

The Birth of the Friends Church: A Workshop on 17th Century Friends

Purposes of course:

- To enrich Friends' knowledge and understanding of the first generation of Friends in 17th century England
- To use this understanding to help Friends today deepen our life together as a faith community
- To help churches talk with each other about key issues in the life of the faith community including theology, church government, and the ways we interact with the world around us.

Leadership style: It is particularly helpful although not necessary to have a teacher or retreat leader who has extensive knowledge of early Friends. This course will work best if the teacher/leader teaches in a very different style from most educational settings. The main goal is **not** to cram lots of information about early Friends to the participants or to carry out the leader's personal agenda for stimulating helpful changes in the meeting. She or he is seeking to create an opportunity for Friends to reflect on their own faith journey today and to explore key issues in the life we share with each other as Friends today.

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 preparation for sharing in the group as a whole)

50-60% Various forms of sharing in the group as a whole - e.g. sharing responses to a question around the circle or sharing responses to a brief quotation.

Setting the agenda: The leader should explore with congregation's leaders requesting this retreat or course their goals for the program:

- Find out why the requesting group is interested in having the church undertake this program
- Find out if possible issues within the church community that may impact your work, such as areas of conflict or areas of need.
- Discern together which of the six possible topics listed below will be covered in this program

Format: This curriculum can be run either as a series of classes taught over a number of weeks or months or as a one day or weekend retreat. Each segment 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 the new movement)
#2 Christ Has Come to Teach His People Himself (a new relationship with God)
#3 Worship in Spirit and in Truth (new approaches to worship)
#4 This Is Our Testimony to the World - Part 1: Truth & Sufferings
#5 This Is Our Testimony to the World - Part 2: Purity, Peace, Equality, Stewardship
#6 Gospel Order as a Blueprint for Church Community

Although the first 3 modules are particularly important in terms of understanding early Friends, the modules on integrity and simplicity can lead to rich discussions as to how to live out these principles in the present day.

Encouraging Friends to open up and share: It is important that participants in this program approach these sessions with a 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 life together today. The leader can talk some before the first program about speaking for ourselves rather than speaking about whether the speaker agrees or disagrees with earlier statements.

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

Opening prayer (5 mins.)

Introduction of the subject by leader (5-20 mins.) - If the leader knows the material well enough to do so, it is best if she or he can talk freely about the subject without reading from the handout. Using a board of some kind to outline key points can help participants absorb what is being talked about - such as key dates and names on for the history session.

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

Hearing words of early Friends. Choose several readings from handout and ask a participant to volunteer to read each reading. (5 mins.)

Response to readings. Can be done individually via reflection or writing down responses to reflection questions, sharing in twos or threes, or sharing around the circle in the whole group. (5-15 mins.)

A skit or two on the topic. These make the subject matter come more alive! (10 mins.)

Exploring what this means to Friends today. A period of sharing and discussion on the implications of early Friends' experience, belief, and practice has for 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.)

An Irreverent Quaker Quiz - This is something fun you may want to have participants do in the first session. Although many of the multiple choice answers are humorous, the correct answers are all accurate. If you feel this would be appropriate for your church, hand them out and let people fill out answers. You can go over answers right way or at end of the first session.

Skits - This curriculum includes skits for most of the sessions. These can add life and energy to the flow of the session and capture a bit of the feel of what life was like in the 17th century England. Get 2 or 3 volunteers to play the parts and give them each their own script. The 21st century skit on simplicity helps Friends reflect on how this issue still remains alive for Friends today in new ways.

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