

# Session 2

## Quaker Testimonies

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This session covers the Quaker Testimonies and gives participants the opportunity to think about how they understand and how they might use the testimonies to explain Quakerism to people interested in Quakerism.

This session uses a selection of activities from the Youth edition of *Journeys in the Spirit*.<sup>1</sup> This resource was adapted from “Engaging with the Quaker Testimonies: a Toolkit” (with permission from Quaker Peace & Social Witness Testimonies Committee). These resources are available from [www.quaker.org.uk/qpsw](http://www.quaker.org.uk/qpsw) and [www.quaker.org.uk/cyp](http://www.quaker.org.uk/cyp).

The QPSW Testimonies Toolkit takes peace, equality, simplicity and truth as the basic testimonies and the developing testimony of environment and sustainability.

### Resources required for the session

- Flip chart paper and pens, Post-it notes
- Resource sheets: Action Cards, Testimonies Cards, Testimonies Images (if using) and Statement Continuum Cards (if using) (available at the back of this pack)

### Preparation for the session

- Stick up a copy of the working agreement
- Cut out the Resource Sheet Action Cards
- For “Thinking about the Testimonies” print out copies of the Equitrade article found on the Guardian website (see [www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2005/aug/14/foodanddrink.features16](http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2005/aug/14/foodanddrink.features16))
- Write up the questions under Testimonies Feedback (see page 27) on a flip chart
- Identify which of the “sharing the testimonies” activities you will use
- If using Resource Sheets Statements Continuum, you may wish to identify topical issues as an alternative to the ones included.
- Divide a flip chart into quarters and write each in each section – comment, enjoy, idea, didn’t enjoy.

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<sup>1</sup> Backhouse, Andrew; Nurden, Howard ed. (June 2007) *Journeys in the Spirit – Engaging with the Quaker Testimonies*, Quaker Life.

## Session Overview

60 minutes

Introduction	10 minutes
Thinking about testimonies	5 minutes
Linking testimonies to life	10 minutes
Testimonies feedback	10 minutes
Communicating the testimonies	20 minutes
Worship	5 minutes

Living our testimonies: The testimonies are inseparable from our faith; they are often described as faith in action. The testimonies are not pious statements of intent, they are not ideals; they are not even expressions of what we believe. They are from the lives and experience of the community.

Although they do not in most cases even exist in written form, they form a framework for the way in which we lead – or try to lead – our lives. They challenge, they comfort, they point the way. They stem from, and also help us to respond to and recognize, the spiritual. They all fit together. They are overlapping, complementary and interdependent.

The testimonies are about bearing witness and about living out what we believe. At one extreme, they will lead people to act “because I can do no other”. They are also a corporate expression of where we stand as a people of God. They provide us with reference points and a path, as the ongoing accumulation of faith in action. They draw on evolving wisdom and are exploratory and experimental. They involve both personal discipline and a level of community. They are not easy, but carry weight.

In living our testimonies in the world, we are making a statement about ourselves, about being Quakers, and about our relationship with God. They take their inspiration from our silent waiting. The leadings we find there are then tested by corporate discernment: are they in line with what Friends already believe and do, or do they represent a new but consistent and perhaps prophetic approach?

The testimonies tug us in two ways at once, as both a constant companion and a challenge. They do not exist in order to show up our failings and make us feel guilty but as an expression of, and means towards, a sacramental approach towards the whole of life. This means that we can be called to do things that involve real sacrifice and difficulty. It means allowing ourselves truly to listen and to be led, and to do so collectively rather than individually. The testimonies spring from the bedrock of our faith, and lead us in challenging and sometimes unexpected directions. The testimonies reveal God in and to us. (Backhouse et al: 2007)

## Group introductions

If there are people who are new to the group, invite each participant to introduce themselves.

## Silence

Continue with a minute or two of silence



If the session is to be held in the spirit, it may be best to start out from silence, rather than shaking hands at the end of the silence.

## Sharing

Ask people to think of one thing they find difficult about Quakerism and one thing they like, take it in turns to share these things. As ideas are shared make links with what is said and the values of truth, simplicity, equality, peace and sustainability. Name these as Quaker Testimonies (although sustainability is not “officially” a Quaker Testimony and discussions about this are ongoing).



