



*Faith and Practice*  
**Cambridge Friends School**



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***FROM THE CAMBRIDGE FRIENDS SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENT***

It is the mission of Cambridge Friends School to provide an outstanding education. Guided by Quaker principles, we engage students in meaningful academic learning within a caring community strongly committed to social justice. We expect all students to develop their intellectual, physical, creative, and spiritual potential and, through the example of their lives, to challenge oppression and to contribute to justice and understanding in the world. As part of our commitment to social justice, we are engaged in building an anti-racist, anti-homophobic community, and we actively seek students and staff from a diverse range of family structures and racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds. Our community tries to go beyond mere tolerance to more deeply address issues of bias and privilege.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Cambridge Friends School (CFS), a pre-K through grade 8 coeducational day school, was founded in 1961 under the care of Friends Meeting at Cambridge.

Quakers throughout the world produce handbooks known as Faith and Practice, which contain information, advice, and questions for reflection. The Quaker Life and Education Committee of the CFS faculty and staff and the Quaker Life and Outreach Committee of the CFS Board of Trustees, with feedback from many of the school's constituencies, have developed this document to articulate the Quaker underpinnings of the school. Although these values may be phrased in Quaker language, many faiths cherish similar values, and Quakers believe that these values are universal and inclusive in nature. As such, they inspire not only the Quakers in the school, but each and every member of the community, regardless of his or her religious beliefs.

The core principle of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) is that each person has access to an Inner Light or Spirit, which may be called the God within, and which helps each person find out what is right and true. This belief in an Inner Light, however defined, is the foundation of our faith in the worth and in the potential of all people of all ages. It is a belief that remains central to the vision and day-to-day practices of the school.

Schooling promotes habits of mind and heart that influence children's choices: how they live their lives and how they participate in their community. These habits are strengthened and affirmed when their families and all members of the school community know and support the values from which they spring.

We invite members of the school community to study this Faith and Practice and to use it as a resource to answer questions about our Quaker values and practice. As a living document, it is open to ongoing revision. It is organized into several sections, each describing practices and principles at work in the school and their connection to the tradition of the Society of Friends.

## **TESTIMONIES AND QUERIES**

In Quakerism, there are guiding principles called “testimonies.” They concern simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, and stewardship. Guided by belief in the Inner Light and by these principles, the founders of Cambridge Friends School sought to establish a school where, in a diverse community, children could grow in knowledge and wisdom. They hoped that students would learn to contribute toward making the world a better place.

The Quaker testimonies are an integral part of the life of Cambridge Friends School; they inform the content of the curriculum and our approach to learning and teaching. The testimonies and queries, which are questions used for guided reflection, are valuable parts of many classroom discussions and classroom Meetings for Worship, as well as All-School Meetings for Worship.

Some teachers introduce specific queries during Meeting; others work with their students to select or to develop queries. The queries may relate to a testimony that will be the focus of an upcoming All-School Meeting for Worship, or they may relate to the classroom’s academic or social curriculum. The following queries, included with the testimonies, are examples of those used in classrooms or in All-School Meetings for Worship. Some of these queries are appropriate for the whole community, while others may be more appropriate for younger or for older students. Some ideas are expressed more than once with different wording to make them accessible to students of different ages; several of these queries were suggested by students.

## **Simplicity**

Our testimony of simplicity reminds us to live wisely. In a world filled with ever-increasing amounts of external stimulation, we all need space and time to discern what is truly important in our lives.

Simplicity means staying true to that which is essential. In a busy and materialistic world, filled with a vast amount of external stimuli, children and adults need space and time to discern what is important and valuable in their lives.

Simplicity can help remove the physical and mental clutter of our daily lives, enabling us to move with a greater sense of ease, a gentler flow. Filtering out the “noise” helps us appreciate each other for who we really are and helps us see what we truly value. Thus we can more fully cherish our lives and the people in them.

“Simplicity, when it removes encumbering details, makes for beauty in music, in art and in living... (It) cleans the windows of life and lets joy radiate.”

— *From the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, 1961*

### **Queries About Simplicity**

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- ☞ How can we make our lives less complicated?
- ☞ How do you find simplicity throughout your day?
- ☞ What does simplicity mean to you?
- ☞ What is most important to you? What gets in the way of attaining or achieving it?
- ☞ In what ways is it hard to practice simplicity?

