

Friends Meeting of Washington (FMW)

Report of the Religious Education Committee for 2012

Presented at the July 2012 Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business

Committee members: Kim Acquaviva (Recording Clerk), Jane Connor, Justin Connor (Clerk), Anita Drever, Rob Farr (Alternate Clerk), Lynsey Wood Jeffries, Chris Klemek, Patrick Lynam, Carrie Mitchell

The Religious Education committee feels deeply blessed to hold a joyful set of committee duties –we seek to lovingly care for the educational/spiritual/faithjourney of each and every one of us who together make up Friends Meeting of Washington, from the smallest infant up through adults. The ministry that occupies the greatest share of our time, care and budget oversight of the nursery and our treasured First Day School (FDS) program. We also have under our nurture and care the regular Sunday morning Adult Religious Education Study group that has been coordinated faithfully for many years by John Scales. This year we have also felt called to working closely with the Child Safety, Healing & Reconciliation and Personal Aid committees among others on various concerns affecting the FDS program, particularly our Child Safety policy.

Seeing a growing number of families with young children coming to the Meeting over the past several years, we are working closely with Finance & Stewardship and Personnel regarding the new proposed position of part-time Youth Program Coordinator, who would work with us to implement all of the various Quaker youth ministries which we currently undertake and envision for the future. We expect this person would also support the Child Safety committee in its work. We are blessed with many active and valued FMW community members who serve as volunteer FDS teachers, the pillars of our program. We are considering a proposal to work with the Ministry and Worship committee to start First Day School at 10:30 A.M. rather than 10:50 A.M. and invite children attending FDS to join worship at 11:10 A.M.

Working closely this year with the Child Safety committee has increased our awareness of issues such as the hand-off between parents and First Day School, safety concerns with dated playground equipment, and overall supervision of and responsibility for children outside of First Day School throughout our campus, especially during the coffee hour and committee meetings.

Nursery – Interim Coordinator: Tracy Hart

The Meeting offers child care to our little ones, from 6 months through 4 years each week during 10:30 Meeting for Worship and monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business. Average attendance is 8-10 children each week and over the past year we have nurtured approximately 40 children and families. We are blessed with a wonderful group of care providers on staff, all of whom hold university degrees and/or certificates in Early Child Education. Makai and Katorra have been with us for many years, providing the comfort of continuity to parents. We recently had several cherished providers, Anita, Aries & Ken, move on to new opportunities, allowing us to hire Thanh, Shannon and Tammy, our new providers.

We continue to upgrade the Decatur Place Room with new toys and supplies to create a cheerful and child-friendly environment for our youngest Friends. For example, we have recently received a number of gifts for the nursery, including books, play kitchen items and arts and crafts

which help ensure the nursery runs smoothly. Being aware that paying our child care providers is by far the largest line item in our committee budget, we feel deep gratitude to the Meeting for its support of this important ministry. We note that we have recently formalized our commitment to provide child care for important called meetings such that these meetings now almost always offer child care. We are reminded us that this child care is only for nursery-age children, and we may need to address this gap.

Quakes – Coordinator: Glenn Parkinson

The Quakes (ages 4-6) is the first FDS class for children aging out of the nursery. At the beginning of the Quakes' year, they focused on introducing children to the basic concepts in the Quaker Faith and Practice and Quaker values. They discussed themes such as simplicity, equality and explored silent worship. Next they focused on building a sense of community within the meeting and were supported in this by volunteer teachers from the Meeting. Modalities of learning used by the Quakes included art, Godly Play (part of the Quaker Faith and Play curriculum), Friendly play and interactive exercises.

Junior Friends – Coordinator: Virginia Avanesyan

The Junior Friends (ages 7 to 9) is the middle FDS class and this year they studied the Biblical parables of the Great Pearl, the Good Shepherd, the Mustard Seed and other parables using dramatic and creative movement extensions. The Junior Friends also regularly conduct community service projects to engage in experiential learning, including going to the Church of the Pilgrims where the children make sandwiches for distribution to the homeless.

Young Friends – Coordinators: Kim Acquaviva and Silvia Dinale

The Young Friends (ages 10 to 13) this year focused on an immersive, experiential exploration of five of the Testimonies – Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, and Equality which they explored through discussions, creative activities, and service. The Young Friends felt the presence of the spirit most deeply when our young learners made short videos about what the Quaker Testimonies meant to them individually. Our Quaker youth spoke simply yet powerfully about their lived experiences as Quakers as asked one another insightful questions on camera using iPad technology and recorded their answers. Over the coming year, the Young Friends will be reaching out to FMW members and attenders to engage all of us in similar on-camera dialogues about their lived experience of Quakerism as the group further explores the Testimonies. The Coordinators are also reaching out to the FMW community seeking more ideas for the future from people who have worked with this age group in past years as we know there is a wealth of experience of working with children in our community.

