

Early Quakers believed they had discovered and were bringing alive
the essential witness of 1st century Christians

William Penn claimed Quakerism was “primitive Christianity revived”—writing the following...
“Primitive Christianity Revived in the faith and practice of the people called Quakers”

George Fox claimed that the church had been apostate and in the wilderness since Constantine
He regarded it as his mission to reclaim the true church of Jesus Christ

Early Quakers didn’t set out to create a new denomination

Or even a new movement within Christianity as they knew and experienced it in 1600s
They sought to recover the basic faith and practice of the apostles found in the New Testament
They sought to restore the days of the early church—reviving primitive, apostolic Christianity
Before Christianity became the official religion—which they saw as “apostasy”

For many denominations, the emphasis is on apostolic succession

Apostolic lineage is physical—tracing the lineage of apostolic authority back to the 12 apostles
It is passed down from one to another through the laying on of hands
This is a hierarchical approach to apostolic succession

Friends, on the other hand, saw apostolic succession as a spiritual reality given by the Holy Spirit

It was not passed down from the bishop or priest to their successor
It was a direct apostolic power given through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon everyone
Just as the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the early apostles—so it is on all people
The Spirit is not constrained to a direct lineage or to geography or tradition—it blows freely!
The Spirit moves unconstrained and unpredicted to all people everywhere
Early Friends saw apostolic vitality as recovering this direct encounter with the Holy Spirit
They put a direct encounter and response to the Living Christ as Present Teacher at the center
In a very real sense, this means that we are all apostles

Paul Anderson lists the ways early Friends lived out this understanding of primitive, apostolic Christianity

- They emphasized the essence of spiritual vitality—Not outward religious expressions
- They proclaimed the Good News to all who would listen, locally and around the world
- They sought to live by the power and present leading of the risen Christ, individually and corporately, declaring that Christ is indeed present to teach his people himself
- God is no respecter of persons, therefore all persons are created equal
- There is that of God in all persons, causing them to work to improve conditions in jails, among the poor, and for all disenfranchised persons
- They emphasized worship in Spirit and in truth—abiding in the place inhabited by early prophets
- Sought to live with absolute integrity—letting their yes be yes and their no be no
- They experienced the outpourings of the Holy Spirit and divine visitations like the first Pentecost
- They spoke prophetically to the needs of the world and were given gifts of healing and faith
- They called for putting away the sword and spoke truth to those in power
- They embraced the ideals of the Kingdom of God, calling for religion and society alike to change

All of these are ways early Friends sought to recover the essence of the apostolic Jesus movement

Christ has come to teach his people himself in the 1600s just as he had in the New Testament
And Christ has come to teach his people himself in 2017 and beyond!
Christ led the early church—Christ leads us today

If the essence of Christianity is a transformative life-changing encounter with the Living Christ
Then we are partners with Christ in furthering Christ's mission in the world

Bottom line—we all directly inherit the apostolic succession in the same way the early apostles did
... through the Holy Spirit

The power of the Holy Spirit has not been diminished over 2000 years

We are no less empowered to live out the Pentecost power than the apostles of Acts

Acts 2—read selected passages

Sources—

Following Jesus: The Heart of Faith and Practice, by Paul Anderson, Barclay Press, 2013—pages 9-14.

A Living Faith: An Historical Study of Quaker Beliefs, by Wilmer Cooper, Friends United Press, 1990.