

Introduction to Quakers and Friends Ways

Session 4 - Testimony – Faith in Action

Introduction

Today, many Friends use the acronym SPICES to remember the most common testimonies (Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Sustainability – the last added in more recent years). Consider the following: *"Many new members are attracted to Friends because they resonate with the testimonies of peace, simplicity, equality, community and integrity. While this kind of attraction is not necessarily bad, the danger is that these testimonies come to be held as ends in themselves — and thus become creeds. Testimonies embraced as ideals are without spiritual grounding. They may be "good" notions but they remain mere notions. They will fade and be lost when brought to the test in an encounter with a world that has contrary notions. This danger is real because often Friends do not do well at making it clear to others that their testimonies are the fruits of their spiritual foundation, not the foundation itself. We are not Quakers because we have embraced the idea of pacifism or simple living or equal regard for both sexes. We are Quakers because we have encountered something within that convinces us we can be and should be at peace, live simply, be loving toward all or live any other witness that may arise from this experience."*

—Robert Griswold, 2005, Canadian Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice 4.4, page 107.

As we begin to speak our truth to others, let us also remember to listen fully to the Spirit speaking through them, so that we may truly share in the learning.

Agenda (Lesson Plan)

1. Worship (10 minutes)
2. The testimonies (40 minutes) In pairs or groups of three, each select one of the quotations relating to a testimony (following pages) and reflect on these queries:
 - a. Which of the selections speaks most strongly to you in your life right now?
 - b. What do you do in your life to live out this testimony?
 - c. How do you think earlier Friends...or other Friends/individuals you know today experienced living this testimony?
3. Worship Sharing (40 minutes) with the whole group, invite participants to respond from the silence,
 - a. What connections do you see between your experience of the Spirit and your daily life practices?
4. Reflect on the learning (20 minutes)
 - a. What remains most strongly with you from our reflection and conversation here?
 - b. What questions do you still have?
 - c. How would you like to explore further?
5. Closing Worship (10 minutes)

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Testimonies: - all selections are from Canadian Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice

Simplicity

4.44. *If we can attain it, how does simplicity shape our lives? Needing little, keeping away from extremes, excess, brings another kind of contentment, a simpler wealth. Simplicity is the essence of stillness, an untroubled way that keeps from grasping, hoarding. Simplicity lies at the heart of the Quaker way of life. Keeping to simplicity is to realize that it is the Light within that leads us, restrains us, inspires us. Knowing this Divine Light is within, we are all children of the Light, all equal. Keeping to the contentment of simplicity leads to peace. Following the plain truth leads to integrity. So all the testimonies are reflected in simplicity. Need little. Want less. It seems a difficult concept in the frantic haste of the world today. We are surrounded on all sides by voices crying their bad advice to buy (save), conform without question, voices that condone greed and excess. It seems hard going against all the pressures that urge us away. Yet keeping to simplicity is turning back to God, is a relief, is the only thing we can really do...Early Friends testified against the extravagance and snobbery of English society in their times and turned away from the superfluities of society to wait in stillness on God. They were as concerned as we are that lives too full of triviality and mediocrity overburden and distract us from the essential, the positive, the simple truth that we are children of God, and that the first thing we have to do is love God with all our heart and mind and strength.*

—Anne-Marie Zilliacus, 2001

Peace

4.22. *A good end cannot sanctify evil means nor must we ever do evil that good may come of it. We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by love and information. And yet we could hurt no man that we believe loves us. Let us then try what love will do: for if men did once see we love them, we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but love gains: and he that forgives first, wins the laurel.*

—William Penn, 1693

Integrity

4.17. *We know truth through what we see, read, do and feel ourselves. We dare etching our testimonies every time we state what we deeply believe and do what our soul calls us to do. We learn from the past but live in the present looking to a future for all creation. We need to affirm our own place in history-in-the-making by living and speaking our truths for ourselves and our children...*

By taking up the call of our spirit and living life with passion and conviction, we feel the heat of truth and rightness in our heart of hearts. Here, in our stirrings of gut knowledge and intuition, we find our passionate calling to certain beliefs, our lovers, our place in this chaotic world, answers (or solace) for the questions that confront us. Each of us feels the passion called truth. It's our choice to listen and act or not. The truth in our bones can be scary; it asks us to put our hearts on the line. In following our hearts, however, we

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will find ourselves in exquisite alignment with the power-filled spirit that we seek truth from.

—Jane Orion Smith, 1994

Community

4.66. *When justice is reduced to nothing more than a matter of punishment, it becomes a simple game of vengeance where pain begets pain. If humanity is ever to achieve any peace, we must redefine justice as the process that allows us all to continue living together after one has caused harm to another in our midst. Justice, therefore, has to be measured by how peacefully and productively we coexist, not by how severely we punish those found responsible for a transgression.*

—Marc Forget, 2001

Equality

4.46. *The Holy Spirit, which we all share, makes us equal. We differ in our class backgrounds, intelligence, manners, experiences, talents, skin color, language, gender, sexuality, and customs; these differences can serve to remind us of the infinite number of ways the Spirit presents itself. But our differences can also create barriers because of our inability to interpret accurately the actions, motives, and goals of others. This failure to understand lies at the heart of racial and ethnic prejudice, for when we fear the unfamiliar or unknown, we tend to reject and thrust it from us.*

—New York Yearly Meeting, 1995

Sustainability

4.77. *We affirm the interrelatedness of nature, spirit and all living beings as expressions of God’s creation. This guides us towards a holistic lifestyle which models for ourselves and others ways to heal the earth. We are responsible for what we eat, wear and use. To paraphrase John Woolman: Let us be open to discern how the seeds of destruction of our planet are present in our ways of living.*

We are thankful that so much joy and beauty have been offered to us.

—Canadian Yearly Meeting, 1992

References for those who wish further resources:

SPICES – Testimonies for Quaker Kids (Included)

Jack Ross, *Nonviolence for Elfin Spirits*. (Argenta, BC: Argenta Friends Press, 1992). Pp 29- 37.

Kathleen Hertzberg, *Doing the Work, Finding the Meaning* (CQP No. 56, 2002), pp 1-3; 34- 35.

Geoffrey Durham, *The Spirit of the Quakers*, (Yale University Press, New Haven and London - 2010), pp 71 – 89; 126 – 149; 150 – 166

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