

Revolutionary Roots of Quakerism (course on Early Friends)

Purposes of course:

- To enrich Friends' knowledge and understanding of the first generation of Friends
- To use this understanding to help Friends today enter a similarly radical living relationship with God as a faith community
- To facilitate meetings using this understand as a springboard to talk about key issues in the life of the faith community including theology, worship, the testimonies, and radical witness

Leadership style: It is particularly helpful (although not essential) in this curriculum to have a teacher/retreat leader who has considerable knowledge of early Quakers. This being said it is important to keep in mind that the leader's primary role should *not* be transferring information or a changing Friends practice based on a preconceived agenda. She or he is seeking to provide an opportunity through this course or retreat to encourage Friends to reflect on their own faith journey today and to explore key issues in the corporate life of Friends today with each other.

How time is spent:

20-25% Presentation/communication of ideas/information

20-25% Work alone or in two's or three's (can be great prep for sharing in the group as a whole)

50-60% Various forms of sharing in the community as a whole - e.g. sharing response to a question around the circle, worship/sharing in response to a brief quotation or query, open discussion

Setting the agenda: The facilitator explores with the group requesting the retreat or course (e.g. Ministry and Counsel Committee, Adult Religious Education Committee).

- Find out some of the key reasons why the requesting group is interested in having this course
- Learn the "lay of the land" in the meeting (theological language, places of brokenness, etc.)
- Discern together which of the 6 possible topics listed below will be covered in this program

Format: This can be run as either a course taught over a number of weeks or months or as a one day or weekend retreat. Each module requires a minimum of 50 minutes (as a class session or section of a retreat - preferably 75-90 minutes. I would not recommend trying to cover more than 3 or 4 topics in a single day (i.e. morning and afternoon) retreat.

Modules (class or retreat sessions):

#1 The World Turned Upside Down (historical background & beginnings of new movement)
#2 This I Knew Experimentally (ideas about God)
#3 The Silent Assemblies of God's People (a whole new form of worship)
#4 This Is Our Testimony to the World - Part 1: Integrity & Sufferings
#5 This Is Our Testimony to the World - Part 2: Simplicity, Peace, Equality, Unity with Nature
#6 Constructing "Gospel Order" as a Way of Living with Each Other

Note: The module on worship is designed for meetings with unprogrammed worship. Although the first 3 modules are particularly important in terms of understanding early Friends, the modules on integrity and simplicity can lead to particularly rich discussions as to how to live out some of

these same principles in the present time. The module on faith/theology can also help sharing among participants about their own beliefs and ways of talking about them with others.

Creating a “a safe container” for the course or retreat: Many Friends meetings today encompass a wide range of beliefs and approaches to Quaker practice. It is critical that participants in this program approach these sessions with a deeply respectful attitude towards other participants. The goal of this program is to encourage participants to share openly with each other their heart-felt responses to what is being learned about early Friends and to explore ways it can impact our own shared life today.

In the first session the facilitator should take time to discuss how important this is and work to create an atmosphere of trust, vulnerability, and mutual respect going into this shared journey of exploration.

Sample session (class or retreat segment - timing will vary depending on the length of each session):

Opening prayer / waiting worship (5 mins.)

Introduction of the subject by leader (5-20 mins.) - It is best if the leader knows the material well enough to talk extemporaneously. Using a flip chart or dry erase board to outline key points can help people absorb what's being talked about - e.g. key dates and names on history session, drawing the different forms of revelation on the theology session.

You may want to leave some time for answering questions. (Others in group may know the answer better than the leader!)

Hearing voice of early Friends. Choose several readings from handout to be read out loud (5 mins.)

Response to readings. Can be done individually via reflection/journaling on queries, sharing in pairs or threes, and/or reflective worship-sharing around the circle. (5-15 mins.)

A skit or 2 on topic. Breaks up the flow and uses a different part of the brain/heart. (10 mins.)

Exploring what this means to Friends today. A period of worship sharing and/or open discussion on the implications early Friends' experience, belief, and practice has for key issues facing us in our local and yearly meetings in the 21st century. Try to simply ask evoking questions and then just *listen!* (15-30 mins.)

Closing prayer / worship (5-10 mins.)

Early Quakers quiz - This is something fun to do in first session. Although some of the multiple choice options are humorous, the correct answers are all accurate. Have people take the quiz and then go through answers together as a group.

Skits - This curriculum includes skits for several of the sessions. These can break up the flow of the session and capture a bit of the feel of the 17th century. Get 2 or 3 volunteers to play the parts and give them each their own script. The 21st century skit on simplicity helps to bring the issues around this to the present day.

You are welcome to utilize or edit these materials freely but please note that the materials were originally developed by Peter Blood-Patterson. You can contact me at inwardlight1@gmail.com