

**Part One: A Brief Look at 350 Years of Quaker History  
With Emphasis on the Beginnings**

“The World Turned Upside Down,” was a quote from the Bible that was often used in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, a time of intense political and religious turmoil. In fact, a time when there was virtually no separation between religious and political beliefs.

Quakerism began in the northwest corner of England in the mid-1600's. Being far from the center of authority, neglected by the Established Anglican Church, the northwest was fertile ground for rebellion. Religious groups like the Baptists and Puritans and others had already taken root. Many people were questioning the old forms of religion and government. Radical groups like the Levellers and Diggers fought hard for the rights of the common person but ultimately lost.

George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, was born into a Puritan family in 1624. He was a serious child who was always asking questions. In his village he was famed for his honesty. He questioned the hypocrisy he saw around him, among his peers who were riotous on Saturday and pious on Sunday, and among the ministers themselves. After much Bible study and wandering about England, seeking the advice of ministers and members of various religious sects, at age 23 he had one of several mystical experiences, which he would later describe in his journal.

“And when my hopes in them (the preachers) and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, oh then, I heard a voice which said, ‘There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,’ and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.” His first-hand experience of the living Christ as the Inner Teacher set the pattern for the ministry that followed. He would often use the phrase, “This I know experimentally,” meaning experientially. For Fox, and those who later joined him, there would be no intermediary between individuals and God and no

authority but the Inner Christ. The Bible was very important but to Fox it was the spirit behind the scriptures and how the individual interacted with the scriptures that mattered. Early Friends believed in continuing revelation: God is still speaking.

At first, Fox had no intention of founding a new sect but wished only to convince people of the Truth, to return to the original form of Christianity—communal and egalitarian—before it became dominated by church hierarchy and dogma. His message of the indwelling spirit—variously termed the Inner Christ, the Seed, the Inner Light— attracted many followers. And then the turning point, the attainment of critical mass occurred in 1652. At that time, many small groups of Seekers rebelling against the empty forms and rituals of the established churches, were already meeting in silence to wait upon the Lord. But they were diffused and needed someone like Fox to join them together and to inspire them with his ministry.

Fox refused to submit to the rules of the dominant culture. He did not doff his hat to someone above him in station. He used “Thee” and “Thou” rather than the formal “you” to everyone, no matter what their rank. He would not swear oaths, insisting there was only one standard of truth. He refused to serve in the army because he said he “lived in that life and spirit that takes away the occasion for war.” He would sometimes interrupt church services and argue with the preacher. He was often beaten and imprisoned, but nothing stopped him. At one service he threw out this provocative question, “You say Christ sayeth this and the apostles say this, but what canst thou say?” Margaret Fell, the wife of Judge Fell of Swarthmoor Hall, who was in attendance at that service actually wept at the truth of his words. Here was another turning point—Margaret Fell is rightly considered the mother of Quakerism. In addition to being deeply spiritual, she had a talent for organization, having to manage a vast estate while her husband was out riding circuit. She opened her home to the fledgling group for worship. (Remember that until the Toleration Act of 1689 it was illegal to hold a Quaker Meeting for Worship.) She started a fund for the travelling ministers, those known as the Valiant Sixty (actually 66, including 12 women). These Publishers of Truth went all over Britain, and to Constantinople, Rome, the American colonies, and elsewhere. In most places they were met with persecution. They were beaten, tortured, imprisoned and killed. But this did

not stop Fox or his followers. It's interesting that among the radical ideas of early Friends, the equality of women was one of the major reasons that Friends were persecuted. It was shocking to insist that women have souls and women could be ministers.

Fox and early Friends started out with an astonishing level of optimism about the possibility of perfection and universal salvation, in sharp contrast to the Calvinist doctrine of sinfulness and damnation. This core belief and the belief in the equality of all, with no need for a hired minister with credentials from Oxford or Cambridge, proved to be very attractive to large numbers of people. Later the belief in perfection was moderated to the concept we are familiar with today: we are each given a measure of the Inward Light and must live up to that measure, and then we will be given further Light.

Fox, was not only a mystical visionary, but a capable organizer. He soon realized that the leadings of individuals needed to be tested by the corporate wisdom of the community of Friends. He could have established a church with himself at the head but he believed too strongly in the wisdom of the group and rejected hierarchical forms. He rode throughout England (and also visited the American colonies) starting Monthly Meetings (which do business once a month like this Meeting), and regional gatherings-- Quarterly Meetings and Yearly Meetings. This original form of grass roots organization has survived, with some ups and downs, for over 350 years.

