



PARENT COUNCIL GUIDE  
TO OUR QUAKER SCHOOL



# INTRODUCTION

The mission of any sound parent/teacher association is to create a solid partnership between the family and their school. As a Parent Council at a Quaker school, this can only be fully achieved by developing a firm appreciation of the community's philosophy and the principles it is committed to. We as parents are not untouched by the experiences of our children at Friends Academy and they, in turn, will live what we reinforce at home.



As a recent edition of *Chronicles of Quaker*

*Education* points out, “All of our behavior influences others through a ripple effect. The values learned and lived by students, teachers, administrators and trustees in Friends schools influence many families; those families influence their communities; those communities influence the world.”<sup>1</sup> As families embrace these Quaker values, our collective identity and relationship with the entire school community deepens.

It is the obligation, then, of the Friends Academy Parent Council to communicate this respect for our Quaker foundation and to outline the school's many Quaker traditions. Most of our parents are not Quakers, and may be naturally curious about these principles. In the work done by the school's Peace and Social Action Planning Committee in 2000, their *Advices and Queries* recognizes that the “Quaker ideals of simplicity, moderation, patience, caring service to others, integrity and commitment to non-violent resolution of differences can be often lost in an affluent and rapidly changing world”. Likewise, it states that we should be “mindful of the stress and pressures that motivate behavior in today's society,”<sup>2</sup> The responsibility of parenting a child at a Quaker school, therefore, presents unique challenges. The committee that came together to create this Parent Council Guide to our Quaker School believes that this responsibility also comes with deep rewards and is well-worth the “ripples” it will create.

Please take the time to look over our Quaker practices and FA traditions, followed by an explanation of the Quaker testimonies entitled “SPICES”- simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and service. They will hopefully enrich your total experience at Friends Academy and only serve to fortify our bonds with the school and each other.

# QUAKER PRACTICES

## & FRIENDS ACADEMY TRADITIONS

Most parents new to Friends Academy receive a basic orientation to Quakerism when they enroll their children in the school. They are also given a copy of *A Quaker Book of Wisdom* by Robert Lawrence Smith, learn of the basic Quaker heritage and testimonies and many attend their first Meeting for Worship. However, Quaker life at the school is ongoing and open to all. Each month, Head of School Bill Morris will use a student-generated query to frame his monthly letter in *Among Friends*. In *Friends Academy Advices and Queries*, it states that “each of us has the opportunity to participate in this dynamic process”, and that these queries “serve to generate thought and conversation and engage all members of the community.”<sup>3</sup>

Our children attend Meeting for Worship once weekly in the Matinecock Meeting House (younger children meet in the Lower School). Meeting for Worship is central to most Friends schools and uses group silence to gain insights and wisdom. *Advices and Queries* explains: “The centrality of Quaker Meeting for worship in the life of the school is based on the belief that God dwells in the heart of every individual. This is sometimes referred to as the “Light Within” or “that of God” which dwells in each person.”<sup>4</sup> Meeting for Worship is open to all parents of all religious backgrounds and its schedules are listed in the Student and Parent Handbook.

All meetings, including the monthly **Parent Council Representative meetings**, begin and end with a communal moment of silence. This practice serves to set apart the business at hand; it eases the transition from busy life to respectful listening and work. It suggests that the expectations at these gatherings are different from the norm.

As *Advices and Queries* informs us, Friends Academy “aspires to practice Quaker ideals that have proved their worth over three centuries.”<sup>5</sup> These values or testimonies influence everyone in the community. Certain testimonies guide activities at the school and are outlined in the Student and Parent Handbook: gambling or games of chance are not permitted, and alcohol is prohibited on campus. Others go to the heart of everything that we do. These Quaker tenets give us direction and are relevant to all. Many Quakers use the acronym “SPICES” to both explain the testimonies and allow non-Quakers to remember them easily! Because “we value and gain strength from the traditions of the community”<sup>6</sup> we can use these values as a roadmap to parenting our children who attend this Quaker school. We sincerely hope that these SPICES lead and “accent” all Parent Council practices at Friends Academy.

