

11 Quaker Faith in Action

Begin this session with worship sharing or a time of reflection on the question, "What can I do better with others than by myself?" Then present the following information.

Quaker action is based on the conviction that goodness is mightier than evil. George Fox wrote, "I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God, and I had great openings."⁵⁸ That inward experience of the love of God encourages Friends to put their faith into action. Friends expect that, with Divine guidance and power, human beings are capable of living divinely inspired lives, which further social justice and peace on earth.

Rufus Jones is an example of a life whose inward experience of the presence of God was expressed through outward actions. His widely recognized writings made him a leading interpreter of Christian and Quaker mysticism. Yet while deeply inward and contemplative, Rufus also led an active outward life, helping to found the American Friends Service Committee, Pendle Hill, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and the Wider Quaker Fellowship.

This balance of the outward with the inward was poignantly illustrated when, on behalf of the American Friends Service Committee, Rufus Jones traveled to Nazi Germany with D. Robert Yarnell and George A. Walton following the "Night of Broken Glass" in 1938. During that night, Nazis broke Jewish shopkeepers' windows, which began the intense suffering and persecution of Jews during World War II.

Rufus Jones and his two Friends went to the Gestapo headquarters in Berlin and met with aides of Reinhard Heydrich, a high-ranking Nazi official, to plead for the safety of the Jews. Before they were allowed to see Heydrich, the Nazis left the three Quakers alone in a room that had hidden microphones. The Nazis thought that, left alone, they would talk among themselves about their *real* mission in Germany. Sitting in silent worship in the microphoned room, they never spoke. They immediately entered into a time of meditation and prayer. As Heydrich, who was in the adjacent room, listened to the silent Quaker meeting, he, in a sense, participated. The Nazis returned after two hours, admitted they had tape-recorded them, and announced that, because of the Quakers' innocent intentions, their request would be granted. Heydrich released a number of Jews to the care of the Quakers.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ *Quaker Faith and Practice: the book of Christian discipline of the Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends [Quakers] of Britain*, 1995, 19.03.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Gray Vining, *Friend of Life: Biography of Rufus Jones* (Philadelphia, PA: JB Lippencott, 1958), pp. 280-93.

Perhaps Friends are best known for their relief work during and following wars. At those times, Friends attempt to provide food, shelter, and medical care to *anyone* who is suffering, regardless of that person's political affiliation or personal morality.

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), founded in 1917 to promote social justice, peace, and humanitarian solutions to society's problems, is well known in Germany for its "Quaker *hilfe*," or "Quaker help." In 1920, the AFSC and the British Friends Service Committee began their "*Quakerspeisung*," or "child-feeding" program. Following World War II, they helped feed "Quaker soup" to around 250,000 children every day. According to Achim von Borries,

Three times in the twentieth century the Quakers have become known in Germany as 'Quiet Helpers.' In the years of hardship following the First World War the *Quakerspeisung*, the feeding program organized by British and American Quakers, was a humanitarian undertaking which saved the lives of millions of German children. From 1933 to 1945, during the years of terror and destruction of human lives, German, British, and American Quakers aided countless people who were threatened and persecuted—in Germany itself, in the occupied countries of Europe, and wherever the victims of dictatorship and racial madness found refuge. And once again, following the end of the Second World War, Quakers from Great Britain and the United States were among the first to arrive in a Germany suffering from cold and hunger and facing an uncertain future amid enormous destruction.⁶⁰

The AFSC and the British Friends Service Committee were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1948 for these efforts in war relief.

Even though their numbers are small, Friends have a remarkable record in social reforms. Friends were among the first to recognize that mental and emotional disturbances are illnesses that need humane treatment. They were pioneers in education, child welfare, and prison reform. They were in the forefront of the movements to abolish slavery and promote civil rights. They have been active in the women's rights movement. They have promoted ecological concerns and animal rights. Almost every major social reform in the history of the United States of America has had a Quaker involved in its formation.

In the course of serving others, Quakers have frequently recognized needs and initiated reforms. For example, Quaker conscientious objectors, who had done their alternative service in mental hospitals, started the National Association of Mental Health (NAMH) after World War II.

Despite Quakers' impressive record in social reforms, Friends realize that a more important outward expression of that of God within occurs in the way Friends live their *daily* lives. For Friends, it is of utmost importance to help others through kindness and compassion in daily living and through the support of one another's search for that of God within. The essence of Quakerism is in how Friends relate to that of God in themselves and in others.

⁶⁰ *Quiet Helpers: Quaker Service in Postwar Germany* (Philadelphia, PA and London, England: American Friends Service Committee, Quaker Home Service, 2000), p. 1. See also Clarence E. Pickett, *For More Than Bread* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, & Co., 1953).