

Stimulating the Core of Quakerism

August 1, 2019 By [Gabriel Ehri](#)



The numbers continue to astonish me. [QuakerSpeak](#) launched in March of 2014, and in five years, the videos have been viewed over 2.4 million times. These videos have helped people all over the world discover the Quaker way as a spiritual path, and they have helped countless Friends go just a little deeper. They have exposed a great many people to the patterns and examples of Friends in a direct and powerful way. This month's issue looks back at five years of our QuakerSpeak project. For my part, I want to share a perspective from behind the scenes.

Jon Watts first pitched the idea to us in 2012: short, high-quality videos on YouTube about Quakers. At that time, a billion people were using YouTube each month, and very little Quaker content existed. My interest was piqued because the Friends Publishing board had recently charged us with not just publishing a periodical, but "to communicate Quaker experience in order to connect and deepen spiritual lives."

It felt like "way opening," to use a Quaker euphemism for divine providence, when in March 2013, I sat in a room with other young adult Quakers and talked about what

might be done to “build anew the Religious Society of Friends.” Trustees from the Thomas H. and Mary Williams Shoemaker Fund had convened us to serve as a focus group of sorts, as they sought to be more strategic and effective in their mission to grow and revive Quakerism through their grantmaking. They were looking for big ideas, and we had one.

In one of the many emails Jon and I exchanged as our plans were jelling, he wrote to me, “My hope with these videos is to really stimulate the core of Quakerism... that is, get in underneath and behind our defenses and our poses and allow the Light to shine in the places where we need to be transformed. I believe that this is the true work of restoring and strengthening Quakerism. I believe that seekers will be naturally attracted to a group that is honestly wrestling with these concepts.” “I couldn’t agree more,” I replied. We were thrilled when the Shoemaker Fund took a leap of faith with us and provided startup funding in late 2013. Jon joined our merry band of staff at Friends Publishing, and we got busy making movies to share with the world.

So many people have been a part of QuakerSpeak since then, both in front of the camera and behind it. Each one of them deserves our thanks for committing to share their light with the world. Most of all, I am grateful for Jon, whose vision, drive, creativity, and generosity have been inspirational. (Even a partial list of individuals and organizations deserving of our gratitude in connection with QuakerSpeak is too long for this space, my editors tell me. You’ll find it on page 5.)

I’m grateful to the hundreds of QuakerSpeak patrons, who chip in a dollar, five dollars, ten dollars, even fifty dollars per video, releasing us to seek out and share Quaker voices that have something of God to share with the millions who might tune in on YouTube and encounter us. Every donation to our organization enables us to connect people with the experience of Quakers, to grow a library of resources for people that may find them helpful throughout their spiritual journey.

These videos have grown to become an important part of who Friends are today and how we greet and engage people. I’m excited to see what is to come. Thanks for watching along with us.

Yours in peace.

Thanks for supporting QuakerSpeak

I am grateful to the trustees of Friends Publishing, whose discernment of a new and crystalline mission statement made it possible to see QuakerSpeak as not

simply a good idea, but something that was our work, a part of our obligation to Friends and to the world. I want to thank the Thomas H. and Mary Shoemaker Fund for the significant philanthropic investment that got QuakerSpeak off the ground. Our partner organizations and their staff helped us explore new ways of working together as Quaker ministries, first of all Friends General Conference and Quaker Voluntary Service. Later, the folks at Friends Committee on National Legislation and American Friends Service Committee would walk with us as QuakerSpeak became more than a pilot project. We would join forces with Friends World Committee for Consultation Section of the Americas, New England and Philadelphia Yearly Meetings, Friends Couple Enrichment, Friends Fiduciary Corporation, Guilford College, Quaker House of Fayetteville, Quaker Earthcare Witness, and the Pickett Endowment. Each collaboration affords us the opportunity to meet and spotlight Friends whose Quaker ministries are changing the world, bit by bit. Finally, my colleagues at Friends Publishing all deserve kudos for their collaboration. We screen and critique rough drafts of each video, helping to shape the final product so that the messages of the Friends on camera can come across most powerfully. And finally, we vigorously promote every video to ensure we find and reach our audience. It's truly a team effort.

Gabriel Ehri