## **Peace**

### ***Striving for Peace in Action***

Quakers are most often known for their peace testimony. We believe that world peace begins with each of us. We try to settle all our disagreements without using weapons or words that hurt others.

As members of one of three “historic peace churches” (the other two being the Mennonites and the Church of the Brethren), most Quakers embrace pacifism. Generally, they hold the belief that peace and justice are linked. Throughout the CFS academic curriculum, teachers focus on non-violence as a model for bringing about change in a peaceful way. Students learn about historical conflicts, their outcomes, and the impact on those involved. They learn about individuals who have helped to resolve conflicts and bring peace.

On the interpersonal level, we understand that “Peace” means more than avoiding conflict.

Striving to maintain a peaceful community is an active process. It means acknowledging conflict, not always eliminating it. It means learning to listen and working to understand different perspectives. Conflict is an



opportunity to explore and to find solutions that recognize the many needs in the community. Teachers provide students with the tools and frameworks for talking to one another about their differences, and they model talking about these differences freely, openly, and respectfully. Teachers encourage students to stop and request a discussion when they feel uncomfortable in a situation and to seek adult help when their own efforts aren't enough to solve a conflict.

Discipline at the school is seen as a time for learning rather than a punishment. Attempts are made to understand the thoughts and feelings of the people involved, both adults and children, and to address the roots, not merely the outward manifestations, of the conflict.

Quakers strive for peace in lives and actions. At Cambridge Friends School, we seek to learn ways for achieving peace. Our hope is that students will continue to apply what they know about peace-making to all aspects of their lives.

*“We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the world.”*

*— From a declaration presented by Quakers to King Charles II, 1661*

### **Queries About Peace**

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- ☞ What do you do to feel peaceful?
- ☞ How can we actively work for peace in our community and in the world?
- ☞ Is it possible to be both peaceful and powerful?
- ☞ Can you find peace in situations in which you are competing with others?
- ☞ What does justice have to do with peace?

## **Integrity**

### ***Seeking and Speaking the Truth***

Integrity means being truthful and always trying to do our very best. We say what we mean and we mean what we say.

An emphasis on integrity and honesty led early Friends to refuse to “swear an oath” in court. They believed that truth should be spoken under all circumstances, not just in court. From the Gospel of Matthew they taught: “Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no.’” Their practice to “affirm” when asked to swear an oath continues today. Early Friends were also known for their integrity and honesty in business. Charging a fair and fixed price was a hallmark of early Quaker commerce.

“Let your life speak” is often cited as a goal for Friends and for students in a Friends school. Lives devoted to seeking what is right and true and trying to live by those truths can contribute to making the world a better place.

Seeking is an essential part of the Quaker process of trying to find “truth.” Friends believe that truth continues to be revealed. Yesterday’s understandings may not be today’s understanding. Our hope is that students will become learners and seekers throughout their lives. In the learning process, thoughtful inquiry is valued as much as academic output.

CFS students are encouraged to seek solutions to problems by listening to multiple perspectives, being willing to be influenced or changed by new insights, and learning from others. Having arrived at a position, students learn to articulate that position clearly and to stand up for what they believe. At the same time, it is important for them to acknowledge the position of someone with whom they disagree.

Children are taught that a mutual commitment to honesty engenders trust. They are encouraged to own up to a mistake and to share an unpopular opinion. Authenticity comes from being true to oneself and to one's beliefs and in being honest with oneself and with others.

Queries, as used in this and other Quaker documents, are vehicles for seeking truth. In reflecting on challenging questions, community members seek to be honest in their assessments and responses and to maintain their integrity by being willing to hold unpopular views if they believe them to be right.

“The search for truth is a lifelong pact with our inner lives that encompasses seeking the truth, recognizing the truth, speaking the truth, and living the truth — which is to say, letting our lives speak.”

— *From A Quaker Book of Wisdom: Life Lessons in Simplicity, Service, and Common Sense*  
by Robert Lawrence Smith

### **Queries About Integrity**

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- ☞ How can I voice my own beliefs and still be open to the beliefs of others?
- ☞ How do you tell the truth even when it is hard?
- ☞ Am I being true to myself/being my best self?
- ☞ How do my actions reflect what I say I believe in?
- ☞ What drives you to take action on your own?
- ☞ How do you maintain personal integrity when others around you do not?

