

Learning Resources 5.1

The General Character of Quaker Testimony

Seven Key Characteristics of Quaker Testimony:

1. **Divine Command and Faithful Response** – Rather than being a set of general values or principles, Quaker testimony is the fruit of a listening, hearing, and obeying relationship with God. It is the outward and visible manifestation of inward spiritual guidance in people's lives, which reflects the divine nature.
2. **Embodying the way of Jesus** – Across history, the general shape and orientation of Quaker testimony has tended to be the result of Friends trying to follow the way of Jesus. It reflects his teachings as they are set out in the Bible.

You are my friends if you do what I command you. **John 15:14**

Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you? **Luke 6:46**

3. **A glimpse of heaven on earth** – Testimony, as it is revealed in people's lives, offers a glimpse of God's plan for the restoration of all things, where heaven and earth are united.
4. **It is both negative and positive** – In a negative sense, Quaker testimony is a refusal to go along with unjust or unhealthy aspects of the way the world currently works. In positive terms, it tries out 'holy experiments' that seek to reveal a better way.
5. **It is provocative communication** – Because it is enacted in a visible way, others see it and may feel the need to respond. In this sense, it is a form of embodied provocative communication.

Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone...¹

6. **It is risky and Uncertain** – Like all forms of communication, Quaker testimony may be misunderstood, misinterpreted or deliberately misrepresented. It is therefore risky and uncertain. Friends feel that being faithful is more important than worrying about success or failure.
7. **It may be costly** – Because testimony tends to disrupt commonly accepted ways of behaving and living, it often provokes a hostile response. Friends acting under concern may face ridicule, threats of violence, and legal sanction. This might result in anything from mild embarrassment to death.

More Information About Quaker Testimony

Videos:

How Quakers Can Transform the World

<https://quakerspeak.com/video/quakers-can-transform-world/>

¹ George Fox, from Britain Yearly Meeting, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 19.32.

Quaker Faith in Actions

<https://quakerspeak.com/video/quakers-can-transform-world/>

The Jewels of Quakerism 4 - Witness and Testimony

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KuVY04O5rcw>

Books:

Jonathan Dale, Elizabeth Cave, and Ros Morley, Eds. *Faith in Action: Quaker Social Testimony* (London: Quaker Books, 2007).

Rachel Muers. *Testimony: Quakerism and Theological Ethics* (London: SCM Press, 2015).

J. Brent Bill. *Hope and Witness in Dangerous Times: Lessons from the Quakers on Blending Faith, Daily Life, and Activism* (Alresford: Christian Alternative Books, 2021).

Paul Buckley. *Quaker Testimony: What We Witness to the World* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Pamphlet 481, 2023).

Online Articles

Quaker Testimony (quaker.org)

<https://quaker.org/testimony/>

Quaker Values or Testimony (Craig Barnett)

<https://www.discoveringquakers.org.uk/blog/quaker-values-or-testimonies>

Categorically Not the Testimonies (*Friends Journal*) – Eric Moon

<https://www.friendsjournal.org/categorically-not-the-testimonies/>

Pointing to the Moon (*Friends Journal*) – Gene Hilman

<https://www.friendsjournal.org/spices-bible-roots-quakerism/>

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Quaker testimony is not about what we say we believe, but rather what we do in our lives. How do you feel about that?
2. The testimony of Friends can seem quite oppositional, but it also involves positive action that tries to model a better way. What value do you see in balancing the negative and the positive in this way?
3. The way we act can preach or speak to others and may provoke a response in them. What do you think your “carriage and life” is communicating? Whose “carriage and life” has had a positive impact on you?
4. Testimony can be risky and costly. Why do you think careful discernment and communal accountability is so important within the Quaker faith?

Learning Resources 5.2

S.P.I.C.E.S – Enduring Themes Within Quaker Testimony

During the past century, many Friends have begun to summarise enduring themes in Quaker Testimony using lists. There are several different versions of this. Here we will focus on the acronym S.P.I.C.E.S.

Simplicity – a commitment to organizing our lives in a way that avoids distractions, helping us to focus on what is most important: listening for, hearing, and responding to divine guidance. What gets in the way of this essential practice?

Peace – a conviction that God's way, as it is revealed in Christ, is a way of peace that rejects the use of coercive force and violent conflict. Along with various Anabaptist groups, Friends are one of the Historic Peace Churches.

Integrity – an emphasis on the need for consistency in what we say and what we do. Are we trustworthy and truthful in all areas of our lives, or are we dishonest and hypocritical? Do we adapt our level of integrity to suit the circumstances we find ourselves in?

Community – a recognition that a community, although it is made up of a group of individuals, is often much more than the mere sum of its parts. This fact helps us to appreciate interdependence and interconnection as we build bonds of mutual support and accountability.

Equality – an affirmation of the dignity and worth of all people, recognising our diversity and difference as well as what we share in common. A conviction that all people are loved and valued by God, regardless of human divisions. We see this clearly in the life and teachings of Jesus.

Stewardship – understanding the place of humanity within the web of life and seeking a more harmonious relationship with the rest of creation. Recognising the power that humans exercise within creation, and the fact that human well-being is dependent upon ecological well-being.

More Information About Quaker Testimony

Videos:

What are the Quaker SPICES?

<https://quakerspeak.com/video/spices/>

Are SPICES 'the' Quaker Testimonies?

<https://quakerspeak.com/video/are-spices-the-quaker-testimonies/>

Examining the Quaker Peace Testimony

<https://quakerspeak.com/video/peace/>

How Quaker Testimonies Can Combat White Supremacy

<https://quakerspeak.com/video/how-quaker-testimonies-can-combat-white-supremacy/>

Quakers and Women in Ministry

<https://quakerspeak.com/video/quakers-women-ministry/>

The Work of Quaker Earthcare Witness

<https://quakerspeak.com/video/the-work-of-quaker-earthcare/>

How Do Quakers Approach Sustainability Work?

