

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

*For Overseers, Ministry and Counsel,
and others who provide pastoral care
in unprogrammed Friends meetings*

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Staying Connected with Young Adult Friends

by Deborah Shaw

Why do our young people have such difficulty making the transition from meeting “child” to meeting “member?” Why don’t our youth and young adults stay engaged with our meetings? Where will the next generation of leaders come from?

Are these familiar concerns in your meeting? My yearly meeting’s book of faith and practice has advices and queries for the care of young children and then skips to preparation for marriage. Where are

Where are the advices that help a meeting support young adult Friends’ spiritual development?

the queries and advices that address the time of life when all that one is taught as a child is placed in question? Where are advices for the time of life when whatever survives that period of questioning is needed as rudder, oar, or ballast as the young Friend sets out to navigate the waters of life? Where are the queries that guide the meeting in helping young Friends as they head off to college, a career, a town without a meeting, or one with a meeting that is quite different from the meeting in which they grew up? Where are the advices that help the meeting maintain connections with young adult Friends in ways that support their spiritual development and create an opening for their continuation within the Religious Society of Friends?

Might it be that our young Friends are not becoming active

adult members because we are not preparing them for that role?

Going straight to the source, *PCN* editor Pat McBee and I did some asking around to learn how young adult Friends (YAFs) view these concerns. Pat talked with groups at Pendle Hill and at the Friends General Conference Gathering. I took a poll of the first year Quaker Leadership Scholars students with whom I am working most closely this year and sent some queries to some folk in their late 20’s who have remained active in the Religious Society of Friends. Their responses and my experience with the Quaker Leadership Scholars Program inform this article’s suggestions on meetings’ relationships with young adult Friends.

What we are learning at Guilford College

It is my privilege and pleasure to work with the Quaker Leadership Scholars Program (QLSP), a program of Friends Center at Guilford College. The program was initiated in 1992 in part to address concerns within the Religious Society of Friends about where the next generation of leadership would be coming from. Currently there are 44 students involved in QLSP, young Friends from all around the country.

A central premise of our program is that keeping young Friends engaged with the Religious Society of Friends throughout their time at college is a critical aspect of developing the next generation of leadership. The program works in a systematic way over the four years, including spiritual development;



Deborah Shaw

internship work; skills workshops in clerking, clearness, decision-making, and planning a major campus conference; and study of Quaker faith and practice, history, testimonies, etc. In addition to these activities, these young Friends work, play, worship and struggle together with issues all young people face, which answers the hunger to deeply engage with Friends their own age.

We have found that it works. Over the years it has been most gratifying to see graduates of this program engage deeply as adult Friends. Many have taken staff positions in Friends organizations including Pendle Hill, Friends Council on National Legislation, Quaker United Nations Office, Friends World Committee for Consultation, William Penn House, and a variety of Friends Schools. Others have engaged in youth education work in monthly and yearly meetings and in a variety of forms of pastoral leadership. One young adult Friend is currently working with QLSP students in designing a project called *Quaker Stories: Encounters With the Spirit*

which will partner middle school students with high school and college students as they engage in interviewing seasoned Friends about their encounters with the Spirit throughout their lives.

How can what we have learned at Guilford be applied to meetings?

Stay in Touch

It is most important that older Friends in the meeting take particular interest in young Friends. Many young Friends that I have spoken with cite these interactions as quite crucial in making them feel a part of the meeting. The young people who were deeply involved in their meeting communities said that they had a sense that all the members were thinking about them. Many spoke of special celebrations—rites of passage—that the meeting had for them as they graduated from high school. One student lives close enough to Guilford that he goes home most weekends and worships with his meeting

Two Young Friends' Experience

Connecting and belonging

Despite going to meeting frequently as a child and attending a Quaker school, it is only through my involvement with a variety of young Friends events that my Quaker identity and my sense of belonging to the Quaker community have developed.

My work with young Friends has enabled me to develop and recognise a variety of skills that would otherwise have remained latent. I feel immensely fortunate in the opportunities that I have been given and the support, both practical and spiritual, from my Monthly Meeting, YFGM, and Quaker Life Children – a young peoples' section. It is through these opportunities that I have been able to find my place within the Society of Friends. For many years, when I was unable to attend meeting regularly, these events were my connection with the Society; without them I would have drifted away from Quakerism.