In a large group these may need to be shared in pairs or threes.



This activity should immediately identify some of the issues from the testimonies. It should be apparent how the young people link to the testimonies or otherwise and which testimonies they might struggle with.

## Quaker Testimonies

Split the group into fours. Give each group a set of the Resource Sheet of action cards (these are found at the back of this pack):

When friends fall out not taking sides.	I do not wear Nike.	I avoid things that I could become dependent on.	I am honest with those responsible for me (e.g. a parent or guardian) about my actions.
Consider choosing to have my gap year in the UK to reduce my carbon footprint.	When someone is new to Quakerism – not focusing on them being a “non Quaker”.	Being able to cope with conflict.	When someone bad mouths another person, finding something positive to say about them.
Understanding the difference between Charity and Justice.	Not having the latest model of mobile phone.	Always reading event boundaries before signing them.	When someone sees things differently to me, I respect them, but I also share my thoughts.
Buying food with a low carbon footprint.	Not responding in a hostile way to people who are annoying.	I have nothing that I know is not useful and that I do not need.	When I've not completed a task, I take responsibility for this and am honest about it.
Using public transport instead of driving.	Considering the energy used by the electrical products I use e.g. computer, TV.	I buy Equitrade chocolate.	I think about where the products I buy come from.

and a set of sheets with the testimonies on (also at the back of this pack).



Each group should discuss and decide which testimony each action goes with, placing the cards on the corresponding testimonies sheet.

The image used for the testimony to Truth is called La Bocca della Verità, (the Mouth of Truth) further information is available on [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

Further information on Equitrade available at [www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2005/aug/14/foodanddrink.features16](http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2005/aug/14/foodanddrink.features16)

## Linking Testimonies to life

10 minutes



To look at linking testimonies to life there are two activities to choose from which focus on this. The first one builds on the activity “Thinking about the Quaker Testimonies”, looking at actions in a wider context. The second is an opportunity for participants to talk about examples of living the testimonies in their own lives. Each activity will take 10 minutes or so, depending on timing you could use both.



### A time in my life

10 minutes

For this activity continue working in the same groups as in the previous activity looking at the action cards and testimonies:

**Think of a time in your life when you have done something that relates to a Quaker testimony. It might be something quite major or something that seems a lot smaller but is still significant.**

It might be helpful to offer examples of things that they might have done:

- Sustainability – would you consider choosing a year out in the UK to reduce your carbon footprint?
- Equality – do I laugh at jokes that humiliate or take away from the individuality of others?
- Simplicity – do I think carefully about whether I really need to buy the things I do?
- Truth – what do you do if telling the truth means that your friend might be hurt or get into trouble?
- Peace – have you been on a non-violent demonstration?

**Think about how the things that are important in your lives – your values. How do these relate or otherwise to the Quaker testimonies – your beliefs?**

## A different perspective

10 minutes

As a group look at how participants have linked the actions and testimonies. This is an opportunity to look at wider thinking around some of the issues. If helpful use the information below as a background to the discussion:

*“I think about where the products I buy come from”*

This could be a consideration of environmental impact – the air miles involved. It could relate to equality, for example who receives the majority of the profit for the produce? Is it the Northern Hemisphere or the country of origin (the latter being Equitrade). It could be considered as contributing to peace if you choose to boycott produce from Israel – is a boycott effective? How might other countries view an “English” boycott of produce? England’s global relationships are seen as oppressive as Israel’s current role in Gaza – for example historical interactions with countries such as Ireland and Kenya or more currently the ongoing involvement in Ascension Island and Iraq.

*“When someone sees things differently to me, I respect them, but I also share my thoughts”*

Often people see Peace as keeping silent when they see the world differently to others – but how does this fit with the testimonies of Equality (remembering that there is that of God in everyone, including yourself) and Truth (do people really know you if they don’t know your values or beliefs?)

*“Having my gap year in the UK to reduce my carbon footprint”*

How many participants would do this? Many young Quakers choose to go on Gap Years that involve international travel; how do they reconcile this with its impact on the environment?

