

What Lutherans Believe

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
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Friends (Quakers)

a.k.a. Religious Society of Friends, Society of Friends, or Friends Church

*Most content and citations from <http://www.quakerinfo.org/> and <https://www.fqcquaker.org/>.
Emphasis of key statements is mine.*

Background and Identification

How did the Quaker movement begin?

It began during a period of much religious upheaval in England during the mid-1600s, as people questioned the established church and sought new ways to understand Christianity. The emerging faith community gathered around the leadership of George Fox and others who encouraged people to be guided by a direct, firsthand encounter with the Spirit. These Quakers were seeking an authentic return to “primitive Christianity,” as practiced by the followers of Jesus in the first century.

Why are you called “Quakers”?

The term “Quaker” arose as a popular nickname used to ridicule this new religious group when it emerged in seventeenth century England. Since the term was so widely recognized, members began using it informally, so people would know what they were talking about. Formally, we call ourselves the Religious Society of Friends. Today, we use “Friend” and “Quaker” interchangeably.

Are Quakers the same as the Amish? As Shakers?

Quaker and Amish are both “peace churches,” but otherwise they are distinct and trace themselves to separate roots in England (Quakers) and Switzerland (Amish). Today, the majority of Quakers no longer practice “plain dress,” as do the Amish.

The primary overlap between Quakers and Shakers is that they have rhyming names. The Shaker hymn “Simple Gifts” is a Quaker favorite.

Are all Quakers alike?

Quakers have evolved and diverged into several different varieties over our three and one-half centuries. The kind of Quaker belief and worship described here represents just one variety. Other branches of Quakers do have pastors and more structured worship, and have a more Bible-centered emphasis in their beliefs. In the United States, those branches are more likely to be affiliated with the umbrella organizations Friends United Meeting or Evangelical Friends Church International, rather than Friends General Conference.

Friends who worship in silence are often called “unprogrammed” or “nonpastoral” Friends, while those who follow pastor-led worship are called “programmed” or “pastoral” Friends.

What’s the difference between a Quaker meeting and Quaker church?

Unprogrammed Quakers (those which worship in silence) call their congregations “meetings.” Programmed Quakers (those which have a pastor-led service with a shorter amount of silence, or none) sometimes use the word “meeting” and sometimes call their congregation a “church.”

How many Quakers are there?

In 2007 there were approximately 359,000 adult members of Quaker meetings in the world, with about 87,000 in the United States. This includes all the various branches of the Religious Society of Friends. All of the branches are represented in the United States. In other parts of the world, unprogrammed Friends (who practice silent worship and don’t have pastors) are most common in Europe and in former colonies of Britain; programmed Friends (with prepared worship services and pastors) are most common in Africa and South America.

Where is the Quaker “central office”?

You could say that it is everywhere and nowhere. There are many Quaker organizations with different functions and which relate to different parts of the larger Quaker movement. A few of the better known examples in the United States include: American Friends Service Committee (which puts Quaker values into action by operating service, development, and peace programs throughout the world), Friends Committee on National Legislation (which lobbies on behalf of Quaker values), Friends Council on Education (which works in support of Friends schools), and a great many others,

including schools and colleges, peace and justice programs, retreat centers, services for the aging, and more. In Canada, the Canadian Friends Service Committee addresses the peace and social concerns of Friends. Each of these organizations is independent of the others, but there is much collaboration and interconnection.

Friends World Committee for Consultation is a worldwide organization, headquartered in London, that promotes fellowship among the various branches of Quakers, but it does not speak on behalf of all Quakers or have authority over them. Some of the Quaker branches have their own “umbrella organizations,” including Friends General Conference (that's us), Friends United Meeting, and Evangelical Friends Church International.

Quaker congregations are affiliated in larger regional bodies called yearly meetings. There are 36 yearly meetings in the United States and Canada.

Beliefs

What do Quakers believe?

