

While deciding which "different" church I would go visit - I had a little bit of a problem because I have already visited a lot of different denominations and other religions' meetings and/or services. I decided to see if Lubbock has a Quaker meeting. First, I visited the website below to find out where the Friends meet in Lubbock. I used the e-mail address on the page and requested a visit. A woman named M- e-mailed me back and told me I did not have to dress any particular way - they were very liberal, but not in the political sense of the word. (The other woman later in the meeting mentioned this, too.) After e-mailing each other a few times - she thought I wanted to visit another Quaker group that meets in west Lubbock and she was part of a group that meets in the middle of Lubbock on University Avenue. I told her I wanted to meet with her and she told me the address and the time to meet.

I showed up early and realized I had been to a dance lesson at this church because of a conflict at our normal lesson spot. People in Lubbock are fond of calling it the "gay" church. She told me the Metropolitan Community Church meets in one part and the Quakers meet in the Education building. There was a man getting out of his car, so I asked him about the Quakers and he told me I was on University and pointed in the direction of Quaker Avenue. I told him, "No - it is Quaker religion, not Quaker Avenue. They told me they meet in the Education Building, but I don't see another building." He walked me over to the other side of the church and took me into an area where he assumed I would be meeting. As we turned around, a woman came around the corner and it was M-. I helped her put out signs to show people where to go for the Quaker services and I helped her put the seats in a circle. She asked if I was familiar with the other church and as I was saying, "they call it the 'gay' church" she was saying "LGBT community." I cringed a little because I do not often have to worry about being politically correct and may have just stepped over a boundary. If I did - she did not seem offended by my comment. She told me they rarely get more people unless they are doing research for a class.

Across from where they have their meetings is a nursery. She told me that Quakers and the LGBT community have a lot in common because both groups believe in adoption. She told me a few of their members have adopted children as do some of the members of the other church. So, the nursery comes in handy. She also told me she is a professor at *****. Come to find out - the other three people who showed up were also instructors or professors at *****. I had only asked where she worked because she looked familiar to me and as we were talking I realized she had been in the same ballroom dancing class that I was in a few years ago. We talked a little about memory. I asked her if they sing and she told me no, but she has heard of other Quakers doing so.

She handed me a tiny book to read about Quakers, which I did not get a chance to read. She asked me about how I found her and I told her about the website. She was surprised that the other Quaker group was still using her e-mail address because she had not been involved with them in a while. I asked how long it had been since they divided and she said it had been a few months. I asked if she would mind telling me why they had divided. She told me that in Quaker society, if someone is verbally abusive towards another person, the community usually goes and stands by the person who is being verbally abused. One day, a man was being verbally abusive towards her because she is a lesbian and the group went and stood beside the man while he kept being mean to her. According to her, this type of behavior is odd in the "Quaker world." So, she decided to start her own group of Friends. (This explained why the Metropolitan Church allowed her to use the room at their church.)

A couple with three children showed up and they took several minutes to get the children settled into the nursery, but the man stayed with the children in the nursery. I noticed that the children had opposing views about what they would be doing and when the parents were talking to the children it was as if they were discussing it rather than the parents just telling the children what they would do. There was no power struggle. I thought it was interesting because the children were adopted or foster children and the whole interaction seemed to move along so smoothly without either parent exerting their will on the children, for instance, by saying: "Because I said so." I mentioned this to the mother and she told me that the boy did not like to do craft projects or things that required fine motor skills and the girls had never been allowed to speak up for themselves without getting a beating - so the girls were really enjoying being able to make choices for themselves and be heard. They were developing different personalities.

M- filled her in on our past in the ballroom dancing world and about her telling me about the division of the Quakers in Lubbock. The woman said she did not realize that is why M- started this group.

One interesting thing the woman talked about was making a game where there is only one player and everyone takes turns moving that one person, but each turn they pick a card and have to do things for each other or read things. "The player could be George Fox," she said, but was still thinking about who that character would be and the rules of the game. But she said the children could all take turns moving him to the finish line and along the way they do things that would reflect their Quaker beliefs. She did not elaborate further on the subject, but I thought it sounded very interesting.

