



Journeys in the Spirit

inward outward upward downward

Children's work edition April 2013 Issue 74



How can I talk about being a Quaker?

Getting ready

For all of us, talking about our Quaker faith can be difficult. We are often unsure how or where to begin, and we can easily get caught up with describing what our faith isn't rather than what it is.

Even when we can find the right language it can often be difficult to talk about these things. It is in the nature of our Quaker faith to be different, often to swim against the tide, to live by different values. It is especially difficult to talk about worship.

How can we help children to talk about what it means to be a Quaker? How can we help them find simple, clear language? How can we encourage them (and each other) to be confident about being different?

When we talk about our own Quaker faith we begin with our own experience, sharing with others what being a Quaker means to us; how living as a Quaker changes us; how living by Quaker values challenges us.

In this issue we will explore how we might encourage children to speak about their own experience of worship and of living by Quaker values, looking at what is important to them, what they cherish and what they sometimes find difficult.

We don't try to find words for them but encourage them to find their own.

Journeys in the Spirit offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with children and young people.

This children's work edition comes out monthly. It offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with 5–12 year olds in a Quaker setting.

It provides opportunities for exploring, creating and learning in an atmosphere of worship in partnership on our shared journey in the spirit.

Gather

Preparing the space:

Have your space ready set out with chairs or cushions in a circle. Then place some of the items below in the centre of the circle:

- Items that might represent worship: a candle, a picture of praying hands, a plain bowl of still water; smooth pebble.
- Items to represent creation or the environment: leaves, flowers, pictures of animals, moss and earth.
- Items to represent what we buy and use: food, clothes, shoes, toys.
- Items to represent family and the people we love: photographs of people of different ages and genders.
- Items to represent peace: CND symbol; feather; 'co-operation is better than conflict'.

For some pictures to help with this see *Additional Resource 74.A*

Have some 'I'm a Quaker' badges (available from the Quaker Bookshop – 0207 663 1030 www.quaker.org.uk/shop).

Ask everyone their names; welcome them and, after a time of stillness and silence, talk about how our Quaker faith begins in worship and being still, then encourages us to think about the world around us, the people around us and how we live.

Underpinning references

'How do you share your deepest beliefs with them (children), while leaving them free to develop as the Spirit of God may lead them? Do you invite them to share their insights with you? A & Q1:19

Additional Resource 74.A can be found at: www.quaker.org.uk/resources-children

Engage

Emily's story

Give each of the children an 'I'm a Quaker' badge. Tell this story slowly:

Emily is nearly six. She has been coming to meeting with her parents since she was first born. She usually stays in worship for about 15 minutes and then goes out for children's meeting. Sometimes she listens to stories and does some artwork, sometimes she just plays. She doesn't always understand what is going on but she loves going.

She was given a badge saying 'I'm a Quaker – ask me why' and she likes wearing it but hasn't really thought about what she would say if someone asked her. One day she has met some friends and their mums in the park and she is wearing the badge on her top. Her friend Lucy asks her what the badge says; when Emily tells her she asks 'So why are you a Quaker?' and Emily suddenly feels unsure about what she should say.

For a moment she is quiet; what should she say? She's not always sure about what's going on; she sees pictures in the meeting house of people around the world; she sees pictures of nature, of forests and seas; she hears people talk about peace and something called sustainability. But none of that quite seems like an answer.

Why is she a Quaker?

When she asks herself the question the first things that comes into her head are the smiles and kind faces of the people at meeting; she thinks about how they welcome her each week; she thinks about biscuits and juice after meetings and sometimes picnic lunches. Then she thinks about when she sits in meeting, the warm sunlight coming through the window and resting on her back, the deep, still silence settling on her, the little book she takes with her and leaning against her dad as he sits still beside her. She remembers how peaceful she feels inside. She thinks about the stories and games and crafts she does with the other children. Emily remembers what it is like when she comes away from meeting; she feels better inside, happy.

So this is what she tells Lucy; she can't explain the stuff she doesn't understand, so she tells her about the stuff she does:

'I'm a Quaker because I love going to my Quaker meeting. People there are always happy to see me; they are kind to me and it helps me be kind to other people. When we are quiet together I feel nice and quiet inside. When I come home I feel happy.'

Lucy has a dozen more questions: What is a meeting? Why are you quiet? Who are the other people? What do Quakers do? Emily feels uncomfortable and a bit embarrassed. Is Lucy laughing at her when she asks? She almost wishes she hadn't worn the badge. But she remembers the kind faces of people in her meeting, old ones and young ones and she knows she is special to them and they are special to her.

Emily can't answer all of Lucy's questions, but it doesn't really seem to matter; she tells Lucy 'Quakers are quiet so we can listen to God together; God helps us to be good to other people. They are always kind to me.'

Lucy thinks about this and asks: 'What do you really love best about it?'

Emily thinks carefully and remembers and says 'We have nice biscuits'.

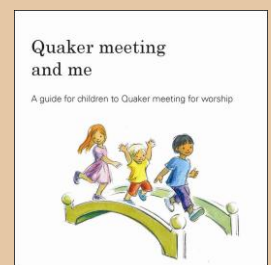


References & other resources



Quaker Meeting and Me, published by Quaker Life.

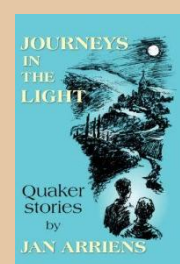
This booklet is intended to help children find a way into Quaker meeting for worship.