In Colonial North America in 1681, William Penn, one of the few Quakers from the British upper classes, began his "Holy Experiment," an attempt to establish a civil government based on Quaker principles of non-violence and equality. He treated Native Americans with respect and had fair dealings with them. Not all the non-Quaker settlers who were already in the area that became Pennsylvania were in sympathy with Quaker values and much conflict resulted. Although Penn's experiment was not an unqualified success, he did a lot of good and his Frame of Government for the colony inspired later writers of the U.S. Constitution. In 1756 Quakers resigned from the Assembly rather than vote for funds for the King to fight the French and Indian wars. At this point the

Holy Experiment came to an end. However, although they were no longer directly involved in government, Quakers were still prominent in business and influential in philanthropic associations.

Quakerism in both Britain and the American colonies was undergoing changes. As happens in many religious and social movements, the zeal and confidence of the first generation gradually changed to a self-protective, cautious attitude. The desire to preserve purity became more important than converting others to the Truth. Outward symbols of piety developed—plain dress, plain speech, and living apart to separate themselves from a corrupt world. This is when Quakers became a “Peculiar People” and the Quietist period began. Nothing should distract from diligently waiting for God’s word. All of the arts and all forms of excessive emotion were to be avoided. More rules were imposed, such as disownment for marrying out. The role of the Elders became dominant. Yet, despite this rather chilly, rigid environment, individual Friends followed their leadings and made a difference in the world.

In New Jersey, John Woolman 1728-72, often called the Quaker St. Francis, acted on his concerns for war tax resistance, Native American rights, the needs of the poor, and slave-holding. He “labored” with those who disagreed with him about slavery and refused to profit in any way from slavery. Slowly Woolman—and others like Benjamin Lay—changed hearts and minds, and by 1776 most Yearly Meetings forbade the buying and selling of slaves.

In England Elizabeth Fry 1780-1845 helped women prisoners and worked for prison reform.

Back in America Lucretia Coffin Mott 1793-1880 worked for abolition with a wide variety of Quakers and non-Quakers. She co-founded the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society which was interracial and interdenominational. She welcomed people of all races into her home. In 1848 Mott and other women, many of them Quakers, organized the Seneca Falls Convention for Women’s Rights. She also advocated peaceful non-resistance, Native American rights, temperance and prison reform.

The actions of Woolman, Fry, Mott, and other outspoken Quakers were not always supported by their Meetings—in fact, Mott was almost disowned for speaking in front of “promiscuous” groups. Many Quakers, whose names we know like Levi Coffin and others who remain anonymous, were involved in the Underground Railroad. But other Quakers did not participate because they were not comfortable with breaking the law.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century we see splits within Quakerism, mainly stemming from the Evangelical Revival and the fact that many Meetings had become lifeless. The splits were often between those who wanted more authority placed on scripture and those who believed the Inward Light should remain paramount. Bitter separations occurred within Yearly Meetings. After 1867 Revival Meetings were added to worship in some meetings, with preaching, singing and emotional expression. These practices eventually led to the hiring of pastors beginning in 1875 and to the biggest split of all between the unprogrammed, silent Meetings and the pastoral Friends churches. The Friends Church does missionary work with the result that the largest Yearly Meeting in the world today is in Kenya. There are also large numbers of pastoral Friends in Peru, Bolivia, Nepal, and elsewhere.

Quaker history isn't in a straight line. Each generation re-interprets the stories of our beginnings in the context of its own day. Joseph Rowntree 1868-1905 in Britain and Rufus Jones 1863-1948 in the U.S. worked to reinvigorate the unprogrammed meeting and return it to its mystical roots. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, Modernist or Liberal Yearly Meetings came to focus more on social justice than on theological questions.

In 1917 The American Friends Service Committee was founded. The AFSC plunged into peace work, establishing feeding programs in Europe in the aftermath of WWI. In the 1930's AFSC helped starving miners in Appalachia and provided relief to victims of the Spanish Civil War. After WWII in Europe they were involved in reconstruction efforts and distributing much needed food. In 1947 The Nobel Peace Prize was jointly awarded to British and American Friends. AFSC continues to do good work all over the world.

And now to the origins of Eugene Meeting. In 1882 Hannah and Joel Bean, wishing to avoid the splits that were happening in Iowa Yearly Meeting as some meetings became pastoral, moved to California. They started the College Park Association of Friends in 1889. Although they were not Liberal Quakers they believed strongly in independence. In 1931 Anna Cox, a granddaughter of the Beans, and her husband Howard Brinton, one of the great Quaker educators and writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, gathered together Independent meetings on the west coast, unaffiliated with any other Quaker organization. Friendly to all but not affiliated to any of the national organizations of meetings and churches.

Friends in Eugene started a Preparative Meeting in 1949 which became a Monthly Meeting in 1956. North Pacific YM separated from Pacific YM and held its first Annual Session in 1972. Pacific and North Pacific Yearly Meetings remain unaffiliated to this day. We do, however, connect with Quaker groups involved in peace and justice concerns.

