

An Introduction to
Quaker Testimonies

San Francisco Friends School



Mission

San Francisco Friends School

San Francisco Friends School is dedicated to educating, inspiring, and nurturing children in the Quaker school tradition.

The daily life of our school is rooted in the Quaker values of simplicity, integrity, mutual respect, peaceful problem solving, and service to others.

We strive to develop in each child intellectual curiosity and passion for learning. We challenge students with academic rigor, while honoring individual strengths and abilities.

We seek to create a community that embraces children and families of all backgrounds, recognizing that diversity is essential to the vitality of our school.

We engage with the larger world around us, working toward the Quaker ideal of a caring and just society.

“There is no curriculum of values. They gradually emerge over time through students’ interactions with their fellows and through the impact of their environment and experience, until their values become part of them, and they feel them in their bones.”

– STEPHEN G. CARY, QUAKER EDUCATOR

This booklet is the collective work of members of the Quaker Life Committee of the Board of Trustees at the San Francisco Friends School. The committee includes trustees, teachers, members of the San Francisco Friends Meeting, administrators, and parents. All tend to the spiritual life of the school by honoring the school’s mission, striving to build knowledge and understanding of Quaker values, welcoming children, teachers, and parents to Meeting for Worship, and encouraging members of the school community to learn more deeply about aspects of Friends education such as peaceful problem-solving, stewardship, and inclusive decision-making. The Quaker Life Committee created a packet of readings about Quaker values in the summer of 2009; this “Introduction to Quaker Testimonies” includes a brief history of each testimony or practice, some information on contemporary Quakers, perspectives on the testimony as it is lived at San Francisco Friends School, as well as queries to guide one’s reflections.

We are grateful to the Friends Council on Education for the inspiring literature we share with our teachers and families. This booklet leans heavily upon the work of our fellow Quaker educators, whose efforts to distill and disseminate the 350-year-old Quaker testimonies to 21st century students and families serve as a lively reminder that these values are fresh, relevant, and deeply compelling.

The Quaker Life Committee
San Francisco Friends School

We have followed the acronym “SPICES” in introducing the testimonies: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship. We have also included silent worship and the reflective pedagogy that form the heart of Quaker education.

Testimonies

A “testimony is different from a secular value. The word testimony is used by Quakers to describe a witness to the living truth within the human heart as it is acted out in everyday life... Testimony is a way of living not a creed. It is not a form of words but a mode of life based on the realization that there is that of God in everybody, that all human beings are equal, that all life is interconnected.”

– JONATHAN DALE, *FAITH INTO ACTION*

Quaker testimonies or values are taught both explicitly and implicitly at San Francisco Friends School. Many of them are learned experientially; from their first days in kindergarten, children are introduced to sitting in silence, problem solving and decision making in a group, and to daily service and stewardship.

Queries

We have included queries throughout our “Introduction to Quaker Testimonies.” Quakers use queries for personal reflection, self-examination, or spirited discussion. At San Francisco Friends School queries help us frame a concern we wish to explore in a faculty, student, or parent discussion. We post these simple questions in our classrooms, read queries to center reflection at Meeting for Worship, and use them to guide discourse in our discernment of a difficult issue or quandary.

Queries serve “not as an outward set of rules, but as a framework within which we assess our convictions and examine, clarify and consider the direction of our lives and the life of the community.”

– PHILADELPHIA YEARLY MEETING, *FAITH AND PRACTICE*

Simplicity

Spirit-led Restraint

Friends believe in simple living. This has historically meant simple dress, plain speech, and unadorned Meeting Houses for worship. Through the simplicity testimony, Friends encourage one another to look beyond the outward and to the inward.

In contemporary terms, Friends try to live lives in which activities and possessions do not get in the way of open and unencumbered communication with others and with one's own spirituality. Symbolically, by clearing away the clutter, Friends are able to more readily hear the "still small voice" within.

At San Francisco Friends School, the testimony of simplicity guides students and staff to focus on fewer ideas or materials, to explore key concepts more deeply and fully, to set priorities, and to prefer clarity over clutter. Simplicity at school means practicing mindful restraint and paring away extraneous possessions, transitions, and distractions. Simplicity is a balm to contemporary anxiety; "less is more" helps children (and adults) feel joy in the present moment.

Simplicity at San Francisco Friends School is also an aesthetic principle. Creating open, clear, and light-filled spaces was the core aesthetic for the design of our school's permanent home.

“Living simply is the right ordering of our lives and priorities.”

– LEONARD KENWORTHY

*“When true simplicity is gained,
To bow and to bend we will not be ashamed.
To turn, turn will be our delight,
'Til by turning, turning we come round right.”*

– SHAKER HYMN

“Quaker simplicity... has little to do with how many things you own and everything to do with not letting your possessions own you.”