*“When someone is new to Quakerism – not focusing on them being a ‘non Quaker’”*

What do people think of the phrase “non Quaker”? Does this fit with the testimony to equality, and the belief of that in God in everyone? What do people think about defining people by what they are not? What do people think about defining people as one group (ask the group how the word young person is used in society, or describing people as black; are these words used positively or negatively?)

*“Peace is not the absence of conflict, but the ability to cope with it”*

What do participants think of this quote? What does it say to their understanding of peace?

The 1980s saw boycotting of produce from the apartheid regime in South Africa – a boycott considered to have played a part in bringing about the end of apartheid. Many now suggest that the ongoing situation in Gaza requires a similar boycott of Israeli produce as a form of non violent protest. For further background see <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jan/10/naomi-klein-boycott-israel> and [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle\\_east/article1878463.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article1878463.ece)

Participants discuss the following questions that you wrote up on a flip chart sheet.

## Questions

- **Think of a time when you put your values into action**
- **What did you do? Why was it important to you?**
- **Was it easy or was it difficult?**
- **Why did you do it?**  
(Were you told to? Did you feel it was the right thing to do? Did you want to do it?)
- **Did other people ask you about what you did? How did you explain it? How did you find doing this?**
- **Do you think that being a Quaker affects your life and the choices you make? How?**



You may choose to do this activity in pairs – if you decide to include feedback remember to allow 30 seconds for each pair.



## Communicating the Testimonies

20 minutes



There are four activities to choose from, to assist the group thinking about how they might explain the Testimonies. Remember that Session 5 looks at sharing Quakerism in depth. Use a selection of these activities to look at communicating the testimonies. Each activity should take 10 minutes, depending on timing you should be able to use at least two.

The participants that you are working with will each have different ways of learning. Some will be visual and benefit from picture based activities, some will be verbal and enjoy discussing issues whilst others will find that active ways of demonstrating their thoughts will help them think things through. Try to bear this in mind when you are choosing which activities to use.

### Testimonies Recipe

10 minutes

Working in five groups – allocate each group one of the testimonies:



**What are the ingredients of this testimony? For example  
Peace might contain:**

- 2lb of patience
- A sprinkling of salt (truth)

After five minutes ask the groups to discuss what this testimony means in practice and how they might share this testimony with someone interested in Quakerism.



## Testimonies Images

10 minutes



This activity could be developed by using a God Bag either alongside the pictures or as an alternative to the pictures. A God Bag is a collection of objects, for example a dice or a torch, which are placed in a bag – participants then take out an object and in this case describe how the object relates to a testimony or the testimonies.

Lay the image cards around the room. Invite the group to look at them and think about the images they see.

**How might the images help describe the testimonies? For example the picture of the paper clip could be seen as a way of linking what you believe with everyday life or perhaps as something that despite its simplicity is really useful. Or perhaps the ball of string could represent truth – how long is a piece of string? – that is, is truth relative or a continuum?**

There will be some participants who find this way of looking at the testimonies really helpful, others may find it harder. For the latter, ask them the words that they associate with the images to help them to link it with a testimony.



## Testimonies Discussion

10 minutes

Lay the Testimony picture cards around the room:



Invite the group to stand by the Testimony which:

- **Features least in their life at this time**
- **That is central to how they live their life**
- **That they find hard to put into practice**
- **That resonates with them**

After each statement:

- provide the space for those beside the same Testimonies to talk to each other
- provide space for discussion with the whole group

## Statements Continuum

10 minutes

To prepare for this activity you should read through the statements below, thinking about your position, and then about the variety of opinions on these statements. You should be prepared to develop discussion around these points. As you read out the statements participants should decide where on the continuum they stand. After each statement encourage discussion between the group about their responses.



You may wish to include additional statements particularly if they relate to current issues.

Lay out the Statements Continuum cards.



Read out the following statements:



**Peace means not disagreeing with the opinions of others.**



**When a friend says something truthful about another person that is hurtful – I find something positive to say about that person.**



**I have nothing that I do not know to be useful.**



**When I sign the boundaries for an event I have read them and intend to keep them.**



**International gap years damage the environment.**

## Worship

5 minutes

End the session with five minutes Worship – bring this to a close by shaking hands.

As participants leave invite them to complete post it notes, under the titles comment, enjoy, idea, didn't enjoy. They should stick these in the appropriate quarter of the flip chart which you prepared.