We believe that every person is loved and guided by God. Broadly speaking, we affirm that "there is that of God in everyone." Everyone is known by God and can know God in a direct relationship. We are called to attend to this relationship and to be guided by it. Quakers use many words to describe the Divine. Some of them include: God, the Light Within, Christ, Spirit, Seed, and Inward Teacher.

Are Quakers Christian?

The Quaker way has deep Christian roots that form our understanding of God, our faith, and our practices. Many Quakers consider themselves Christian, and some do not. Many Quakers today draw spiritual nourishment from our Christian roots and strive to follow the example of Jesus. Many other Quakers draw spiritual sustenance from various religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and the nature religions.

Quakers invite the word of God to be written in our hearts, rather than as words on paper—we have no creed. But we also believe that if we are sincerely open to the Divine Will, we will be guided by a Wisdom that is more compelling than our own more superficial thoughts and feelings. This can mean that we will find ourselves led in directions or receiving understandings that we may not have chosen just from personal preference. Following such guidance is not always easy. This is why community is

important to Quakers, why we turn to each other for worshipful help in making important choices, and why we read the reflections of other Quakers who have lived faithful lives.

Do Quakers believe in heaven and hell?

The emphasis of a Quaker's life is on present time—on experiencing and following the leadings of the Light in our lives today. Individual Quakers hold a variety of beliefs about what follows our lives on earth.

Do Quakers read the Bible?

The Bible is a book close to the hearts of many Friends. Many Quakers turn to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures for inspiration, insight, and guidance. They are valued as a source of wisdom that has been sacred to many generations. Quakers are informed by Biblical scholarship that offers perspective on the creation of the Bible and the understanding we have of it today. Most Quakers do not consider the Bible to be the final authority or the only source of sacred wisdom. We read it in the context of other religious writings and sources of wisdom, including the Light Within and worshipful community discernment. Some Quakers have little interest in the Bible.

Quaker Worship

Quaker worship is based on silent waiting, where we expect to come into the presence of God. In this living silence, we listen for the still, small voice that comes from God through the Inward Light. Worshiping together in silence is a way for a community to be brought together in love and faithfulness.

During silent worship, anyone—adult or child—may feel inspired to give vocal ministry (speak out of the silence). After the person speaks the message, the silence resumes. Such messages may be offered several times during a meeting for worship, or the whole period of worship may be silent. Someone will signal the close of worship by shaking hands with another person, then everyone shakes hands with those seated nearby.

How do Quakers practice baptism and communion?

For Quakers, sacraments are understood as an inward, spiritual, experience. We don't have a custom of performing sacramental ceremonies.

What are Quaker testimonies?

Quakers find that attending to the Light Within influences the ways we act in our personal lives, as well as the changes we work for in the wider world. We have noticed that certain values seem to arise more or less consistently when we try to stay close to the guidance of the Inward Teacher, and we call these principles our “testimonies.” They are not so much rules that we try to obey as the outcomes of our efforts to live in harmony with the Holy Spirit. Some commonly recognized testimonies include peace, integrity, equality, simplicity, community, and care for the earth.

Do I have to be a pacifist to be a Quaker?

Peace has always been a very important expression of how Quakers are guided by the Spirit. We wrestle with our understanding of what God requires of us. We are asked to consider if we are called to be pacifists, but this determination is left to the individual as conscience dictates. For many, it has meant a commitment to nonviolence and conscientious objection to participating in war. Some Quakers, however, have served in the military. Quaker institutions, such as meetings, generally hold to a pacifist position.

What do Quakers think about science?

Quakers find compatibility in our longing for spiritual understanding and in our desire to understand the workings of the natural world. Many Quakers have been leaders in science, including some who have won the Nobel Prize in a variety of fields. We understand that people evolved over millennia, and we stand in awe of the creation. Many Quakers feel called to help protect and heal the world that we are blessed to inhabit.

How do Quakers live today?

There are Quakers of all ages, religious backgrounds, races and ethnicities, education, sexual orientations, gender identities, abilities, and classes. Modern Quakers generally “blend in” with the larger culture, rather than adopting the distinctive dress and patterns of speech associated with Quakers of earlier centuries.