In observing the arc of Quaker history we see some slips and falls, as well as shining moments. If Quakerism as a whole hasn't always lived up to the noble ideals of the 1650's, we still retain those ideals. I believe most of us are sincerely open to the leadings of the Spirit and wish to live up to the measure of Light we each have been given and to manifest Quaker testimonies on peace, equality, simplicity, community, and stewardship in our everyday lives.

## **Part Two - What Friends Believe**

Friends do not share a universal creed. However, we do have shared beliefs that arise from our history and experience. George Fox's leading to seek a direct experience with the Divine is followed by Friends today as we sit in silent worship connecting with that higher power without the intermediary of a clergy person.

Friends come from many backgrounds. Even though the roots of Quakerism are Christian, in our tradition of unprogrammed Friends, one can be a Jewish Quaker, a Buddhist Quaker, a Pagan Quaker, etc. Friends jokingly refer to their take-all-comers approach with the term JewBuSuQu. This would be someone who is all at once a Jewish, Buddhist, Sufi Quaker.

Friends believe that the Spirit is universal and available to everyone everywhere if only we center ourselves and make ourselves available to it. The Divine has guidance to offer through messages that may come to us during worship. These messages may present themselves as leadings to be put into action in our everyday lives in support of our own growth and development. Messages may develop into leadings to extend our Light out into the world to support others. Or these messages may become vocal ministry to be shared during the Meeting for Worship. Friends believe that messages of this type are important to share because they may be meant for someone else's ears.

The belief that there is that of God in everyone is a fundamental understanding of Friends. We strive to treat all people of all ages and backgrounds as equal. When in mixed-age groups, we give children equal time and attention as adults.

We believe that each person holds a piece of the whole truth in any community situation. This is especially noticeable as we practice our business. We need all voices in order to hear the voice of the Spirit.

You may sometime hear the traditional Quaker refrain, “Way will open.” This refers to the belief that the Spirit is constantly at work in our lives and provides opportunities for growth and new Light.

We believe in taking our time, that listening to each other and preserving respect for each other is more important than forging ahead with action. When timely action is required we work together to preserve our practice so that we act with discernment guided by the Spirit and not in haste.

Friends’ practice is rooted in peace. Peace begins within and is sought and strived for in the world. This includes speaking up for those whose voices are not heard and lending a hand to those in need.

Friends believe in taking a stand for social justice. Though Friends have been and sometimes still are complicit in the oppression of minority populations, Quaker history is steeped in organizing and mobilizing for peace and justice since the beginning of our history. Other faiths often think of Friends as one of the “peace churches.”

Friends use many names for God because each person’s experience is their own. This practice of personally defining the Spirit and recognizing how the Spirit moves in our lives makes us responsible for our own spiritual growth. Because we do not rely on a formal statement of faith, we must constantly be asking ourselves, “What do I believe?” One of the ways we do this is through our living testimonies.

Testimonies are ethical principles that guide us and by which we measure our actions and attitudes. Common testimonies include Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship. Rather than defining what each of these testimonies means, we allow for their ongoing development by posing related questions meant for deep reflection. These questions are called queries. Instead of defining equality, for example, and then admonishing each other to practice it, we may consider the following queries: “Do we regularly examine ourselves for evidence of privilege and prejudice?”



“How do we make our Meeting open to all regardless of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and identity, and class?”

We use queries in clearness committees as well where we gather to support one Friend – or sometimes two in the case of marriage - as they seek Divine guidance for a decision in their life. We believe we can act as catalysts for the revelation of the Divine to those Friends by posing queries that prompt them to open their hearts and minds.

Another phrase you may hear in Meeting for Worship for Business or in committees is, “That Friend speaks my mind.” This is used when the essence of what one Friend feels is expressed in another’s words. Even though we do not all believe the same things, you will find that there are many shared sentiments in Quakerism as well as many opportunities to learn from each other’s beliefs.