**S**implicity & moderation

**P**ease - peaceful resolution of conflict

**I**ntegrity - earning the trust of others

**C**ommunity - caring for each other

**E**quality - respecting & valuing all people

**S**ervice - to others wherever needed



*“Friends Academy is a Quaker school, and that begs a question- What exactly does it mean to be a Quaker school? First and foremost, it means there are certain principles that go to the heart of everything we do- integrity, simplicity, justice, patience, moderation, respect for others, and the peaceful resolution of conflict. It means we are committed to doing work in service of others, on our campus, in the larger community, and beyond.”<sup>7</sup>*

*- Quaker Values, FA Website*



# SIMPLICITY

## & MODERATION

To live simply is not to merely forgo materialism, but as Robert Smith says in *The Quaker Book of Wisdom*, “to live to the point, to clear the way to the best, to keep first things first”. In the 17th century, Quakers adopted the practice of outward simplicity as a means to protest the extravagance and pretentiousness that existed in English society.<sup>8</sup> The Quaker tenet of simplicity suggests that we minimize distractions so that we may discern what is truly important in our lives.

One basic, outward manifestation of this testimony is our dress code. When coming to school, students are told to dress as if they were going to work. The Friends Academy Student and Parent Handbook states: “The dress code at Friends Academy reflects a respect for the traditions and mission of the school....dress should be neat and clean, reflect modesty and moderation and avoid faddish styles.”<sup>9</sup> Please refer to this book for specific dress code policies in your child’s section.

The Friends Academy Parent Council endeavors to keep this testimony in mind as we plan events throughout the year. We suggest modesty when organizing post-concert receptions, cast parties and in-school birthday celebrations. Our members are mindful to not waste food or to detract from the focus of the occasion with elaborate or expensive decoration.

Many families desire to express their gratitude to those at the school who help shape their children’s lives. The Parent Council holds a **Faculty and Staff Appreciation Luncheon** every spring to honor the work that is done by our school personnel throughout the year. This event reinforces that ALL parents appreciate the devotion and work of the faculty and staff at Friends Academy. Parents are encouraged to help work this day in April or to send in a home made dessert for the occasion. Families who opt to give additional tokens of appreciation are asked to do so on an optional and individual basis. Please present any gifts at the beginning or end of the school day and not in front of a class. Likewise, collective solicitation of money from the parents in class is not condoned due to the economic diversity at the school and the personal preferences of each family. As per the Student and Parent Handbook, “We ask that gift giving is in keeping with our Quaker principles of simplicity, moderation and equality.”<sup>10</sup>

# PEACE

## PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT

The peace testimony is probably the best known of the Friends' testimonies and Quakers have been following it for over 300 years. Peace is not just what happens in far away places. It also influences our day-to-day lives and our relationships at home, at school and in our communities. According to the Friends Council on Education's Queries on Peace, "there is no use opposing great wars if there are small ones present in our lives (quarrels, grudges, etc.). We need to pay careful attention to different points of view and avoid subtle forms of violence (i.e.) unkind words, disrespect and putting others down for their differences."<sup>11</sup> This pertains to direct interpersonal contact or electronic communications. Likewise, we settle all disagreements without physical force or words that hurt others.

The school's tradition of discouraging violent or warlike costumes (including those featuring weapons) during Halloween celebrations is born from this testimony. Likewise, the dress code prohibits students from wearing military or camouflage clothing, including bomber jackets to school. Please reference the Student and Parent Handbook for further clarification.

Our **Parent Council meetings** are loosely modeled after a Quaker business meeting. Though we do not function as a Meeting would, we are committed to following these practices because we believe they help build the best possible school community. In *The Quaker Decision-making Process*, published by Friends Council on Education, it outlines some of the requirements for such a meeting:

- Members need to bring an open mind and respect for the group.
- There is a willingness to contain reactive emotions (i.e.) anger, irritation while focusing on the work at hand.
- Patience and the ability to use silence constructively.
- Respect for the work of committees who may have prepared reports or planned events.
- The meeting begins and ends with a moment of silence. The clerk convenes the meeting. Active listening is promoted. The clerk can encourage reluctant speakers as well as rein in participants who overwhelm the meeting or speak too frequently. If discussion should become contentious, a moment of silence may be asked for by the clerk.
- The group meets with a prepared agenda, at an arranged time and place.
- A recorder takes notes and then communicates through minutes.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike a Quaker meeting for business, Parent Council meetings involve less decision making and focus more on augmenting communication between the home and school. These meetings are open to the entire community.

# INTEGRITY

## EARNING THE TRUST OF OTHERS & DEMONSTRATING TRUST OF THEM

“Let your life speak.”<sup>13</sup> These words are so well-known by Quakers that they hardly need attribution!