Quakers try to live and act in ways that are consistent with the divine harmony that we seek in worship. Through this effort come our testimonies of peace, integrity, equality, community, simplicity, and care for the environment.

How do Quaker meetings make decisions?

Once a month, the meeting (congregation) holds a “meeting for worship for business.” Anyone who is part of the meeting may attend. Decisions are made without voting. Instead, the participants discuss the matter and listen deeply for a sense of spiritual unity. When the clerk recognizes that unity has been reached, it is called the “sense of the meeting.” If those present agree with the clerk’s expression of that sense, then the decision is recorded in the minutes.

What does the pastor do? How do Quakers get organized without a leader?

Quakers believe that we are all ministers and responsible for the care of our worship and community. Rather than employing a pastor, Quaker meetings function by appointing members to offices and committees, which take care of things like religious education for adults and children, visiting the sick, planning special events, having the meeting house roof repaired—all the many things that any congregation needs.

A member of the meeting is appointed as “clerk,” a volunteer office. The clerk chairs business meetings and handles communications. When the clerk’s term expires, a new clerk is appointed.

How do Quakers get married?

During a special meeting for worship, the couple stand and face each other, then make very simple promises, giving themselves and taking each other in marriage. They sign a special certificate of marriage containing the words of their promises, then after the close of the meeting for worship, everyone present signs the certificate as a witness. Most states make some kind of special allowance for legalizing a Quaker wedding when there is no pastor to “officiate.”

How do Quakers celebrate Christmas?

In modern times, most Quakers celebrate a low-key Christmas, and sometimes Easter, as part of our larger culture. However, traditionally, Quakers did not celebrate any religious holidays because all days are “holy days.”

How do I become a member?

You become a Quaker by joining a meeting. Quakers encourage newcomers to spend some time getting familiar with the Quaker way and with the community before making up their minds to formally join. You may spend anywhere from a few months to a few

years as an "attender," participating in worship and other meeting activities before you feel ready to make a commitment. The first step toward membership is to write a letter to the clerk of the meeting expressing your wish to join formally, since Quakers are often reluctant to make someone feel pressured to join.

Branches of Friends Today

In the United States there are four major distinct branches of Friends. The distinctions between them fall primarily into these categories:

- **Manner of worship**
 - "Unprogrammed" silent worship without pastoral leadership
 - "Programmed" or "Pastoral" worship guided by a pastor, with or without a period of silence

- **Theological emphasis**
 - "Orthodox," placing stronger emphasis on the authority of Christian scripture (especially the New Testament)
 - "Liberal," placing the strongest emphasis on the authority of the "Inward Light"

- **"Affiliating" organizations.** Some Friends are not associated with any of these organizations; some are affiliated with more than one.
 - Friends General Conference
 - Friends United Meeting
 - Evangelical Friends Church International

- **Evangelism**
 - Some branches practice missionary or evangelical work, as well as social service, while others limit themselves primarily to service work

Liberal Friends

Liberal Friends meetings practice unprogrammed worship. They emphasize the authority of the Inward Light, and their membership contains both those who identify themselves as Christians and those who do not. They are often active in service work, but generally not in missionary or evangelical activities. Many liberal meetings are affiliated with Friends General Conference; some are dually affiliated with FGC and Friends United Meeting; some are independent and unaffiliated.

"Liberal" Friends are sometimes identified (and even self-identified) as having two sub-groups: "Universalist Liberal" and "Christ-Centered Liberal."

Universalist Liberal Friends, while recognizing that Quakerism has historically been a branch of Christianity, do not believe that Quakerism is or should be limited to a Christian understanding of God. Friends who hold this perspective often see Quakerism as a meeting ground for followers of various world religions – and of none at all.

Christ-Centered Liberal Friends hold that, while Quakerism should not be defined by any particular set of beliefs, the life and teachings of Jesus are central to their personal faith journey. Some Christ-centered Liberal Friends would self-identify as Christians; others would not. Christ-centered Liberal Friends are in general agreement with Universalists in their view of the role of belief and practice. While Christ-centered Friends find the life and teachings of Jesus to be deeply significant for them as individuals, they are often comfortable co-existing in Meetings that have no common faith in Jesus.