### **Part Three - Demystifying Quaker organization and Quaker terminology:**

1. **Eugene Friends Meeting is called a “monthly meeting”** because we have meetings for business once a month. Our Faith and Practice says: *“The monthly meeting is the fundamental unit of the Religious Society of Friends. It consists of a group of Friends who meet together at regular intervals to wait upon God in meeting for worship and meeting for business.”*
2. **The meeting for worship** is the heart of the monthly meeting. The “unprogrammed meeting for worship” is our historically distinctive Quaker practice: We wait in worship, grounded in expectant listening for Divine inspiration and guidance.
3. As members and attenders of an unprogrammed meeting, we are each ministers in word and act, responsible for the good order and material needs of the meeting, for visitation of each other, and for faithfulness in testimonies – *“all these things, in the measure of Light that is given, fall upon each person in the meeting.”* (F&P)
4. **Clerking team:** We don’t have a minister, but we do have a Presiding Clerk - or in our case, 2 co-clerks. The clerk’s job is not the same as a minister; they are not paid, and they are not in charge of ministry (any more than the rest of us). They preside over the monthly business meeting and serve as the glue that holds the various committees together, seeing the big picture.
5. **Committees:** Like many Friends Meetings our work gets done in committee. Each meeting discerns what committees they need at any given time. Descriptions of our ongoing “standing” committees are posted on the bulletin board in the hall, along with the name of the current clerk or contact. I’ll just mention 2 committees right now:
6. **Worship/Ministry/Nurturing Committee** does the work of supporting our Meeting for Worship, greeting newcomers, overseeing marriages and memorials, caring for the health of our Meeting for Worship, leading worship-sharing sessions on various topics, and ministering to Friends spiritual and physical needs, such as organizing rides, food, clearness or support committees.
7. **Children’s Religious Education Committee** does the same for the children of our Meeting, as well as finding teachers for First Day School (Sunday School) and helping to integrate children and youth into the Meeting Community.
8. **We also sometimes have ad hoc committees** that serve for a year or two then disband- currently we have an ad hoc Inclusivity Committee helping us to examine Trans issues.
9. **We have several paid employees:** Our two Hearthkeepers schedule the use of the building, edit our weekly announcements, and clean and set up the rooms. Our Treasurer cares for the money, payroll, and reimbursements. And we have a few childcare workers who are full employees also.
10. **We have two Worship Groups** under our care- Florence and Umpqua. These are small meetings without enough people-power to take on the full responsibility

of being a Meeting. Becoming a Preparative Meeting would be the next step towards being a Monthly Meeting.

11. **A Quarterly Meeting** is a group of two or more monthly meetings in a given geographical area. Our quarterly meeting is Willamette Quarterly, which is made up of all the meetings in Oregon. Currently our QM meets 3 times a year, in Fall at Camp Cleawox, in Winter at Corvallis, and in Spring in Portland.
12. **A Yearly Meeting** is composed of Quakers in a broader area. North Pacific Yearly Meeting's members are located in the states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. NPYM holds an annual meeting in the summer, but works year-round to support its members by fostering communication, leadership, education, and right action.
13. **The Junior Friends** are our high-school aged Friends, and our kids have a very strong tie to NPYM Junior Friends, who meet twice a year, at summer camp after annual session, and at the winter retreat. They do a large service project trip every other year.
14. **Business and unity on decisions:** Our meeting meets monthly to seek unity on everything-- political action, organization, money matters, committee work, and so on. Our business meetings are a time of worship -- Friends Meeting organization is bottom up- since we send ideas for action on to Quarterly and Yearly Meetings, we have a responsibility to check that our actions are consistent with the convictions of Friends.
15. **Involvement in the Life of the Meeting:** As I said, our Meeting runs on committee work. Our Nominating Committee seeks to find the right fit for each member and attender, and not everyone can work on a committee. We have many other kinds of projects and services a person can get involved in. Ask me later about the interfaith breakfast project I'm part of, or the upcoming work party!
16. **Membership:** Quakers are in no rush to suggest an attender become a member, but eventually you might get a tap on the shoulder from someone on W/M/N asking "Hast thou considered membership, Friend?" The choice to become a member is a leading of the Spirit. *"Membership in the Religious Society of Friends involves a continuing commitment. It implies a readiness and desire to join in the common effort of the Society to seek and follow the Inward Light, as well as some experience and understanding of that Spirit as it is known by Friends."* (F&P)

**Resources:**

- *Weekly Announcements*: A few printed copies are on the table in the hall; to receive by email, please send a request to [Hearthkeeper@eugenefriendsmeeting.org](mailto:Hearthkeeper@eugenefriendsmeeting.org)
- *Website*: <http://eugenefriendsmeeting.org/>
- *Extra copies of Friends Journal and Western Friend*, in hall rack, available to borrow

**In the Eugene Friends Meeting Library:**

- *North Pacific Yearly Meeting (NPYM) Faith and Practice* (available to purchase)
- *Friends for 350 Years* by Howard Brinton, with updates by Margaret Hope Bacon
- *The Quakers, A Very Short Introduction* by Pink Dandelion
- *Pendle Hill Pamphlets*

**Online:**

- *Google*: “Quakers YouTube” and among many results you will get *Quaker Speak*, weekly videos on various topics, presented by Friends Journal.

*The notes were compiled from various sources, many of them listed above, by the members of the Quaker Studies Committee. (9/2018)*