– ROBERT LAWRENCE SMITH, *A QUAKER BOOK OF WISDOM*

“In order to seek one's own direction, one must simplify the mechanics of ordinary, everyday life.”

– PLATO



Queries

How do I show that I value people more than things?

In what ways do I strive to not be greedy?

How do I prevent trivial things from diluting my energy or scattering my thoughts?

What is truly important to me? How can I “clear the way” to focus on what I value?

Peace

Peacemaking at Home and Abroad

Friends oppose and refuse to engage in war and violence. The Quaker belief in peace is not just a rejection of war, but an endeavor to see “that of God” in every person, regardless of nationality, race, or social status. In addition to renouncing war and violence, Friends are led to eliminate the occasion for war and violence—causes such as ignorance, racism, and poverty. Striving for peace is enacted daily, in interactions with family, neighbors, fellow community members, and those from other countries.

At San Francisco Friends School a safe, peaceful space is daily and deliberately cultivated. Problem solving and conflict negotiation skills occupy a central place in our curriculum. Children learn that in order to promote peace in the larger world they must first create peace within. In the older grades especially, the tough questions about war and unrest in our society and around the world are faced full on, woven into the study of world history, religions, and current events. Peace is developed in the community, by the community, as a community.

“The Quaker way is to so order the inner life that outer pressures can be adequately met and dealt with... In one sense we become independent of outer tumults and conflicts, but in another sense we are not independent because we must seek to reproduce in the world around us the inner peace created within ourselves.”

– HOWARD BRINTON, *THE QUAKER DOCTRINE OF INWARD PEACE*

“Peace is not a distant goal that we seek, but the means by which we arrive at that goal.”

– MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

“At every opportunity, be peacemakers in your homes, workplaces and communities.”

– FRIENDS COUNCIL OF EDUCATION, *ADVICES AND QUERIES*

“If you want to make peace, you don’t talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies.”

– MOSHE DAYAN (1915-1981)

“Peace is like a window. Once it has been shattered it is hard to put back together.”

– SAN FRANCISCO FRIENDS SCHOOL 4TH GRADER

“Peace, in the sense of the absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold. It will not remove the pain of torture inflicted on a prisoner of conscience. It does not comfort those who have lost their loved ones in floods caused by senseless deforestation in a neighboring country. Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free.”

– FOURTEENTH DALAI LAMA



Queries

How do I try to not hurt others and help others do the same?

How do I forgive those who have said and done things that hurt me?

Where does peace begin? How can it start in me, grow in our school, and spread throughout the world?

– SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL THIRD GRADER

How do I try to solve problems with others using caring words and actions?

Integrity

Consistency in Word and Deed

Friends often summarize the integrity testimony with the historical injunction “let your yea be yea and your nay be nay.” The need to deal honestly with all others and with oneself is still the foundation of Friends behavior in the world.

Speaking the truth is so central to the faith that contemporary Friends do not take oaths when appearing in a court of law, rejecting the idea that there is one standard of truth for daily living and another for the court. Instead, they “affirm” to tell the truth. In another manifestation, integrity means being true to oneself—striving to have one’s inward and outward self be the same.

At the root of the word integrity is the concept of wholeness. At San Francisco Friends School, we value the social, emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual dimensions of each child and adult. To be whole is to have one’s entire sense of self intact. To be whole also means to be true, to speak the truth and do the right thing, even when no one is looking.

“Let your life speak.”

– QUAKER TENET

“Truth is the only safe ground to stand on.”

– ELIZABETH CADY STANTON

“Truth-telling simplifies life—lying burdens and complicates life.”

– ROBERT LAWRENCE SMITH, *THE QUAKER BOOK OF WISDOM*

“Live so that when your children think of fairness and integrity, they think of you.”

– H. JACKSON BROWN, JR.

“The time is always right to do what is right.”

– MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.



Queries

How do I hold to my belief yet keep my mind open to new truth?

How do I strive to say and do what I believe in my heart is right?

Do I do the right thing even when no one is looking?

Community

Living in Fellowship

While the Quaker faith is founded on the principle that every person can have a direct relationship with God, an equally central tenet lies in the power of the gathered community. For example, early Friends relied on the support of their community to provide for the families whose breadwinner was imprisoned for their beliefs.

When Friends gather in silence to worship, they are collectively seeking the will of God, rather than meditating individually. Shared worship signifies unity and trust. At a Quaker wedding, the union is formalized not by a clergy member but by the signature of every member gathered, recorded on the couple's wedding certificate.

San Francisco Friends School strives to build a sense of community in and amongst its various constituents—students, teachers, parents, and staff. Events are designed with community building at their heart. Our school seeks to help students grow into their world in expanding concentric circles, beginning with the community of the classroom, then into the broader community of the school, neighborhood, city, and beyond. Community building centers on simple gestures of kindness, warmth, and inclusion. Our Parents' Association was inspired to create its Circle of Friends committee in order to provide family-to-family support for community members in need.

