



Friends World Committee
for Consultation
SECTION OF THE AMERICAS

Comité Mundial de Consulta
de los Amigos
SECCIÓN DE LAS AMÉRICAS

ABOUT THE WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP

The Wider Quaker Fellowship program of Friends World Committee for Consultation is a ministry of literature. Through our mailings of readings, we seek to lift up voices of Friends of different countries, languages and Quaker traditions, and invite all to enter into spiritual community with Friends.

The Fellowship was founded in 1936 by Rufus M. Jones, a North American Quaker teacher, activist and mystic, as a way for like-minded people who were interested in Quaker beliefs and practices to stay in contact with the Religious Society of Friends, while maintaining their own religious affiliation, if any. Today, WQF Fellows live in over 90 countries, and include non-Friends, inquirers, Quakers living in isolated circumstances, and even active members and attenders of Friends meetings and churches. The Fellowship does not charge a subscription fee, but depends on donations from its readers and other supporters to cover costs.

©2007 by Barclay Press

Reprinted 2007, with permission from Barclay Press and the author, by The Wider Quaker Fellowship, a program of the Friends World Committee for Consultation Section of the Americas

Friends Center, 1506 Race Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102 USA
tel: 215. 241. 7293, fax: 215. 241. 7285
email: wqf@fwccamericas.org
website url: www.fwccamericas.org/about_us/programs/wqf.shtml

The Top Ten Reasons I'm a Quaker

GREGG KOSKELA



REPRINTED BY

The Wider Quaker Fellowship
La Asociación de amigos de los Amigos

This article first appeared in "The Conversation Café," January 10, 2007,
at www.BarclayPress.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Among Friends, I have found my spiritual home. My wife Elaine is a Haworth, a Quaker through and through. But I have come by conviction. My experiences of the living Jesus have been enriched and deepened by my connection with Friends. I long to live in obedience to Jesus Christ and with love toward our world.

I am a pastor at Newberg Friends Church in Oregon, and am grateful for the ways that God has opened doors for relationships with the wider body of Friends over the past few years. Elaine and I have been married for 17 years and have three daughters, Talli, Hayley, and Aubrey.

Writing a compelling top-ten list is a difficult task. A successful top-ten list doesn't just dispassionately recount the ten most important things in a category. Because of David Letterman, a little humor is needed. A top-ten list must have some controversial items, so the reader can say "Who's the moron writing this list?" Yet the list can't go too far down that road, because the reader also wants to see enough things that validate her perspective, that cause her to say, "Yep! That's exactly what I would have said." It's tricky to toe the line of top-tenness. I'll consider a roughly equal amount of hate mail and gushing accolades to be an indicator of success, as I share "The Top Ten Reasons I'm a Quaker."

1. I want to join Christ in changing the world.

I'm a Quaker because of this radical way of life where an intimate, alive relationship with God is married to a holistic, all-encompassing, action-oriented embrace of social justice. It's the beautiful bonding of the vertical and horizontal relationships in our lives, the bewildering balance of mysticism and activism. I want to know and be known by Jesus, loving and being loved by the God of the universe. And that means I want to be a channel through whom God loves and transforms the world. The mystery of God's will is that we are chosen to join what God is doing, to "bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ" (Ephesians 1:10). This is what it means for me to be a Quaker, and why I gladly take the name.

3. **I want to be challenged to integrity and simplicity.**

I live in a culture of consumerism that tries (sometimes successfully) to convince me that more things will make my life better. I live in a shady world of half truths, where a company (alibinetwork.com) can have a business plan based on the assumption that not only is it okay to lie, but that they can profit by providing an alibi for anyone with a credit card. I want a life of *purity*—a life of single-minded focus on complete obedience to God and a relentless reduction of the distractions of stuff.

2. **I believe the passionate power of God's Spirit unleashes radical, joyful, committed followers of Jesus.**

Maybe this is a longing more than a reflection of my experience. Early Quakers were not afraid of being charismatic, holy rollin' extremists. I long for a life of bold obedience, out-of-the-box risk taking, and joyful, exuberant praise. I yearn for a life touched by Jesus' power and spirit, a life of laughter and healing and compassion and wholeness. I'm waiting and praying for an eruption of God's power in myself and in our communities where the blind receive their sight, the deaf begin to hear, the wounded are healed and learn to forgive, where our atrophied legs are transformed and cause us to walk and leap and praise God!

10. **I'm put off by hierarchy and energized by community.**

There's nothing I enjoy more than being a part of a group of people who all contribute their God-given abilities, where the sum is greater than the individual parts. Too many branches of the Christian church consider "success" to be cramming thousands of people into a dark room where all the action happens up front. I want to be with Jesus-followers who each take responsibility to obey and listen to God, who encourage and challenge and sharpen each other, who commit to love each other through thick and thin. This is the Quaker vision of community.

9. **I believe no one has it all, and no one is a lost cause.**

Some branches of Christ's church are "too hot"—so full of prosperity promises and holiness chutzpah that I can't really see how I could fit in—or how they have any need for God at all. Some branches are "too cold"—so full of despair about the futility of the human condition and preoccupied with predestination that I wonder why they even bother to get out of bed in the morning or how they have any hope of real change in their lives or in the world. At our best, Quakers bring the Goldilocks in me to say, "just right"—a healthy realism about my own laziness, flakiness, and sinfulness, joined to an irrepressible hope that God's power is at work in even the worst serial killers, dictators, and pastors on the planet.

8. I believe God can and does show up in every human experience.

Fancy seminarian-types would say “All of life is sacramental.” I believe God is not silent. I believe God is not hidden. I believe in *symbol* in the best sense of that word—that every experience and activity and object is capable of conveying ultimate Meaning (note the capital M; it is the person of God who makes all things truly real and relevant). When I’ve worshiped with Friends, I am challenged to actually expect God to speak right then and there, and to look for God every moment of every day.

7. 86.7% of the most influential people in my life are Quakers.

(And 98.4% of statistics are made up on the spot.) Seriously, out of the people who have most shaped my life, the ones I admire and respect, the people I would most like to model my life after, a huge percentage of them are Quakers. I choose Quakers because it’s a community of people who have changed me.

6. Silence speaks to me.

Worshiping with Friends opened a whole new world to me. The guy who used to do his homework while watching TV and listening to a Walkman, who thought that prayer was about saying the right words, discovered the still small voice of God waiting in the silence. I don’t believe it’s the only way to worship or to hear God (see number 8 again), but I can’t fathom how others encounter God while *never* practicing silence.

5. I believe every person on the planet can hear God’s voice and be a part of God’s plan.

On the positive side, this means I strive for justice and equality in human relationships, because there are no fundamental distinctions between people. It gives my life purpose, and offers hope to anyone. On the negative side, this reason for being a Quaker challenges my competitiveness and selfishness, refuses to allow me to keep on the blinders of nationalistic pride when I look at the world, screams against capital punishment and war and vindictiveness, and forces me to listen carefully to those with whom I disagree. Grays sometimes overshadow the black and white, but never completely overwhelm.

4. I don’t want to be called “reverend.”

As a pastor, I don’t want to be set apart from the people with whom I’m living life as a follower of Jesus. God alone is worthy of being revered. Even Friends don’t always get this right, but I’m proud to be a part of a denomination that truly holds to the priesthood of ALL believers, that refuses to look at a person’s *office* or *function* in the church, but rather at the person’s *openness* to the Spirit of God.