There is a moral voice in all that we do. In *Advices and Queries* it states:

“We seek to create a community where the individual is trusted, yet held responsible to the community, and where reliance on each other for strength and guidance is a basic belief and practice.”<sup>14</sup> An individual should act according to what he or she knows is morally, ethically and spiritually right and good.

The *Portrait of our Community* states:

“In support of our mission, the Friends Academy community has created a statement of principles called the *Portrait of our Community- REACHES OUT*. Each day we challenge ourselves to demonstrate these qualities in our thoughts, words, and deeds.”

*R*espectful, responsible and reflective

*E*nthusiastically embraces learning

*A*ppreciates all diversity

*C*ompassionate and courageous

*H*onest and humble

*E*ngages in service within and beyond the community

*S*trives for spiritual awareness, emotional well being, and physical health

*O*pen-minded and creative in pursuit of excellence

*U*nderstands and honors Quaker testimonies

*T*hinks analytically and independently<sup>15</sup>

The Parent Council recognizes that the manner in which we do our work is just as important as the end result. Committee and subcommittee work is respected and regarded with respect. Thus, decisions made on behalf of the community are carefully considered by those who are charged with these important responsibilities. Positive and negative outcomes are thoughtfully considered. Further, minutes are taken at any meeting in which major decisions are made so that the community can understand the discernment process. The community is asked to appreciate decisions made in this way. We strive to respect all voices, and as such, all committees are open to participation from every member. Please review the **Volunteer Opportunities** section of the Parent Council portion of the website and put your unique talents to work!

# COMMUNITY

## CARING FOR & ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

“Is my school a caring community? Do the people care for one another deeply? Do they recognize each other’s needs and help in meeting them?”<sup>16</sup>

As parents in a Quaker community, we have a responsibility to use our time, talents and resources for the good of the school and each other. Caring individuals serve our immediate and larger communities. Building our collective sense of community allows us to support one another through trying times and to celebrate the good ones together. Robert Lawrence Smith, in *A Quaker Book of Wisdom* writes:

“A Friends school is always striving to become a better school community- a process that everyone in the school is aware of and involved in.”<sup>17</sup>

The Parent Council is committed to reaching out to all members of the school community, past, present and future. Local Friends Academy alumni are starting to receive e-mail notification of Parent Council events throughout the year. Alumni parents return to work at booths at the **Fall Fair**, are invited to the **Parent Council Luncheon** and to attend the **Auction**. New parents are welcomed by our **Parent-to-Parent** mentors before their children begin classes so that they learn about our community early on. We work to improve our lines of communication by creating interactive portions of the Parent Council section of the FA website and establishing **Community Service, Athletic** and **Arts Parent Council Liaison** positions. These Liaisons will report at Parent Council Rep Meetings, and via e-mail will notify our entire community (alumni included) regarding special events in their Departments. Our many community building events, such as the **Senior Brunch** and **Pre-Prom** gatherings, **Lower School Winter Games** and **Middle School Family Night** strive to bring us together in special and memorable ways. It is a tradition that special attention is given to the **FA Prom** experience. By maintaining ticket prices at the affordable price of \$40, and providing chaperoned coach buses for transportation in lieu of limousines, we endeavor to make this senior event more inclusive, affordable and safe. The Parent Council provides significant financial support to ensure that all Friends Academy Proms are open to every student, regardless of means. Additionally, the Parent Council will purchase a **Library Tribute** to honor the passing or celebrate the birth of a Friends’ family member. We care for one another. An active and responsible parent body serves the interests of all, and more importantly, “creates one fellowship” here at Friends Academy.

# EQUALITY

RESPECTING & VALUING ALL PEOPLE

“Friends generally approach modern concerns about diversity and inclusion by emphasizing a historic testimony to equality in the areas of gender, class, race and religion.”<sup>18</sup> (Advices and Queries, Peace and Social Action Planning Committee 2000) Briefly, this history includes the institution of coeducational schools in the 1600’s, the long lasting peace treaty between William Penn’s Pennsylvania and Native Americans, the practice of religious tolerance (which set them apart from all other colonies), the abolishment of slavery in many of their communities almost 100 years before the Emancipation Proclamation, their far-reaching involvement with the Underground Railroad, and working for the rights of women.<sup>19</sup> If Quakers believe that there is that of God in every person, then kindness and respect for all should follow.