“Community is a place where the connections felt in the heart make themselves known in bonds between people, and where the tugging and pulling of those bonds keep opening up our hearts.”

– PARKER PALMER

“Perhaps community is a constellation. Each one of us is a light in the emerging collective brightness. A constellation of light has the greater power of illumination than any single light would have on its own.”

– JOHN O'DONOHUE, *ETERNAL ECHOES*

“Community is the matrix in which young people can develop the trust and self-confidence essential for the risk-taking required in education. In community everyone can learn to take responsibility, to follow or take the lead. In community we can learn to give and receive love.”

– PAUL LACEY, *GROWING INTO GOODNESS*

“We cannot seek achievement for ourselves and forget about progress and prosperity for our community. Our ambitions must be broad enough to include the aspirations and needs of others, for their sakes and for our own.”

– CESAR CHAVEZ

“We want our children to be safe within their school community. For us that means safe to be different, safe to ask silly questions, and safe to make mistakes during the process of learning.”

– SAN FRANCISCO FRIENDS SCHOOL PARENT



Queries

How do I look for and love the best that is in each person?

How do I help others at school and create community by my words and deeds?

Do I treat all members of our community with equal dignity, respect, and kindness?

Equality

Social Justice

In contemporary terms, equality brings to mind equal access or equal rights. For Friends, equality refers to the belief of equality in the eyes of God, as well as to the idea that access to the inner Light is available to each person equally. Early Friends broke with the social custom of using “you” when addressing those of higher rank and “thou” for those of lower rank. As witness to the equality testimony, Friends chose to address everyone as “thou.”

Other early examples of the Friends equality testimony in action include the long-held belief that the Spirit works equally in both men and women; that slave owning was wrong (and this, over a hundred years before slave holding became outlawed); and the rejection of the death penalty. In current day terms this profound sense of equality leads Friends to treat each person with respect, looking for “that of God” in everyone.

At San Francisco Friends School we teach children to recognize that equality is essential, but different from sameness. Equality asks that we give and receive the same respect, kindness, and care for one another. It requires that we work to ensure that every person—from the elderly to the youngest among us—gets what he or she needs. We seek to build each child’s “eye for invisibles” and build from his or her innate sense of what is fair, a lifelong hunger for justice and equality.

At San Francisco Friends School we are all known by our first names; we share both duties and privileges as equitably as possible.

“Though all of us are attracted to physical beauty, cleverness, wittiness and intelligence, the Quaker affirmation that there is that of God in each person asserts that being worthy of respect does not depend on possessing attractive qualities or skills. Until we can respect another person without justification except that he or she is a child of God, it is not really respect.”

– PAUL A. LACEY, *GROWING INTO GOODNESS*

“Learn to be quiet enough to hear the sound of the genuine within yourself so that you can hear it in other people.”

– MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

“When [Susan B.] Anthony was once asked, ‘Do you pray?’ she responded, ‘I pray every second of my life; not on my knees, but with my work. My prayer is to lift women to equality with men. Work and worship are one with me.’”

– HUGH BARBOUR, *PLAIN LIVING*

“From the time they are tiny, kids are taught that they are part of a community and that everyone in a community has responsibilities to people who are their equals in all ways, regardless of their physical circumstance.”

– CAROLINE WEST, GERMANTOWN FRIENDS ALUMNA



Queries

How do I show that I am open to all people and different ideas?

How do I speak up when I see someone being treated poorly?

How do I look for the good in everyone?

How can I help things be fair so that everyone is included?

Stewardship/Service

Care for the Earth and Its Inhabitants

Friends strive to use God's gifts wisely, with gifts conceived in the broadest of terms. These gifts include not only material wealth, but environmental richness, a talent, good health, or wisdom. Friends believe that material gifts and the space they inhabit on earth are not theirs alone.

To Friends, good stewardship means taking care of what has been given, not just for themselves but for future generations. Here, the Integrity testimony comes into consideration as well, as Friends strive to spend their time and resources in accordance with their other beliefs so that the inner may be aligned with the whole.

At San Francisco Friends School, we seek to teach children—and remind ourselves—that we should be active stewards of things (our classroom, our building, our garden, the earth), of ourselves, of each other, and even of ideas and ideals. Through practice and reflection, students grow into an awareness of their responsibility in shaping the worlds they inhabit—from the culture of their classroom to the nature of their neighborhood to the environment around them.

“All things are connected. We did not weave the web of life. We are but a strand in it. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the people of the earth.”

– CHIEF SEATTLE

“The disciplines of silence, study and service provide the matrix for growth: silence opens us to change; study helps us to know the world; service challenges us to put our values into practice.”