The skills I have learnt are not restricted to Quakerism and include the ability to plan workshops, speak in front of large groups of people and work as part of a mutually supportive team. Also crucial was the confidence that I gained through being given the opportunity to use my talents, being affirmed in my successes and given the chance to develop and gain new skills. This has led me to remain involved with Quaker youth work, volunteering on the staff at a young people's summer school and being part of the CYPC

Travelling Team. I wanted others to have the opportunity to benefit from attending young Friends' events as I have. Being a recently graduated student I couldn't give money to our corporate work so I gave my time and, I hope, my enthusiasm and skills. This is the way that I express my commitment to the Society of Friends, and I know of many young Friends who have done likewise.

Participating in two Quaker Youth Theatre projects and working with a group of similar people towards a common goal has enabled me to be part of a very special community and a very 'Quakerly' atmosphere, reflecting the feeling of the project as being an act of faith by the group.

Going on a Quaker Youth Pilgrimage to the United States five years ago was a pivotal moment in my spiritual life; the friendships I made were deep and lasting and it gave me the opportunity to explore my spirituality, both on my own and through conversations with others. This has enabled me to grow as a person and as a Quaker.

Yet it is sad, given all I have gained, to reflect that these words written in *Young Quaker* in 1985 are still true. 'Many young people have had and are having bad experiences in their local meetings...often feel patronised, smothered or bored, and...have found little evidence of a spiritual search amongst the older Friends.'

and cherishes knowing that 240 people are pulling for him to graduate. Most of these young Friends are reminded of their meetings' support through conversations with parents who tell them that people in the meeting are asking after them, not through any direct contact from the meeting or its members.

Occasional phone calls, letters, or email correspondence to college aged Friends and young adult Friends are ways of staying in touch and encouraging participation and interaction with the Religious Society of Friends. Inquiring about their lives and their spiritual lives nurtures a connection, however sporadic.

One young man in his late 20s mentioned that he gets an annual personal letter from a person in his meeting who knew him during high school. He said that he answers that letter and truly appreciates receiving it. The person from meeting shares some of what is going on in his life and in the life of the

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meeting and inquires about the young person's life. This contact is highly valued by the recipient, even though he is geographically far from his meeting. Other YAFs hearing about this remarked that they would like to have that kind of attention. Some meetings allow graduates to pick an adult member who will keep in touch by sending letters and birthday cards. Even if letters to YAFs go unanswered (very discouraging to the letter writer) they are worthwhile. Sometimes the YAF will make contact years later and say the communication was meaningful. We are lucky now to have email to which young people are more likely to respond.

In my own experience the interest of an older woman Friend made a critical difference. This woman made it clear that she was interested in what I was thinking about, what my opinions were, and she shared her thoughts and opinions with me. Being sure that the space is cleared to listen in a gracious

Young Friends are part of the Society *today* and not merely for the future."

I know I am lucky. There are many young Quakers who don't feel as involved as I do. This is why I am so enthused about a particular aspect of the job I have started, working on outreach for Young Friends General Meeting. This involves attracting other young people who could be the future members of our Society.

However there is also a need for 'in-reach' to those young Friends who don't feel part of the Society of Friends. Without this Quakerism is diminished not just for the future but in the present as well. Each individual, by their contribution to a meeting and to the Society, complements all others. If one person or group of people is separated then the whole meeting is poorer in spirit.

My faith is a result of the opportunities and experiences that I have had over a period of years as a young Friend, for this I am grateful. My involvement with and commitment to the Society of Friends are an expression of this. However the main reason for my involvement is simple. This is where I belong.

*Simon Best
Young Friends General Meeting
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On Becoming an Adult Member

I am once again an active member of my home meeting. The meeting was always there for me throughout my college career, as well as in the years following that until I returned back home. I received the bulletins regularly in my mailbox at school, as well as other cards and letters from members of the meeting. If one of them was in Richmond, I usually had a call inquiring if I could go out to lunch or for a snack to get away from campus for a while. Also, while at Earlham I participated in an off-campus study in northern Japan. Several times during my 6 months there, I received cards that had been signed by the entire meeting, just reminding me that they were only a prayer away, that they loved me and were proud of my accomplishments.

The transition from child to adult in the meeting was a difficult one. Since I joined the meeting when I was 2 months old, they had "raised" me. My parents are still members of the meeting so in some ways it is difficult for people to see me as an adult. It helped when I got married! Just in the last two years, I have been given a position of leadership as a committee clerk. With this move, I think that I am finally being recognized as an adult, rather than their child that they have now nurtured for 30 years.

*Davina Reeves Starke
Knightstown Friends Meeting
Knightstown, IN*

and leisurely manner communicates to a young Friend that you truly value her or his responses and presence.