Another man (N-) showed up and sat down, but shortly afterwards Miriam looked at the other woman and asked very quietly, "are you ready?" The woman said, "Yes" and they all closed their eyes. I watched them for a few seconds before the woman opened her eyes and told me "this is the part where we try and center ourselves and listen for the voice of God." M- added that sometimes no one speaks. I nodded at them, not wanting them to get bogged down with explaining things to me. I closed my eyes, too. I sat there and tried to relax. I was not relaxed. I thought about meditating and started thinking about the usual meditation scenes I paint in my mind, but I kept thinking about the three other people in the room. Were they going to start quaking? Were they going to all start talking at once? Was anyone going to talk? Are they trying to read my mind? What is that noise? Is there a mouse? This chair is uncomfortable. Those kids are loud. Oh, wait, maybe I should try and listen for the voice of God, too. I am falling asleep. I have to open

my eyes. What is M- doing? What is N- doing? What are the children doing? Where are the children going? (I can hear them leaving.) Please - someone say something. Ok, now. Now. How long is this going to go on?

Finally, the other woman started speaking about M-'s awful experience with the other Quaker group and the Quakers' habit of standing beside someone who is being abused. She talked about Ahmed Mohamed who built the digital clock and got arrested and shortly after on Twitter people were putting #standwithahmed and how people are always putting things like that on Twitter about #standwith(whatever) and she thought it was very Quaker of them to do so and she wanted to just say she stood with M-. She kept her eyes closed the whole time she was talking. That was nice of her to say this and I saw M- smile, but M- had her eyes open and her head a little bowed.

I quit closing my eyes because I can fall asleep pretty easily if I sit still long enough - especially if I have my eyes closed. I just looked around the room while they stayed quiet. After a little while I saw M- look at the clock and close her eyes again and so I felt like maybe it was getting close to "closing time." After about five minutes, M- asked, "Is that good?" and the others said yes. We got up and held hands for a few minutes. I felt N- squeeze my hand pretty hard, but not painfully and then I felt M- do it. I did not know what that was about, but finally they let go of my hands and we sat back down. The time from beginning to end was a little over an hour.

I asked the other woman how long they had been involved with the Quakers and she told me she was from California, but had met her husband in Illinois and he was already involved with the Quakers. She talked about several other things and then looked at me and I probably had a 'deer in the headlights' look on my face because she did not answer my question. I think she quickly realized it, though, and told me that she has been with him since 2001. In her roundabout way I think she was saying she had been involved since 2001. I thought about how short a time that is - fourteen years, but it is still way longer than I have ever been involved with a particular religious or other group. M- told me she had grown up being involved in a different religion, but did not elaborate on which one. She had an aunt and uncle who were Quakers and her mother was always saying they were going to hell, but when her mother died she quickly (within a couple of months) became a practicing Quaker, but felt like she had been a Quaker all her life. Although she was ready to start being involved in Quakerism she said she had to find people who believe what she believes. Now, she is a representative to the national organization of Friends General Conference.

They talked for a while about growing and going to get Navajo Tea (greenthread). M- had received seeds she had ordered online and then she talked to them about going out to the orchard in Idalou and about the corn maze near Shallowater. The man who had stayed with the children during the meeting talked about tea for a long time. I kind of wondered why they did not talk more during their meetings about religious things, God, or Jesus. It seems as if they could take notes during the week as they thought of things to talk about and that way they could have something to say, but that is more organized than this group of Quakers wishes to be. I think they want to be truly motivated in the moment. I kind of joked with myself (only in my mind and now on paper) about the only man who stayed in the room may like attending the meetings so he can have some peace and quiet.

I did not feel much of anything from this meeting and almost went to the other Quaker meeting to see if there was a difference, but I did not go. I have been to a lot of different churches in my life, but the ones I went to regularly were Baptist (as a child) and Church of Christ in my early adult years. I was also a member of the Roman Catholic Church for about seven years - fifteen years ago. The other churches I have visited are: non-denominational (that was what they called themselves), Pentecostal, Episcopalian, Methodist and Lutheran. I was a member of Nichiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai thirty years ago, for a short time. The main reason I quit was because they were trying to make me memorize things in Japanese without telling me what they meant. When I questioned the practice and insisted that I would rather know what I was saying first, they were a little insulting (as if I were not intelligent enough to understand). The weird thing about this Quaker group is that all I felt was anxiety about sitting there with my eyes closed for so long with nothing going on around me except others doing the same thing. I also felt anxious about offending them. I thought maybe that was one of the purposes - I need to work on my anxiety? I did not feel any warmth or otherwise emanating from any of them. Other places I have visited, I feel some type of warmth, excitement or happiness from the people in attendance - as if they are happy to be there and they are happy for me to be there. It is a celebration, but this felt like a bunch of nothing to me. I also thought may be that that is the whole point. Just because you feel jubilation from others - it may be for the wrong reasons or insincere.

<https://www.quakercloud.org/cloud/lubbock-friends-meeting>