– FRIENDS SEMINARY, NEW YORK

“Friends education helps students to know themselves, know the world, and feel empowered by the connection between the two. When service is accompanied by time for reflection, students begin to assume responsibility for their own lives and their values-based behavior.”

– FRIENDS COUNCIL OF EDUCATION

“All we possess are the gifts of God to us; now in distributing it to others, we act as his stewards...”

– JOHN WOOLMAN, 18TH CENTURY QUAKER ACTIVIST



Queries

How can I take care of my classroom and my school?

Do I avoid wasteful consumption and pollution?

Do I try to protect nature?

Do I take care of my body, the home of my spirit?

How can we maintain in ourselves, and encourage in others, a responsibility for the natural world based on reverence for life and a sense of the splendor of our surroundings?



SILENT REFLECTION

Friends gather in silence, in a practice centuries old, to clear the way for the “still small voice.” This silent gathering, called Meeting for Worship, is based on the belief that if one opens one’s heart and listens, one can hear what is right, and can live out these inner teachings. Nurturing awareness and capacity for reflection is often overlooked in traditional religion and education but is central to Quaker practice and pedagogy.

When a group settles into silence it feels to be more than a simple quieting down; the sense of collective thought deepens. Short periods of silence are also observed at other times, before a meal, before a decision is made, or when emotions need to be calmed. Quakers believe that silence is a gift, and what comes out of the silence is also a gift.

At San Francisco Friends school, students gather weekly for Meeting for Worship, a peaceful oasis amid the whirl and bustle of our active learning environments. In the classroom, silence is used as a tool to help children settle down into the business of learning, to invite reflection, and to allow time for the synthesis of ideas. Silence refreshes the spirit and makes way for deep thinking about both ethical and intellectual quandaries. It is a habit of mind that our students learn to nurture and cherish.

Friends Gather in Silence

“For Quakers, wisdom begins in silence. Quakers believe only when we have silenced our voices and our souls can we hear that ‘still small voice’ that dwells within each of us.”

– ROBERT LAWRENCE SMITH, *A QUAKER BOOK OF WISDOM*

“True silence is the rest of the mind; and is to the spirit, what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment.”

– WILLIAM PENN (1699)

“A Friends’ meeting, however silent, is at the very lowest a witness that worship is something other and deeper than words, and that it is to the unseen and eternal things that we desire to give the first place in our lives.”

– CAROLINE E. STEPHEN (1908)

“The goal is to cultivate an understanding that the silence is alive, that it is a time for settling and clarity, and that it helps to create a sense of community.”

– IRENE McHENRY, FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FRIENDS COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

“Silence has provided a way station for our son’s constantly traveling mind. It is a gift I believe he will carry through life.”

– SAN FRANCISCO FRIENDS SCHOOL PARENT

“My most powerful memory of my Quaker education is what I learned when I was surrounded by silence.”

– LUCY ROBERT SMILES, SIDWELL FRIENDS ALUMNA

“I like Meeting for Worship. It gives my ears a rest.”

– SAN FRANCISCO FRIENDS SCHOOL FIRST GRADER



“A true message from out of the silence might stick in the listener’s mind throughout the meeting, throughout the day, or throughout a lifetime.”

– SIDWELL FRIENDS SCHOOL ALUM

“I think peace and silence have a lot to do with each other. It seems as if they’re cousins, peace and silence. I think the world would be a much better place if everyone was silent for thirty minutes each week.”

– SAN FRANCISCO FRIENDS SCHOOL SIXTH GRADER

“Seek to know an inward stillness, even amidst the activities of daily life.”

– FRIENDS COUNCIL OF EDUCATION, *ADVICES AND QUERIES*

Queries

Do I make time in my day for silence, solitude, spiritual reflection and the growth of my inner life?

Have I taken time for rest and restoration each week?

How do I listen for the voice within?



PHOTO BY TIM GRIFFITH

We wish to thank the Sue Thomas Turner Quaker Education Fund for support to create a folder of Quaker readings for our teachers during the summer of 2009. This booklet is an outgrowth of that work.

We are grateful to the Friends Council on Education for the pamphlets, articles, and workshops that have inspired our founding trustees, teachers, and parents.

We deeply appreciate the kindness of our fellow Quaker educators, who have shared generously of their time and wisdom. This book was inspired by a similar booklet created at Sidwell Friends School; as a young Quaker school founded upon time-honored principles, we look to those who have stewarded Friends testimonies and ideals for hundreds of years.

For those interested in learning more, our library has books for both children and adults about Quaker principles, Friends education and the history of the Religious Society of Friends, as well as “seekers packets” created by the San Francisco Monthly Meeting. The San Francisco Meeting, at 65 Ninth Street, has an extensive library and a welcoming policy for borrowing books. There are resources on our website and on the website of the Friends Council on Education at www.friendscouncil.org.

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