



Deep Listening in a Divided Age

On the Wednesday morning after the 2016 presidential election, Quaker school students and educators across the country engaged in a practice used regularly in our schools: the weekly gathering together as a community in silence for reflection, deep listening and the respectful expression to one another across our differences.

The object of this silent reflection is for our school communities to seek common ground, or a communal sense of the truth through which the whole of the school and all of its students might benefit. Silent reflection also provides the framework for students' experiences in our classrooms and the kind of civil discourse we expect from them; we value respectful listening to one another as equals above all else. It is through deep listening to others that our students discover their own voices.

William Penn founded the first Quaker school in 1689, 100 years prior to the formal addition of the Bill of Rights to the United States Constitution. Penn directed that the school educate students from all walks of life, genders, religions, and ethnicities to prepare them to be moral leaders within the Commonwealth no matter what profession or trade that they might someday pursue.

Penn's school created a program of study through which these young people might together imagine a more ideal society. Today all Quaker schools strive to serve this critical public purpose just as Penn imagined it in the earliest days of what would become the United States.

Now we find ourselves in a time of uncertainty and deep distrust. In Quaker schools, communities are turning to the Quaker values of peace, integrity, equality and community, as well as the longtime practices of peaceful conflict resolution and non-violence, as touch points for navigating these turbulent waters.

It is our sincere hope that children everywhere may come together, in the spirit of respect for all, to find a way to listen deeply to one another, to value the gifts that all students bring with them to school everyday, that they might, together, imagine an ideal society.

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