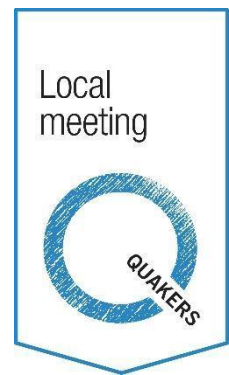


Dear Visitor

Welcome to Uxbridge Quaker Meeting.



If this is your first visit to a Quaker Meeting this pack contains some text we've selected which may help introduce you to Quakerism and what happens in a Quaker Meeting for Worship.

You are very welcome to look at the contents during the Meeting. You may observe some other Friends, (the familiar name given to Quakers), also reading during the meeting. It is perfectly acceptable to do so.

The Meeting will last approximately an hour from 10:30 to 11:30 and its end will be signalled by a general greeting, notices, news of Friends etc. You are very welcome to stay on for a drink and a chat with Friends but after your first meeting you may just wish to leave - that's OK.

During the Meeting it is possible that one or more attending will stand and say something important to them or which will assist the Meeting in its silent spiritual searching and reflection. There are no rules about what to say or how to say it, only that a Friend may address the Meeting - what we refer to as 'minister' only once in a Meeting. Friends will always allow space for thought and contemplation following ministry before making their own contribution. Sometimes the Meeting will remain silent throughout the whole hour and this is occasionally described by Friends as the most 'gathered', i.e. spiritual of Meetings for Worship.

We hope that at the end of the Meeting you will have enjoyed the experience of silent worship and feel relaxed and at peace. Although don't worry if you don't, it doesn't always happen even to the most experienced Friends.

The 'Onion' Sheet 🍷

Some years ago we had a sheet describing how to 'centre down' during Meeting for Worship which was aimed at children. We always thought it a good read so have adapted it here for adults too. We call it the 'onion' sheet because of the layers.

1. Look around, see who's here, who's sitting where, perhaps smile to acknowledge, perhaps not. Now you've had a look, take all your thoughts about that and throw them away. They were the first layer of the wrapping paper (or 'onion'), we don't need them anymore.
2. Let's go on to the next layer. Let's think about the rest of the day. Do you know what's for dinner? What are you going to do this afternoon? Think what you've got to do – what you're going to enjoy. Right, put those thoughts behind you too. We're getting further into the parcel now. We don't need them anymore.
3. The next layer is anything you're worried about: next week at work, things at home, troubles with friends, colleagues, anything. Don't be afraid to think of them. Have a really good worry. Now, let's dump all those sad and worrying things. We're getting right into the parcel now.
4. Three more layers to go, then the secret in the middle. Now, listen hard. A lot of what we do in Meeting is just listening. First listen to everything you can hear outside the room: birds, cars, people. Then try to forget those and listen only to noises in the room: breathing, gentle movements.
5. Then forget those things too and listen to what's happening in your own body: those funny clicks and thumps and tummy rumblings. And that's the last covering. Throw it away and try to listen still deeper inside yourself. Find the treasure in the middle.
6. What is the treasure? It is different for everyone. You may find the person your friends love there. You may find God. Try it again. Listen outside the room, listen inside the room, listen inside yourself, deeper and deeper inside.

The Quaker Way (Richard Allen, 1985)

Quakerism is a way of life, rather than a dogma or a creed that rests on a conviction that by looking into their innermost hearts people can have direct communion with their creator. This experience cannot ultimately be described in words, but Quakers base their whole lives on it.

The Quaker movement arose in the mid-seventeenth century. Its followers called themselves 'Friends of Truth', or simply 'Friends'. 'Quaker' was an abusive nickname used by others, but Friends have since adopted the term themselves, and today 'Friend' and 'Quaker' mean the same and are used interchangeably. The formal title is 'The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)'.

Friends' basic attitudes show themselves in certain ideas and practices, personal and collective, of which the most important are:

- **In their meetings for worship Quakers do not sing hymns or use set prayers but wait on God together in silence. Out of this silence occasionally someone may speak briefly, or pray, or read from the Bible or other religious work.**
- **Friends historically have tried to learn from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as recorded in the Gospels. There is a tradition of trying to live in the spirit of forgiving love that was shown in his life and death, this spirit a living source of strength and inspiration to his followers ever since. This does not, however, prevent many Quakers from acknowledging a debt to the saints and sages of other religions and to wise people of no declared religion.**
- **Quakers do not consider that ultimate authority can reside in a church or other organisation. Nor do they regard the mere words of the Bible, or any other writing, as authority. They try to enter into the spirit that inspired the writers. This does not mean that every Friend is his or her own authority. Belonging to the worshipping group exerts a gentle discipline which Friends gladly accept.**
- **Friends also carry on the business of their Society in a framework of silent worship, placing themselves and their affairs in the presence of God. The proceedings are conducted by a 'Clerk', who is both chairperson and secretary, and records the 'sense of the meeting' at the time without recourse to voting.**
- **Quakers tend to live simply, but they are not rigidly puritanical. For example, some Friends are teetotal, while others drink alcohol in moderation.**

- Quakers recognise only one standard of truth, and consequently do not swear legal oaths. This attitude is also reflected in their avoidance of speculative business deals and gambling.
- Quakers do not practise or condone discrimination by sex, social class or race.
- The Quaker way implies non-violence in thought, word and deed. Most Quakers refuse to fight in war, and make clear their opposition to all preparations for it. The Society is regarded as one of the traditional 'Peace Churches'.
- Quakers are prominent in work for disadvantaged people at home and abroad, though many people who admire this work are not aware of the religious conviction underpinning it.
- Finally, it is fundamental to the Quaker way to be open to new insights from whatever source, to tolerate differing opinions, and to work for reconciliation wherever there is strife and enmity.

It should not be imagined, however, that Quakers are impossibly 'good' people. Like others they have their faults and fall short of their own aims. Nor do they claim that their path is the only true one; they have simply found it *right for them*.

While Friends are glad to tell others what Quakerism means to them, they do not pressurize anyone to join them, but leave people free to decide whether the Quaker way really is for them.

Everyone is welcome to attend a Quaker Meeting for Worship, and Friends are delighted when people want to find out more about them. This may take some time. The best approach is to attend a Meeting for Worship on several occasions, and also Meetings in different places, and to do some reading. Leaflets on Friends' silent worship and other aspects of the Quaker way can usually be obtained free from any meeting house.



Leaflets, information and books about the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) may be obtained from: Friends House, Euston Road, London NW J 2BJ. Tel. 020 7663 1000, e-mail: enquiries@quaker.org.uk and online at quaker.org.uk