<https://quakerspeak.com/video/quakers-approach-sustainability-work/>

Books:

Joanna Godfrey Wood. *In STEP with Quaker Testimony: Simplicity, Truth, Equality and Peace - inspired by Margaret Fell's writings* (Alresford: Christian Alternative Book, 2021).

Catherine Whitmire. *Plain Living: A Quaker Path to Simplicity* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2001).

John Lampen and Diana Lampen. *Inner Healing, Inner Peace: A Quaker Perspective* (Alresford: Christian Alternative Book, 2023).

Cherice Bock. *A Quaker Ecology: Meditations on the Future of Friends* (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2022).

Online Articles

A Perspective on the Peace Testimony (*Friends Journal*) – John Andrew Gallery

<https://www.friendsjournal.org/2002122/>

Friends and the Understanding of Reason and Equality (*Friends Journal*) – Caroline Whitbeck

<https://www.friendsjournal.org/3011040/>

Friends Testimonies and Ecological Understanding (*Journal*) – Keith Helmuth

<https://www.friendsjournal.org/2007160/>

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What do you think are the potential strengths and weaknesses of using set lists of Quaker testimonies?
2. Looking at the six themes within S.P.I.C.E.S, Can you see how these might form an interconnected whole? Can you identify a common thread running through all of them?
3. Given what you know about the Quaker faith, do you think there are any important themes missing from the S.P.I.C.E.S list?
4. The testimony of the earliest Friends included issues that were important at the time but seem less relevant today (e.g. opposition to tithes and the arts). How do you think Quaker testimony might change in future?

Learning Resources 5.3

The Quaker Peace Testimony

At the beginning of the Quaker movement, Friends held a testimony against fighting with outward weapons. They felt that evil would only be defeated, and God's Kingdom established, through an inward conflict within each person over which spirit ruled them – Christ's or the Serpent's.

And as they war not against men's persons, so their weapons are not carnal, nor hurtful to any of the creation; for the Lamb comes not to destroy men's lives, nor the work of God, and therefore at his appearance in his subjects, he puts spiritual weapons into their hearts and hands: their armor is the light, their sword the Spirit of the Father and the Son; their shield is faith and patience; their paths are prepared with the gospel of peace and good will towards all the creation of God. Their breastplate is righteousness and holiness to God; their minds are girt with godliness, and they are covered with salvation, and they are taught with truth.

James Nayer – *The Lamb's War* (1657)

Our principle is, and our Practice have always been, to seek peace and ensue it and to follow after righteousness and the knowledge of God, seeking the good and welfare and doing that which tends to the peace of all. We know that wars and fightings proceed from the lusts of men (as Jas. iv. 1-3), out of which lusts the Lord hath redeemed us, and so out of the occasion of war. The occasion of which war, and war itself (wherein envious men, who are lovers of themselves more than lovers of God, lust, kill, and desire to have men's lives or estates) ariseth from the lust. All bloody principles and practices, we, as to our own particulars, do utterly deny, with all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world.

A Declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God, called Quakers (1660)

In modern times, the peace testimony has tended to be understood in a broader way, no longer regarded primarily as a defining characteristic of a peculiar people.

Bring into God's light those emotions, attitudes and prejudices in yourself which lie at the root of destructive conflict, acknowledging your need for forgiveness and grace. In what ways are you involved in the work of reconciliation between individuals, groups and nations?

Advices and Queries 32 (Britain Yearly Meeting)

Conscientious objection is not a total repudiation of force; it is a refusal to surrender moral responsibility for one's action.

Kenneth C Barnes (1987)

More Information About the Peace Testimony

Videos:

What It Means to Be a Quaker Peace Activist

<https://quakerspeak.com/video/quaker-peace-activist/>

Make Peace a Way of Life

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CrKW_9DOmk0

Books:

Meredith Baldwin Weddle. *Walking in the Way of Peace: Quaker Pacifism in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Peter Brock. *Quaker Peace Testimony: Quaker Attitudes to War in England, America, Prussia, Australia and New Zealand* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

Adam Curle. *True Justice. Quaker Peace Makers and Peace Making* (London: Quaker Books, 2007).

Sharon Hoover ed. *Quakers and the Search for Peace* (Friends Publishing Corp. 2010).

Online Material:

James Nayler's tract *The Lamb's War Against the Man of Sin* (1657)

<http://www.qhpress.org/texts/nayler/lambswar.html>

A Declaration from the harmless and innocent people of God, called Quakers (1660)

<https://quaker.org/legacy/minnfm/peace/A%20Declaration%20to%20Charles%20II%201660.htm>

The fighting sailor turned peaceable Christian – Thomas Lurting

<http://www.qhpress.org/texts/lurting.html>

A collection of Quaker materials on the peace testimony

<https://quaker.org/legacy/minnfm/peace/>

The Quaker Peace Testimony (online pamphlet)

<https://quaker.org.uk/documents/the-quaker-peace-testimony-pdf>

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How do you feel about the early Quaker conviction that peace will only come through the fundamental transformation of human nature, as a spiritual conversion? What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of this position?
2. Some early Quaker leaders did not agree with the peace declaration made to the king. They felt that evil within a fallen world is too strong to be left physically unopposed. Do you agree or disagree?
3. Quakers played an important role in getting the principle of Conscientious Objection recognised by governments. How do you feel about this principle?
4. During the two world wars, as a community, Friends held firm to their peace testimony. Some Quaker men of conscription age chose to fight but faced no sanction. Why do you think the Quaker community was able to tolerate such decisions?