## **Community**

### ***Responsibility to Individuals and the Group***

We welcome the perspectives of everyone, respect the worth of each individual, and value our collective wisdom. We strive to be a supportive and inclusive school community.

In a Friends Meeting, all members are responsible to and for one another. Likewise, at CFS, each adult and child is responsible for contributing to the learning of others as well as helping to solve community problems.

Community is a gift not to be taken for granted. Students are encouraged to discover and pursue their individual talents and strengths and, at the same time, to recognize and encourage the strengths of others. When students work together, each is responsible for communicating clearly and honestly, for doing his or her part in a timely fashion, and for supporting the group.

Teachers help students appreciate their own accomplishments through a growing understanding of their individual abilities and learning styles,

rather than by simply seeking to surpass other students. With the recognition that comparisons between people are inevitable, students and the adult community are encouraged to aim their efforts towards “doing one’s best” rather than “being the best,” which is often at a cost to others. This departure from the commonly held goal of “being the best” is challenging. The school acknowledges its responsibility to prepare each student to enter a world where one’s well-being may depend upon being able to work both independently and with others. We have found that a Quaker education can meet that responsibility.

“Many candles lighted and put in one place do greatly augment the light, and make it more to shine forth.”

— From *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* by Robert Barclay, a classic exposition and defense of Quakerism published in 1678

### **Queries About Community**

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- ☞ How do we create a sense of community?
- ☞ What do I bring to a community?
- ☞ What ties people together in a community?
- ☞ What do I do to welcome others?
- ☞ How can we make everyone feel visible and heard?
- ☞ How does CFS support a community of diversity?
- ☞ What does it mean to be part of the world community?

## **Equality**

### ***Dedication to Justice and Equity***

Our belief in “the Inner Light” means that all people are equal. Everyone has the same human rights and should be treated fairly.

Friends have an historical commitment to the care of the sick and imprisoned, to the feeding and clothing of refugees, and to working for justice and equality. Cambridge Friends School incorporates this same commitment to social justice, which is based on the belief in the worth of all people and a deep concern for fairness. Learning to be of service to others is emphasized from the earliest grades. Teachers encourage students to have the confidence and courage to speak up and to be mindful and active citizens in the world. In age-appropriate ways, students learn to think critically, solve problems through peaceful means, and develop ways to pursue justice and equity. Throughout the school, differences are honored and celebrated.

The school is an actively anti-racist and anti-homophobic community. Students are taught to look critically at history, learning the points of view

and achievements of people whose voices have often not been heard: women, people of color, the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender community, immigrants, and people with disabilities.

In its recruitment, hiring, retention, and promotion of faculty, staff, and administration, and in its admissions policy, the school attempts to reflect the diversity present in the wider community. Priorities for admission include economic and racial diversity and variety in family structures.

“Equality is not sameness. It is equality of respect. Every person is a child of God.”

— *From the New England Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice, 1958*

### **Queries About Equality**

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- ☞ How can you be an ally to people who aren't treated fairly in our community or in the world?
- ☞ How can we balance what is fair versus what is equitable?
- ☞ Is fairness everyone getting the same thing? Is equality everyone getting the same thing?
- ☞ In what situations might a person need something different from another person in order to have equity?
- ☞ How do you balance what you need and what you want?

## **Stewardship**

### ***Caring for Our World***

We need to take care of the things we use and own as well as each other. We believe in leaving the world a better place than we found it.

Stewardship means paying attention and taking care, knowing that what we do affects others. We respect the past and take responsibility for the future. Students learn the necessity of environmental stewardship, sustainable living, and the importance of taking action.

Beginning in the earliest grades, the children learn the importance of caring for classroom spaces and materials. The school's curriculum reflects our concern for the environment and our appreciation of the natural world through the study of topics such as climate change and life cycles. At certain grade levels, students take responsibility for projects that include school-wide recycling, composting, and gardening. When we use our individual gifts and resources of time, money, talents, and ideas in a positive way, all are enriched.