“A Friends Academy education starts with the inner light- the fundamental belief, firmly rooted in our Quaker tradition, that there is truth and goodness in each person. We believe that each child carries unique gifts and talents which we seek to nurture and celebrate.”<sup>20</sup> Quaker Values, FA Website

As parents in a Quaker community, we will model this respect and kindness for all- teachers, staff and families- to our children. When planning extra-curricular events, milestone birthday parties or social gatherings for our families, we have a perfect opportunity to discuss the value of inclusion. We can teach them to be mindful of the feelings of others. Longstanding party guidelines are: inviting all but a few children in a particular class can be hurtful and problematic, mail all invitations in lieu of handing them out in the classroom, school is not the place to plan or discuss parties. Feelings of exclusion are counter-productive to our sense of community. Please speak with your child’s principal for further clarification.

In Parent Council, we strive to reaffirm this regard for the unique worth of every member by conducting ourselves with the Quaker Business Meeting model in mind. Friends do not vote or operate by “majority rules”. To exclude minority opinions would be to invalidate their worth to the group. We aim to actively listen to all voices, knowing that each may represent part of the Truth. “Consensus” occurs when the gathered community comes to a spirit-led decision. Many times, this is NOT unanimous, but if all members have had an opportunity to be heard, they will feel committed to the process and its decision. The Parent Council slate of officers and class representatives are appointed by the **Nominating Committee**, which functions in this way. This committee attempts to achieve diversity in the full slate by putting forth names of parents of different backgrounds and experiences at the school. Service to the community and the understanding of the school’s mission are also taken into account. All parents are honored and thereby encouraged to volunteer their names to be considered for Parent Council positions. Please log onto the **Volunteer Opportunities** portion of the FA website to do so.

# SERVICE

## TO OTHERS, WHERE NEEDED, IN ANY WAY ONE CAN- STEWARDSHIP

Quakers have an established tradition of putting their caring into doing, which leads to the saying “service begins when the Meeting ends”. According to the Friends Academy Mission Statement, “We are also committed to service and ethical action.”<sup>20</sup> As parents collaborate and reinforce the value of service, we can present a powerful lesson to our children. Parent Council encourages this effort by providing support in many ways. Stewardship of our immediate community would encompass every volunteer position we offer, the **Campus Beautification** efforts and our funding of the Health and Wellness program that services students, parents and staff. As we look outward, Parent Council provides significant financial support to Breakthrough Long Island, as well as offering them an opportunity to do additional fundraising at our **Fall Fair**. Service to the larger community also includes the **Coat Drive**, **Mitten Tree**, and **Toy Drive**. After Thanksgiving, Parent Council partners with Lower School Art Director Margaret Lindner to coordinate the **Holiday Tag Craft** event. Here Lower School families enjoy camaraderie while personalizing tags for the mittens, scarves, hats and toys they have collected. We have instituted **Family Community Service Projects**, which brings parents and children of all ages together monthly to make sandwiches, create seasonal decorations and collect essential items for food banks and shelters in our neighborhoods near and far. To date, we have contributed to P.O.T.S. (Part of the Solution) in the Bronx, St. Patrick’s Parish Food Bank in Glen Cove, and several I.N.N (Interfaith Nutrition Network) facilities, such as the Rosa Parks Shelter in Roosevelt. These “Projects” give parents and older students a chance to model service for our younger children. They also send a powerful message- performing service can be fun! Our parents have not only enthusiastically volunteered for these events and the We Care for Kids week, but have developed other avenues for giving; the Box Tops for Education and Used Sporting Goods Drive. Growing our service initiatives is clearly a goal of our parent body.

For Quakers, service includes stewardship of the earth. Care for all of God’s creations is shown through responsible attention to the planet and all of its creatures. By living simply, you take only what you absolutely need of the earth’s natural resources. The FA Green Campus Initiative addresses this, and the school is working in some profound ways to shrink its ecological footprint. Parent Council is now an active partner of the **Green Committee** and is pledging to conduct our events in an environmentally responsible way. Some changes are small: supplying washable mugs at all Exec Board and many Rep meetings, using recycling bins at all large Parent Council functions, substantially decreasing the size and number of mailings to parents, and using electronic minutes for all meetings. Others have a larger impact, such as using 100% recycled paper in all remaining mailings, putting our **Gift Wrap Sale** and **Auction** online and offering financial support to Green Campus Initiatives. Lead by example!

# SOURCES

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