

World Quaker Day Message Leann Williams

Good morning! Today is World Quaker Day! Many Quakers around the world craft gatherings in person or online to connect with other Quakers to remind ourselves that we are a global community with great diversity and to remind ourselves what it means for us to be Quakers. The chosen theme for this year is “Love Your Neighbor.” For me, the Quaker core values or testimonies explain what it means to be a Quaker. These values or testimonies are slightly different in form around the world, but I believe the guiding intention is to try to articulate what loving your neighbor looks like in everyday life. In preparing for today I learned that European Quakers use the acronym STEP for Simplicity, Truth, Equality, and Peace. African, American and Asian Quakers have expanded the acronym to SIPCES for Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship

I decided to look at Quaker Speak videos and a documentary on the 2024 World Gathering of Friends, read guiding documents which Quakers call their Faith and Practice from different Yearly Meetings and reference various books by Quaker authors to extract words that articulate ways of understanding our testimonies from around the world. I will bring these words to you today.

Simplicity is the first value for European, African, American and Asian Quakers. Matthew 6 reminds us, " Do not store up for yourself treasures on earth... but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...No one can serve two masters...You cannot serve God and wealth."

I found these definitions from a Quaker Speak video on Simplicity interesting.

Simplicity can be understood as:

- Making space for what really matters.
- Paring down – Living with what is essential in mind. To enjoy things that fill my mind and spirit without consuming more than is necessary.
- Trying to shut away distractions to not allow yourself to be overwhelmed with possessions or positions, so that you can hear what you are meant to be doing.
- Living simply that others may simply live.
- Plain speech is a manifestation of simplicity – speaking words directly without flattery, deception, or manipulation.
- Mindfulness is a form of internal simplicity.

London Yearly Meeting Advices and Queries states:

Try to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength. Do not be persuaded into buying what you do not need or cannot afford. Do you keep yourself informed about the effects your style of living is having on the global economy and environment?

Peace is another foundational testimony to all Quakers. In Matthew 5:9 Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Daquann Harrison (Adelphi Friends Meeting in Leeds, England) shares:

An example of where the peace testimony is individually bound to me is my mindfulness work, ways to engage and interact with myself in positive ways. Making sure that I am within myself peaceful. Shutting down negative thoughts, finding lessons instead of feeling like a failure. That's peace within me...I also really consider the community level of peace...It might be something as simple as taking the time to talk to someone in my community as I am grocery shopping, having that moment when I am asking, "So, what are you going to do with that spice?" A piece of peace is (developing) more connections, we can have... more tiny little strings there from me to you to this person to that person... Peace, as a testimony, as a founding and grounding place for us to do our work reminds us why this work is important. How can we ask someone to give us that little piece of peace in the grocery store when they are budgeting and know that they don't have enough money to buy the food they actually need to feed their family? Our work at all of these levels affects our peace testimony. It is about the way we engage with ourselves...others and the work that we do to ensure that the larger community and the world can have peace.

Windy Cooler (Sandy Spring Friends Meeting, Sandy Spring, Maryland, U.S.) reports:

I feel like the more I tried to deny the violence inside of me and the violence around me, the more stuck I got and the less peaceful I actually was. To be peaceful, to me, does not mean to be placid. It doesn't mean to be still or quiet. It means to feel contentment and satisfaction in my heart, to feel in my relationship with other people... To be in right relationship with other people is never a peaceful enterprise. When I think about being in right relationship with my family, that requires constant negotiation, constant introspection. Peace is not a peaceful thing.

Pradip Lamichhane (Bhaktraput Evangelical Friends Church in Nepal) says:

If you feel peace within yourself, that's the great thing (that) I am experiencing currently, whether there is an issue in family, issue in church, issue in meeting, issue in office. But within myself, I feel peace. So, from that power, I will try to fix the issues outside of me... So even in the family, you can't accept things every time you are in your family. There is no one in the world whose couple has not fought. The husband and wife, the son and father. That's natural. That's normal. That has to be there. Otherwise, you are not family.

Paula Christopherson (Germany Yearly Meeting) expresses:

The peace testimony I practice in everyday life. I'm learning of the violence that might have crept into my habits and use of language, questioning where harm might have been perpetuated; and then changing the way I act and speak to be harmless in what I say and do.

Brianna Davies Halliwell (New England Yearly Meeting) responds:

What the Earth herself is asking of us and what God is asking of me is to simply be present, to truly see each other, to be present with each other, to listen and to learn to love.

Integrity comes next in African, American and Asian testimonies. 2nd Corinthians 8:21 states, “For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.”

I chose only one quote for this value which comes from Mark Russ in his book entitled *A Quaker- Shaped Christianity*. For me, this statement encapsulates the testimony of integrity.