“Together, the world's people have been granted stewardship over the Earth, to enjoy it briefly, then to surrender it to succeeding generations. The Earth is not a possession but a trust.”

— *From the Friends World Committee for Consultation statement to the United Nations Special Session of the General Assembly on Disarmament, June 12, 1978*

### **Queries About Stewardship**

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- ☞ What does it mean to be a good steward?
- ☞ What can we do to care for our classroom (school, community, environment, each other)?
- ☞ What can we do to avoid being wasteful?
- ☞ How do we regard our time, talents, and wealth as gifts to be shared?



## **SERVICE**

Service at Cambridge Friends School puts into practice Quaker values and testimonies, incorporating them into the daily life of the school. Our understanding of service is that students will use their time, energy, work, and/or resources for the benefit of people and causes beyond their immediate classroom. This happens along a developmental continuum as students' understanding of themselves in the world changes and matures over time.

Our over-arching goals for students' service learning are that students will develop a life-long habit of service, become empowered as change agents, learn the skills necessary to be an advocate for a just cause, see themselves as part of the larger community, become aware of the different ways they can contribute to the community, develop understanding of others' life experiences, and recognize that those receiving service should be involved in the development and review of the service.

## **MEETING FOR WORSHIP**

Meeting for Worship is central to Quaker practice. Early Quakers believed that each person could communicate directly with the Divine. In Meeting for Worship, we sit in silence, waiting and listening for guidance from within. The experience of silence is different for each person. For some members of the community, sitting in silence might mean simply practicing being quiet. For others, Meeting is a time for deeper reflection, for contemplation, for reverence, for prayer. Any person may feel moved to speak during the Meeting. We listen to each other with open minds, quietly, not arguing mentally, not judging, and not rushing to formulate a response. Sitting together in silence, remaining open to the Spirit, helps us to overcome our differences and approach a sense of oneness. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the Jewish theologian, describes such an experience as “a realm of time where the goal is not to have but to be, not to own but to receive, not to control but to share, not to subdue but to be in accord.”

At CFS, silence is an integral part of the life of the school. Periods of silence are valued and used in a variety of ways, primarily through our Quaker Meetings for Worship held each Tuesday morning, when the entire school settles into silence. Faculty, staff, and students set aside their work, and phones are turned off. In each classroom, there is a Meeting of students and their teachers; adults in the community are invited to a Meeting that is held in the library at the same time.

Students participate in Meeting for Worship beginning in pre-kindergarten. Teachers introduce different ways to settle into the silence.

Sometimes the group focuses on an object placed in the center of the circle. Younger students may have a small ball of clay to hold or drawing materials to use after a short period of silence. Meetings often begin with a thought or query, a poem, or an inspiring story. When students are hesitant to speak out of the silence, teachers encourage them to share their thoughts at the end of Meeting.

About six times a year, the entire school gathers for All-School Meeting for Worship, and classrooms share the responsibility for care of these Meetings. Graduation from CFS is celebrated with a Meeting for Worship that includes students, their families and friends, alumni, and teachers, administrators, and staff.

Silence is sometimes used as a way of facilitating transitions: at the beginning and end of the school day, at the start and end of decision-making meetings, and before a meal.

A kindergarten student, new to the school, was asked by his parents what was Quaker about Cambridge Friends School. The child replied, “We sit in circles. God is everywhere, and there are no right answers.”

Kathryn Damiano, founding core teacher of The School of the Spirit, a Quaker ministry of prayer and learning, expressed a similar thought: “If we can stay in this place of silence without rushing to fill it up in some way, we are humbled to know even for a little while that we in our own power do not have all the answers. We become more willing to listen.”

“In the noisy rush of modern life,  
we need periods of quiet when the  
soul may feel at peace in that which  
shall nourish it for action.”

— John Wilhelm Rowntree,  
English Quaker, 1868 – 1905

## **MEETING FOR BUSINESS: MAKING DECISIONS**

### ***Seeking the Sense of the Meeting***

Quaker communities meet for the purpose of conducting business in the belief that each person has divine, yet incomplete, insight (the “Inner Light”) needed for the group to reach clarity on a course of action. This belief accords respect to each person’s thoughts and encourages honest discussion of all opinions in a respectful environment. We recognize that it is only by the careful consideration of all views that a decision can be reached that is best for the community. Listening is, therefore, as important a skill as speaking one’s truth. This Quaker process of discernment, leading to a decision, is termed “seeking the sense of the Meeting.” It involves neither consensus nor compromise; rather it seeks to reveal the emerging truth to the group. Similarly, Cambridge Friends School encourages decision-making that reflects both one’s own personal truth and respect for the Inner Light that others bring to the issue at hand.