Journeys in the Light by Jan Arriens.

A series of stories about what it means to be a Quaker. Available from the Quaker Bookshop - 0207 663 1030

www.quaker.org.uk/shop

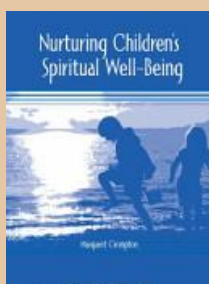


References & other resources

Nurturing Children's Spiritual Wellbeing by Margaret Crompton

Pendle Hill Pamphlets.

Available from the Quaker Bookshop



Respond

Emily's story. Discussion:

Telling people about being a Quaker doesn't mean you have to explain it or know lots of things about it. It just means telling them about what it means to you.

Tell the children that you are going to spend some time together exploring what being a Quaker means to them. Ask some questions like these here:

What would you say if your friends asked you why you are a Quaker?

What do you like or not like about coming to Quaker meeting?

What is your favourite part? What do you like doing best?

Does it make a difference to how you live your life?

How you are with other people?

Thoughts, answers and ideas could be written up onto a big sheet of paper as a reminder for the two activities below.

Explore with them what being a Quaker might mean; use the images and items that you brought for the Gather time, have them set out as you continue the conversation:

Share with them the idea that being a Quaker:

- Begins in worship: *Quakers try to listen to God in the silence, to find strength and peace.*

Ask what do you think about in worship? How does it make you feel? What do you do in the quiet?

- Changes how we respond to others: *Quakers believe that there is something special and precious ('that of God') in everyone and that we should try to find it.*

Ask questions like, do you try to look for this in other people, even people you don't like? Do you look for it in yourself?

- Challenges us to live better in the world: *Quakers try to work for a more peaceful world; they believe that fighting and hurting one another is wrong and that we must do all we can to make this world a fairer and happier place. Quakers know that the planet we live on is beautiful and fragile and that we must do all we can to care for it and encourage others to do the same. They realise that we don't need lots of money or lots of things in order to be happy and they try not to be greedy or have too much stuff.*

Ask what they think about this.

Activity – (you will need art and craft materials). Thinking about their own Quaker faith, invite the children to choose from the set out items and pictures that mean most to them. Is it worship and stillness, peace, caring for the world or relationships with those around them? What other pictures or items might show what their Quaker faith means to them? Invite them to draw or paint pictures or make models of the things that are most important to them as Quakers.

Perhaps make 'I'm a Quaker – ask me why' posters, pictures or large badges.

Activity – when they return to the meeting, take some of the items, pictures and things they might have made with them. Talk to the adults who are there about 'I'm a Quaker – ask me why'. Invite each of the children to share what being a Quaker means to them and then ask the adults to do the same. What is the most important thing for them about being a Quaker? Use the items and images as prompts and ask them which item or picture means most to them.

Reflect

Daring to be different

Talking about being a Quaker isn't always easy; people sometimes don't understand or they think that it's funny or a bit odd (and in a way, it is). Sometimes we have to dare to be different. In the past, Quakers have often had to face real difficulties in order to live out their faith and tell others about it. Briefly mention the story of the children from Reading meeting, who kept the meeting going when their parents were in prison. Go to www.quaker.org.uk/files/Journeys-in-the-Spirit-Children-Sep-07-No-7-additional-sheets.pdf for an outline of their story.

Sometimes we know we can't explain it with words and when we do, people might not understand or might not like what we are saying. Sometimes we have to show what being a Quaker means by what we do rather than what we say. Think quietly about what this may mean.

Ask the children, during the coming week, to look for an opportunity to *show* why they are a Quaker, through kindness, through caring for the world around us, by not responding unkindly when someone is unkind to us, by trying to see the best in those around us, even those we don't like. Do this yourself. Next time you are gathered invite sharing about what the children, and you, have done.



Review

Reviewing can happen at the time or later, and may be particularly helpful where a series of activities is planned around the same themes.

Some useful questions to consider are:

- What went well, and why?
- What didn't go so well, and why?
- What might you do differently another time?
- What did the children say was most important for them about being a Quaker?
- What did the adults say?

This issue was written by Alistair Fuller and edited by Chris Nickolay and Howard Nurden. Chris Nickolay wrote the Topical activity.

Issue 75 will explore very difficult questions about using animals in science. Available from 1 May 2013.

Issue 76 is the first in the new series looking at six different feelings. The first in this series offers way to think about and explore sadness. Available from 3 June 2013.

Issue 77 will give ways to wonder about and explore anger. Available from 1 July 2013.

Materials available online are:

Current issue additional Resources Sheets

An easy to use plan for a Children's Meeting

A simple plan for an all age Meeting for Worship

A topical activity – this time about separating eggs using a plastic bottle and making meringues.

Also a 'How to use *Journeys in the Spirit*' guide; a link to special issues; an archive of previous issues; a link to the *Journeys in the Spirit* Youth edition.

Go to: www.quaker.org.uk/journeyschildren and choose from the range of links in the sidebar.

Published by Children & Young People's Staff Team, Quaker Life

Available free by subscription.

Contact:
CYP Staff Team,
Friends House,
173 Euston Road,
London NW1 2BJ

Phone: 020 7663 1013

Email:
cypadmin@quaker.org.uk

Website:
www.quaker.org.uk/cyp



Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional resources 74.A



Gather

Pictures to use