There are many ways to be Christian, to be Quaker, and to be a Quaker shaped Christian... I don't think we can neatly separate beliefs from actions. The stories we tell about ourselves and the world shape how we behave in it. Right action demonstrates right belief, and right belief produces right action. This is a strongly held conviction of the first Quakers, who believed that we demonstrate our relationship with God through living spirit empowered lives... I accept that I am rooted in a particular faith. In my tradition Jesus is the guiding star, the foundation stone for understanding what right belief and right action looks like. Although Jesus is my center, the horizon of my Christianity is limitless. God is deeper than I can fathom, and broader than I can span. There is always more to learn, and I am always open to being surprised. A characteristic of the God revealed in Jesus is spaciousness. God is the liberating space within which “we live and move and have our being.”

Community is another testimony that articulates a specific value related to peace and equality. First Peter 4:10 states, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in all its various forms.”

I found the African Quakers to speak most powerfully to this testimony.

Rev. Parfaite Ntahuba (Quaker Peace Network Africa in Burundi) shares:

I am the national coordinator of Friends Women's Association. The projects we are running are related to health and to gender-based violence. We have a clinic called Ntaseka...We have a project called Improving Women's Reproductive Health,...another called caring for HIV-positive People. We provide nutritional support and Rape Survival Support... if we continue to work together and to support each other, we can keep on bringing our small contribution in the world to bring a positive change (in it).

Mr. Mac Donald and Dudu Mtshazo (Southern Africa Yearly Meeting) explain:

One of our languages is Zulu. We have this thing, Ubuntu, which means, without you, there is no me. So, it simply means that all of us, we need each other...We are each other's keepers.

Without you, there is no me. We need each other. We are each other's keepers.

Equality is a Quaker testimony shared across the globe, and one with which we continue to struggle to put into practice. Galatians 3:28 states, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Sharon Star Smith (Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting) discloses:

Quakers are struggling with their own racism. We've all as Quakers decided worldwide, I believe, that we want to become an anti-racist multicultural faith community. I practice my indigenous traditional practices and I'm also a birthright Quaker. When I first started interacting with Quakers, I had already been immersed in my indigenous community, but I had also been living my Quaker values. I felt they (Quakers) were not prepared for a person of color to act as an equal.

Britain Yearly Meeting brought these words to the World Gathering of Friends:

We've invited us all to work toward hope and restoration, true genuine restoration.

We in Britain are on a journey. Guided by our testimonies, we want to listen and share with the world family of friends with open minds and hearts. We have faith that the breadth of experience and wisdom across the world family is a rich resource to guide us and friends everywhere... (Additionally, they offered these encouragements.)

Think it's possible that you may be mistaken. Be open to new light from whatever source it may come. Walk cheerfully over the world answering that of God in every one period. And (finally) when opportunities arise, do you take them?

Stewardship reflects how these previous testimonies work out in very practical ways.

Ephesians 5 instructs, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."

The following statement was a summary of the work of the 2024 World Plenary meeting of FWCC.

We each have differences in how we express spirituality, in our views about the world, our ability and disability, and our experience of gender and sexuality. But we have been able to connect all the same. In our discernment together, we have felt the spirit move among us. Even as we have been imperfect vessels in these challenging moments, we have learned that we can find an equal place at the table without needing to adopt the same identity. We have sought to discern spirit-led ways forward to honor our commitment to our three interconnected themes: Care of creation, the healing of relationships in the light of historic and ongoing injustice, and nurturing Ubuntu...We recognize that our three themes...are intertwined and inseparable. The spirit of Ubuntu, the power of community can also dig deep into the pain and trauma of the world, to face up to climate crisis and the ongoing effects of historical injustice. In expanding our sense of the divine and our understanding of Ubuntu, we

can say, I am because you are, and because creation is. We grieve with God for the exponential impact of historical and ongoing injustice. Healing begins with sharing our stories, telling the truth, and listening deeply.

In closing today I am reading a challenge from Kieth Runyan, General Secretary of Quaker Earth Care Witness:

We have to become hope. It's not about having hope... We have to become it...Being peaceful is not good enough. You have to have an active form of peace. You have to have a prophetic, influential and powerful form of peace that's able to shift the war-mongering cultures of the world back towards something deeper.

And finally, a prayer read by Simon Lamb, clerk of FWCC at the closing of the 2024 conference:

God of love and grace, we are a beautiful and broken people, living in a beautiful and broken world. We confess that we have fallen short in caring for each other and for creation. As a faith community, we ask you to forgive us for neglecting creation and for inflicting grave injustices upon one another. Give us the courage and wisdom to move forward boldly. Grant us the strength to seek each other's forgiveness and the love and courage to hold both pain and possibility in our hearts. We ask that you send us on a new journey with our fellow humans and all your creatures in the spirit of Ubuntu. Amen.

Queries:

How do you shut away distractions to not allow yourself to be overwhelmed with possessions or positions, so that you can hear what you are meant to be doing?

How might violence have crept into your habits and use of language where harm might have been perpetuated?

What piece of peace do you offer in your community?

From Britain Yearly Meeting:

- Think it's possible that you may be mistaken.
 - *Where might you be mistaken?*
- Be open to new light from whatever source it may come.
 - *Where might you find new light?*
- Walk cheerfully over the world answering that of God in everyone, period.
 - *How might you answer that of God in someone you disagree with?*
- And (finally) when opportunities arise, do you take them?
 - *What opportunities are you being invited to take?*