“The continuing search for unity is what makes the conduct of Friends business so uniquely coherent and effective. Friends are not trying in the business meetings to find the broadest area of common acceptance in order to form a consensus, but are searching for the Truth and for an understanding of our own relationships to it.”

— *William B. Watson*  
“*Before Business Begins*,” 1976

Arriving at a sense of the Meeting does not mean that each person agrees with the decision. In some cases, where there is disagreement, an individual may “stand aside,” subordinating her or his view to the one that has emerged through the discernment process. Less frequently in these situations, a person does not stand aside — an action that should not be undertaken lightly. The group must then continue to deliberate before deciding, since the strength of Quaker decision-making is in its group discernment. No individual, however, in a Quaker community should prevent the group from reaching a decision because of a personal viewpoint. As Quaker writer George A. Selleck said, “Friends should endeavor to work with one another in a humble and loving

spirit, each giving to others credit for purity of motive, notwithstanding differences of opinion.”

Because some decisions cannot be made without special knowledge or particular information, the work of Quaker communities is often delegated to committees. Through appropriate research and a process of discernment, these committees bring key information and proposals to the community, where they are considered for approval with or without modification.

Meetings for business within and among classrooms and in the wider school community are conducted with these Quaker principles in mind. It should be noted that arriving at the sense of the meeting can be a lengthy process, and this amount of time may not always be available in the operation of a school. Also, decision-making by the group is not appropriate in all circumstances; there are decisions that must be left to teachers and/or administrators without the use of the full group discernment process.

Quakers have found it helpful to focus on two questions: “What is the right thing to do?” and then, “How can we make it happen under the present circumstances?”

To clarify the decision-making process at CFS, members of the board, faculty, and administration have produced a document that delineates the levels of responsibility for decisions and how those decisions are made.

## **CONCLUSION**

The ideas articulated in this Faith and Practice reflect an approach to learning that seeks to integrate Quaker principles with the academic and communal life of the school and with the intellectual, psychological, and spiritual growth of each child. A teacher, explaining how Quakerism was woven into her teaching, gave this insight into how that approach influences what happens in the classroom:

*Meeting for Worship is important in our week. Some kids relish it. Others endure it. It provides a different way to be a community, and, at its best, it is a place of deep, reflective thinking about the world and our place in it. It is the structure my students have turned to over the years to deal with death and difficult things. They have initiated Meeting because they wanted and needed a place to be together and think, feel, reflect, find solace.*

*More than anything, the idea that there is that of God in everyone is the foundation of my teaching. It leads me to become an anti-racist, anti-bias teacher, because without that approach, I am not able to meet that of God in each child.*

*The idea of continuing revelation and the focus on the process of discovery and individual connection to the truth (in contrast to dogma and The Canon) affect the way I teach. I love those moments of discovery when a class or student comes upon a different way of thinking about things.*

*The depth of understanding in these moments is rich and exciting. I believe in teaching students skills and things they need to know, too, but never without the connection to true inquiry.*

This Faith and Practice is a guide to understanding the mission of Cambridge Friends School and the means by which the members of our community strive to fulfill that mission. We, the faculty members of the Quaker Life and Education Committee and the members of the CFS Trustees' Quaker Life and Outreach Committee ask your help — your wisdom, your skills, your spirit — to keep these ideals at the center of life in our community.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Members of the Faith and Practice Committee of the Cambridge Friends School Trustees, now the Quaker Life and Outreach Committee of the Board of Trustees, began writing this document several years ago. The current trustee committee has collaborated with the faculty and staff members of the Quaker Life and Education Committee to revise and complete it. We are indebted to Friends Seminary, Baltimore Friends School, and Sidwell Friends School, who preceded us in writing their Faith and Practice and who inspired us. We were also guided by the New England Yearly Meeting Faith and Practice and by “Advices and Queries” from the London Yearly Meeting.

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