Engage from the Heart

As I write this I find myself somewhat surprised that none of the students mentioned any special outreach from their meetings following the events of September 11. What a missed opportunity to engage in worshipful conversations about this event which has us all struggling so deeply. A third year Quaker Leadership Scholar shared the following thoughts with me:

I wish that meetings would have more dialogue about specific Quaker experiences. I could have used conversations about the testimonies and experiencing God within. I feel like Quaker meetings need to talk more about these topics with their young ones because these topics are unique to Quakerism. I really did not know much about God or the testimonies when I got to college, and these have been things I have struggled with a lot since I am trying to find out how Quakerism is a part of my life as my life is forming and changing.

I got the impression that adults did not bring up questions with each other much (I mean I was usually the only one willing to ask things), and I wonder why Quakers stop talking about things? I really don't think we all have the answers yet.

Starting with the very youngest children in our meetings, it is important for older Friends to make opportunities to share their spiritual lives. Share about times that you have been confused, or have felt constrained by the status quo. Share about the experience of God moving in your life. How does it feel, viscerally and emotionally, to be moved to speak in a meeting for worship? How does it feel to stand in a peace vigil when people are yelling at you? What are the feelings that move you to stand in that vigil no matter what? How have you struggled with difficult issues in your life? How have you invited the meeting into your struggles (clearness committees, consultations with elders, requesting prayer, etc.)? Your sharing can begin a rich dialogue in which the young person can share his or her experiences and insights as well as questions.

We will find ourselves renewed and transformed if we risk engaging in a process of discovery with a

young Friend. Everything we do to reach out to young Friends risks being empty and meaningless unless it is done with the foundation of an open and honest engagement in articulating our faith and practice, to which we invite our young people of all ages.

Share in the Spirit

Many of the young adult Friends we spoke with find that they are unable to enter the spiritual dimension of meeting for worship. As one said, she "...just has never have 'gotten it' in meeting for worship even though [she] comes from a well centered meeting and her parents value the worship."

How do meetings help children and young Friends enter into meeting for worship? For many young Friends, going to meeting means arts and crafts, nature pursuits, some book study, fun

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activities with other youth and maybe ten minutes of sitting with the adults in meeting. When the time comes for them to be in meeting for the whole hour, they have little idea of what to do with the silence—it is too dissimilar to anything they have yet experienced.

It is important that we engage our young children meaningfully in what excites and moves us about meeting for worship, about our daily struggle to live into that "life and power," about the transforming nature of the Spirit at work in our lives, about how that inward work leads into outward expressions of God's love through vocal ministry, social justice and peace work, hospitality, etc. If we do this, I think it will be a lot less likely that we "lose" them as they become young adults.

We need to be willing to share with humility how it may be a struggle to tune out the grocery list every First Day morning. We also need to be willing to share about the times when the connections with the Divine are sweet and deep, when the centering comes swiftly and surely. We need to be very careful to share with our young ones that being a Friend is a process, not a product, and to risk articulating how the process works for each one of us. We need to be clear, with ourselves first, that we can share about these things in a manner that is inviting and not dominating. In sharing our own way, it is in the clear

Graduation has arrived!

* Some of your meeting's youth may be off in a month or two, seeking new adventures at college or elsewhere. This is a crucial time for maintaining a young person's identity as a Friend.

* Here's one way to show your young folks that your meeting cares and hopes they'll stay in touch with Quaker values and activities: Student subscriptions to *Friends Journal* arrive eight times during their academic year (October through May) and cost only \$18 (a 7 percent savings over our regular price).

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recognition and expectation that everyone else's way will be different, wonderfully so. We need to be willing to say that we don't have all the answers (maybe we are too willing to say that), just as we need to be willing to say that we may have been given some of the answers and, in humility, acknowledge the Source—that which we expect to guide us in worship, business, and daily life.

Some meetings provide opportunity for this kind of sharing through semi-programmed intergenerational meetings for worship. Others have a First Day School meeting for worship in which there is teaching about worship as well as experiments with ways of centering, and opportunities to share. Other meetings invite seasoned Friends to come to First Day School classes to answer questions about their experience of worship. This can be particularly valuable with high school age young Friends.

Trust Younger Friends with Real Responsibility

Years ago during a discussion group at an annual national gathering of Friends, where we were focusing on these very issues, I asked the group if, in their individual meetings, they made an effort to put young people on committees and in positions of

responsibility in the meeting. One Friend responded, "No, they might make a mistake."