Teens Group – Coordinated by Young Adult Friends (YAF)

The challenge for our Teens group this year has been one of discernment, and in particular, discerning the path forward for the Teens group. The Young Adult Friends took the Teens group under its care and tried out several different ideas over the year: regular Sunday morning meetings during Meeting for Worship, Saturday evening events including a film screening and pizza party, and facilitating FMW youth to get to events organized by the Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) Youth Program. Of these, only the third turned out to be successful due to lack of interest in the other options.

Our Yearly Meeting has a very active youth program that includes regular weekend retreats at Monthly Meetings throughout BYM for those in 6th through 8th grade – Junior Young Friends –

(see <http://jyf.bym-rsf.net>) and those aged 14-20–Young Friends –(see: <http://yf.bym-rsf.net/>). Parents of FMW teens report to us that the BYM programs are just wonderful and enable the teens to get to know other younger Friends from all over the area and they have the time of their lives together while practicing lived Quakerism through the regular retreats they have. This program is also always seeking Friendly Adult Presences to be watchful guides at retreats.

Therefore, after several months of YAF members trying to enthrall the few teens with whom they had made contact, YAF came to the conclusion that the BYM Youth Program and other local meetings are already in fact providing exciting and engaging events for FMW Teens and we should not try to duplicate or replace these. So while it may be unfortunate that FMW itself does not currently have any specific organized teen events we feel it is the right course for the time being because we sense this need is very much being met by the Yearly Meeting's truly outstanding youth programs.

Adult Religious Education Study Group – Coordinated by John Scales

During the past year the study group met generally twice a month on Sundays before the Meeting for Worship. It benefited by the contributions of new, as well as long-standing members, as they shared in their readings and led discussions. The group continued its focus on the lives and contributions of leaders in American society who had Quaker backgrounds. William Penn's life was studied. Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony became better known biographically as well as in their key roles in leading advances in women's rights and suffrage. A biography of President Herbert Hoover elaborated on his early years as an orphan, his career in mining globally and his leadership in Europe in attending the needs of those affected by the First World War, as well as the depression years.

A study of the lives and contributions of well-known American writers revealed the influence of their Quaker backgrounds: The poet John Greenleaf Whittier wrote many poems about Quaker meetings and principles. An autobiography of James Michener gave the group background in how he became a writer, his journeys in the South Pacific, the nature of his faith, and his testimony to racial harmony. How these were expressed in the musical play, "South Pacific" and his book "Chesapeake" were considered. Joan Baez's life and songs were appreciated in relationship to her Quaker background.

The group also studied the poetry of Walt Whitman, whose mother was a Quaker, as influenced by that background and his role in caring for the wounded during the Civil War. Members then learned more about how Friends dealt with the Civil War, and how many were conflicted between their peace and anti-slavery testimony. First-hand journals and other writings by Quakers during and just after the Civil War, including one written by an ancestor of a member of the study group, gave a sense of that period from the Quaker perspective.

The group also benefited greatly from the initiative of one member in reading and sharing writings by other religious figures, and subjects. Other works studied included the Kabbalah/Jewish mysticism and The Way of Perfection by St. Teresa of Avila, 16th century Spanish mystic. The book, Amazing Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us (by Robert Putnam and David Campbell), was also discussed. The book contains a very thorough survey of different religious groups and their attitudes toward other groups, politics in the various groups and charitable activities.

In summary, it has been a busy yet fruitful year for the Religious Education committee, and we have keenly felt the divine working amongst us and enjoyed the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our midst. We are deeply grateful to the many people in the Meeting who support and uplift the work of Religious Education within the Meeting, regardless of whether they have children enrolled in the program and we welcome you to join us in nurturing the children of our village. I would like to close by reading, in a spirit of reverence and appreciation, the names of those in our community who have taught First Day School at some point over the past year:

David Abergel
Kim Acquaviva
Virginia Avanesyan
Kathy Brandt
Justin Connor
Silvia Dinale
Meg Greene
Tracy Hart
Giovanni Sella
Rob Lipp-Farr
Eileen Hanlon