Conservative Friends

Conservative Friends are "conservative" in the sense that they tend to "conserve" the Friends tradition as it was believed and practiced in the mid-19th century. In their meetings, they adhere to unprogrammed worship, and some members continue to practice traditional "plainness" of dress and speech. They acknowledge the authority of "Christ Within" and also of the Christian scripture.

Conservative Friends do not have an affiliating organization beyond the level of their yearly meetings (regional groupings).

Pastoral Friends

Pastoral Friends meetings practice "programmed" worship services often guided by pastors. This branch has traditionally emphasized the authority of Christian scripture. They are active in service and missionary work. Most pastoral Friends meetings are affiliated through Friends United Meeting.

Evangelical Friends

Evangelical Friends churches are similar to other Evangelical Christian bodies, with a strong emphasis on the authority of Christian scripture. These Friends practice programmed worship and are more likely to call their congregation a "church" rather than a "meeting." They are active in missionary, evangelical and service work, and are generally affiliated with Evangelical Friends Church International.

From <http://friendswoodfriends.org/visitor-info/friends-overview/>

Friends Overview

Friends, also called Quakers, had their origin in seventeenth-century England. As a young man, George Fox (pictured) longed for a genuine faith which he did not find in the cold, legalistic church of his time. He looked in vain for human help, and studied the Bible so thoroughly that he learned much of it by memory. After four years of searching, he found inner peace through trusting Jesus Christ as his Savior. Soon he began to tell others about the Gospel of Christ as God's way to free people from sin. As Fox shared the reality he had found, others responded and joined him in spreading the good news of salvation. Thus a movement of Christian renewal was born in 1647 which was to become known in time as the Friends Church, or Society of Friends. A rapid period of growth began in June, 1652, in northern England.



The Message Of Friends

Fox and early Quakers declared that salvation is a personal matter between the individual and God. No human mediator or outward ordinance is necessary. Therefore the Friends message with its clear, spiritual interpretation of the Gospel was a logical conclusion of the Protestant Reformation. With its emphasis on spiritual reality and without dependence on outward rites, Quakerism fulfilled the development of doctrine begun over a century earlier by Martin Luther.

Friends endeavored to rediscover New Testament doctrine in its threefold nature of knowing about Jesus Christ historically, knowing Him personally in religious experience, and following His pattern of life. They recognized the role of the Holy Spirit in revealing sin and leading people to new life in Christ. Rather than merely dispensing with all outward ordinances, they taught positively that true baptism is that of Christ's Spirit within, and real communion takes place in fellowship with the Bread of life.

Friends As A Church (Society Of Friends)

The dynamic message of Friends attracted thousands of people, and the early Quaker movement grew rapidly; some have called it an "explosion". They are thought to have taken the name "Friends" from the statement of Jesus in John 15:14 that "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you". They also called themselves "Friends of Truth" or "Publishers of Truth". The term "Quaker" was originally a derisive nickname. For legal reasons it became necessary in England to use the name "Society of Friends" as English law recognized only one established Church.

Many consider the word "church" belongs to the total invisible body of believers. Therefore some Friends hesitate to use the word to refer to any one part of the body of Christ (as a certain denomination) or to the building used as a place of worship. In a spiritual sense Fox and his followers did use "church" freely when referring to the group of believers to whom they ministered. Today, many Friends congregations call themselves the Friends Church. Others are careful to use the term "meeting" for a group of believers and "meetinghouse" for the place of worship.