While not all Friends would unite with that response, that concern represents an obstacle to keeping younger Friends active in meetings. Elise Boulding shares that the way to have young people of any age engaged in a meaningful way is to employ them in activities where they are doing "real" things that truly benefit others. If we want young adults to enter the life of the meeting, take up committee work, and step into positions of responsibility, we must be willing to relinquish those places to them. We must also be willing to let them experiment, try new ways of doing things and not be bound by "the way we have always done it."

Help Young Adults Connect with the Wider Society of Friends

Very few of the young adults we spoke with, in either the college or the older age group, are active in a meeting. There is a strong desire among YAFs to be with others of their age, but the reality is that often there are few of their age group to be found at their local meetings. This is further complicated by young adults' irregular attendance which limits

Young adult Friends connect best through organizations where they can be with other young adult Friends.

possibilities of connecting.

Those who feel a connection with he Friends do so most often through organizations where they can be with other

young adult Friends: Friends General Conference Annual Gathering, yearly meeting YAF groups, yearly meeting camping programs, youth pilgrimages, Young Friends of North America, etc.

Local and yearly meetings can support gatherings of college age and other young adult Friends. We can young adults broaden their base of involvement by making sure they are aware of opportunities such as Pendle Hill internships and programs, FGC gatherings, and offerings at Quaker conference centers that are specifically for young adult Friends.

Meetings can make pro-active, if not aggressive offers of financial assistance for YAFs to attend gatherings of all varieties. This might involve eeking young Friends out by phone or email—during which the opportunity to inquire about their lives and spiritual condition presents itself.

Attend to the Inward Teacher

As Friends we constantly engage in the struggle of balancing the inward and the outward. It is no different with the concerns raised here. We must nurture our interior landscape, share it freely with our precious youth, and attend to the ways in which the Inward Teacher instructs us to augment those narratives with outward work.

<<>> *Deborah L. Shaw is a recorded minister and a member of Friendship Friends Meeting, North Carolina Yearly Meeting - Conservative. She is currently serving on the executive committee for the Friends Association for Higher Education and is one of co-leaders of the 2002 Quaker Youth Pilgrimage. Deborah's article exploring singing as vocal ministry appeared in the first issue of the Journal of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting (Conservative).*

To read more about Young Adult Friends check out *Who do we think we are? Young Friends' Commitment and Belonging*. London: Quaker Home Service, 1998. Available from FGC bookstore and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Library.

Questions for Reflection

1. Who are the young adult Friends who grew up in our meeting and have not yet settled into a meeting community as adult Friends?
2. In what ways are we in touch with them? How could we be more intentional in our contact with young adult Friends?
3. Do we know what religious and spiritual issues are of concern to each of them?
4. Who in the meeting has a gift for engaging with younger Friends on matters of the spirit?
5. Might we develop a periodic newsletter or round robin e-mail to keep young people in touch with each other, the meeting, and events for young adult Friends?
6. How can we develop a fund to financially support attendance at events for young adult Friends sponsored by yearly meeting, Friends General Conference or another Friends' institution?

YAF's On Line

The internet is a good place for young adult Friends to catch up with what is happening with and for young adult Friends.

Start with www.quaker.org/yfna/network.html. Its webmaster, Martin Kelly writes: "I think there are a lot of young adult Friends who feel disconnected and don't know about communities of YAFs who might be nearby. I figured that if people have a way to know what's happening elsewhere it would help." The site provides an annotated listing of YAF websites in various yearly meetings as well as web addresses for other organizations.

YAQuaker newsgroup, has been the most successful attempt to start a YAF list that would reach across the different branches of Friends. the address is <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/yaquaker/>.

YAFs who have attended the FGC Gathering keep in touch through <http://www.topica.com/lists/fgc-ayf@jgc.topica.com>. For info on YAFs at the 2002 FGC Gathering contact dockhorn@cs.oberlin.edu or martink@nonviolence.org.

Opportunities for Young Adult Friends

YAFs interested in volunteer and internship opportunities in Quaker organizations can find a wealth of information on the Quaker Information Center website at www.afsc.org/qic/oportnty.htm or by contacting the Quaker Information Center at 215-241-7024. The listing includes a wide range of internships including:

- American Friends Service Committee
www.afsc.org, 214-241-7000.
- Ben Lomond Quaker Center
www.benlomond.org.
- Friends Committee on National Legislation,
www.fcnl.org, 202-547-6000.
- Friends Journal, www.friendsjournal.org,
215-563-8629.
- Pendle Hill, www.pendlehill.org, 610-566-4507,
e-mail youthprogram@pendlehill.org

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