse to Act in the World

No matter what else we may imagine the life of Jesus to be, it is certainly understood to be a revelation of God's love through a human life, and what that means, among other things, is that humans and God are not so far apart as we may be led to believe—that God's love would be revealed to us through a human life.

That sort of ups the ante in terms of what it means to be incarnation people, because if God’s love can be revealed through a human life then God’s love can be revealed through my life. And what a thing to need to live into—to live up to—if in those mystical encounters of prayer and contemplation and communion with others on the path, I find myself truly compelled to live in response to the glimpse I’ve been given of the holy, then: wow. We better get to it, you know? There are people to feed and people to love and people to to bring back.

Becoming Active

One of the things that kept me out of being activist for a very long time was a fear of getting it wrong—or a fear of needing to know more than I could stand to know, actually—just more than I was interested in knowing. I think that's one of the reasons, I just want to say, my involvement with Friends Committee on National Legislation has been a life changer.

The feeling companioned and equipped for important work during these lobby events that they have a couple times a year has helped me understand the way in which my own contemplative practice, my own sense that God has intentions and hopes for the world and that God is deeply relational and we're giving glimpses of God’s way for the world and that we are in fact compelled—we're under compulsion to respond to those if we really believe we've been given them, that they can still be a stop, a fear. I don't know enough or I'm scared And yet Friends
Committee on National Legislation has the nuts and bolts down and have kind of held my hand through becoming more active in the political arena in a way that feels mature and effective, and has made me understand that the letter writers that I ran from have been blowing on the coals trying to re-light the fire of clarity that those of us who are given over to mystical inclinations must act in the world.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. *What is an experience of mysticism that you’ve had? What about an experience of activism? Have you ever had an experience where both of those were present?*

2. *Jennie says, “people of faith are required to take that faith and come to places of not-faith and live faithfully.” What does this mean to you? What is an example of it?*