From The Christian Cyclopedia

1. Commonly called Quakers; religious body founded ca. 1652 in Eng. by George Fox. Followers first called themselves Children of Truth. or Children of Light; finally adopted the name Religious Society of Friends. Their number grew rapidly, including many of the higher classes, ministers, army officers, justices. Converts included W. Penn and R. Barclay. During the first decades Friends suffered much persecution, largely because they held public meetings (other nonconformists met in secret); they also disparaged clergy, sacraments, and churches, interrupted services, and refused to take oaths, pay tithes, and take off hats as a show of deference. By 1656 Quakerism reached New Eng., where it encountered persecution especially by Puritans in Massachusetts, who hanged four Quakers in Boston. Pennsylvania offered Quakers an asylum where they prospered and became known for their kind treatment of Indians and their efforts toward abolition of slavery.

2. The Soc. of Friends as a whole recognizes the historical value of the ecumenical creeds but does not regard them as binding; some declarations of faith have been issued (e.g., those of 1658, 1663, 1671, 1693, and 1887) in self-defense or for the information of non-Quakers. The declaration adopted 1879 in Ohio ran counter to conservative Quaker teaching in holding that God saves through preaching. Barclay and his followers acknowledged the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, but Quakers often moved in thought-patterns of dynamic monarchianism¹ and anti-Trinitarianism. Other teachings result from the “inner light” theory. This theory, not agreed on in detail by all Quakers, holds in general that God communicates with man, that He does not leave Himself without witness in man's heart, and that the measure of light thus given grows by obedience. The redemption of Christ is not sufficient, but gives man the power to complete it; an inward redemption must follow, accomplished when the capacity for justification becomes active. Justification is not a declaratory act, but a moral change enabling the believer to acquire righteousness by works. God gives His Spirit also without the means of His Word; it is possible to be saved without knowledge of the historical Christ. All who are illumined by the “inner light” and are obedient to it are mems. of the church Baptism and the Lord's Supper are regarded as mere rites without intrinsic value. Services are completely non-liturgical. Assembled worshipers sit silently

¹ View that developed primarily in the 2nd and 3rd century, stressing that God is a single being, thereby trying to preserve monotheism and unity (monarchy) of the Godhead. Two divergent views arose:

- Dynamic Monarchianism. Christ is a mere man (though conceived by the Holy Spirit and born in a wonderful way of the Virgin Mary) whom God endowed with His power.
- Modalistic Monarchianism. View that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not 3 persons but 3 modes or forms of God's activity; God revealed Himself as Father in the work of creation, as Son in the work of redemption, and as the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification.

until someone is called by the “inner light” to speak. If no one is so moved the meeting ends in silence. God did not institute a special ministry. But ministers are employed, though not ordained; most of them do not receive salary.

3. Quakers believe that the dignity and essential worth of the individual rest on the measure of the Spirit that he possesses. They believe in the brotherhood of man and respect for human rights. They advocate broad humanitarianism and are active in many phases of philanthropy. They are opposed in principle to participation in war, capital punishment, and litigation. Church organization is simple, including Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings.

4. Friends United Meeting (formerly Five Years Meeting of Friends. present name adopted 1965). Organized 1902; largest Friends body in US; composed of 14 Yearly Meetings, including 3 outside the US; belongs to NCC

5. Oregon Yearly Meeting of Friends Church. Withdrew from Five Years Meeting 1926.

6. Religious Society of Friends, Kansas Yearly Meeting. Withdrew from Five Years Meeting 1937.

7. Religious Society of Friends (Conservative). “Wilburites”; founded 1845 by John Wilbur (1774–1856) of Rhode Island; separated from main body of Friends to maintain primitive teachings.

8. Religious Society of Friends (General Conference). “Hicksites” followers of Elias Hicks (1748–1830), who led the most liberal elements of Friends into separation 1827–28; composed of 8 Yearly Meetings and 1 Quarterly Meeting. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends is a member of the NCC

9. Central Yearly Meeting of Friends. Evangelical and fundamental group with churches in Ohio, Arkansas, Michigan, Indiana, and missions in Bolivia.

10. Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends Church (Evangelical Friends Alliance). Name changed 1971 to Evangelical Friends Church, Eastern Regional Central office in Damascus, Ohio.

11. Pacific Yearly Meeting of Friends. Est. 1947 at Palo Alto, California.