

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

*For Member Care Committees,
Ministry and Counsel, Overseers,
and others who provide pastoral care
in unprogrammed Friends' meetings.*

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Weaving Children and Adults into Full Meeting Life

by Christie Duncan-Tessmer

Quakers hold that the Light of the Divine is within every person—no exceptions. We also believe that the presence of the Light is our guide and teacher. This is clear in our social activism and in our form of worship. Friends recognize this is true for children as well as adults, and the respect that we have for our children's spirituality is evidence of the belief.

From this basis, the questions Friends ask include: How do we more fully weave children into the full life of the meeting community? What activities, educational opportunities and social experiences can we offer that will bring us together across generations? How can we help our children and young people feel more a part of the meeting for worship and feel welcome to bring vocal ministry?

These are important questions. To get to answers that truly recognize that children's and teens' claims to God's presence and guidance within are as valid as adults', I suggest we reframe the questions. Rather than looking for ways to weave the children into adults' experiences or, conversely, to weave the adults into the children's experience, it is useful to take a step back from our community and seek a different perspective.

The Multi-Generational Community

A multigenerational community brings all generations

together for the same purposes: learning, worshipping, serving God, savoring fellowship and having fun in order to bring the community into a deeper relationship with each other and with the Divine.

A successful multigenerational experience can be recognized by its ability to allow kids and adults to interact while being reflective and expressive in a way that is meaningful for everyone. Adults sitting in small chairs and coloring with children or inviting teens to sit in on a long talk-filled business meeting does not foster engagement or interaction.

Finding Flexibility

In a multigenerational experience, no one needs to act like a person from another generation; each one is welcomed and nurtured as unique. By including Friends of all ages in the various aspects of our community, we are each nurtured by the gifts and understandings that are different in each stage of life. Adults can benefit by getting out of their talk-oriented, cerebral default and join children in engaging their other senses—God is huge and trying to experience God through one means consistently will stagnate the seeker. Adults may find it hard to become more flexible and engage their other senses.



**Christie Duncan-Tessmer and
her daughter, Moxie.**

Adult Friends have learned to use the tools of faith, such as the discernment process, quieting into worship and using an agenda. They hold a wealth of history, tradition and knowledge within our faith. Children need to know about these treasures in order to live from the Spirit in the manner of Quakerism.

The simple joy that children bring, the urgency and intensity of teens, the readiness to risk and passion of young adults, the experience and constant balancing act of parents, the wisdom and long-view of older Friends—all these are present when we worship, work, serve, make friends with and have fun with one another. These are the compelling, energizing, life-giving reasons that multigenerational approaches that are important in our community.

Just believing that multigenerational community is important, is not enough to make it happen. It is hard to engage, challenge and satisfy people of different ages at the same time. Believing that it is a good idea does not tell us *how* to do it.

There are some ingredients for creating a multigenerational experience that will support its success, whether the community is learning together, engaging in a discernment process, serving the homeless, having fun or taking care of a member of the community. Some of these ingredients support children's needs and some support adults'. I will share some factors that I've found to be important and then illustrate them in an example.

Multimodal Approach

To truly engage the whole age spectrum, a healthy portion of the work you do together will include some mode of processing and wrestling with information that is not based solely on talk. You will need to seek artistic, imaginative or physical ways to do some of the work. People, not just kids, find out about the world in all kinds of ways and the more we can honor this, the richer our experience of the world and God's presence in it will be. Additionally, to keep kids engaged, a multimodal approach will enhance the activity.

A warning! This does not mean to simply

illustrate the theme of your work by drawing a picture of it (a common mistake in programming strictly for children as well).

For example, no one learns more about the story of the Good Shepherd by gluing cotton balls onto cutout pictures of sheep. No one. Not even three-year-olds.

We can discover more about the meaning of the story by acting it out—taking turns being the sheep left behind and the sheep found and journaling or sharing about the experience. We learn more by being newspaper reporters and interviewing the sheep and the shepherd. Everyone can discover something by engaging in the story at this level.

Octogenarians and 30-somethings and little kids all have their own things to discover and they will, if given space with a minimum of talk to exert their own creativity.

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Provide Structure

A well-planned, realistic agenda always serves a meeting well. It gives the meeting structure and predictability and lets everyone know what the goal is. These points: structure, predictability and knowing what the point is, will support children (and many adults) in their participation. Each step needs to be clear as to what we're doing and why and how. Kids soon will find out that the talking part won't last forever and they will learn how Quakers do things.

For example, instead of starting a committee meeting by saying "We'll have a moment of silence now," the clerk can say, "We are going to worship together now so that we can all begin to feel ourselves being part of God together and then we can follow God's lead more clearly."

This tells unfamiliar Friends (not just kids!) that the silence has a holy and vital purpose and is not just a transition tool. Likewise, when discerning, labeling each step is valuable:

- We are going to center down and open our hearts to hearing what it is God is asking of us;
- We are going to share what we can hear with our hearts and listen deeply to what others have heard—we are all such different children

of God that we can hear different voices from God and we want to be able to listen to all hearts;

- We are going to sift through everything we've heard from all hearts to try to tease out what it is we are being called to do as a community;
- We are going to worship some more since we know so much more now and we can maybe hear more than we could last time.

Of course all the while, we are also using a multimodal approach and writing each idea down on a different light-bulb or other appropriately shaped paper and asking some people (who need to be moving a bit) to draw what the ideas could look like. Being explicit in this way helps for adults who are unfamiliar with multigenerational approaches as well.

Rather than simply giving directions on how to play a game in which you ask three people for their definition of peace, explain, "We're going to find out about all the ways peace is envisioned here in our community in a way that involves all of us." Then give the directions.

Small Group Options

Remembering again that Friends have varying strengths and needs in processing information, it can be good to have different small group options available as part of the structure. Always begin together so be sure that everyone experiences the event as a single, inclusive effort. But at some point it often makes sense to go deeper in small groups. All groups may be dealing with the same topic (For example: How are we going to share our peace testimony with the rest of our town?) but they may do it in different ways.

One group may be discussing ideas. Another may be trying to invent a new game that can be shared. Another group may be planning the more hospitality aspects of food and invitations. Participating Friends may choose the group that is most interesting to them, regardless of age. Interest in the activity rather than age of the participant should be the dominating factor. Younger children in the group may be deliberately partnered with a non-parent adult

so they have support, can make friends with an adult member of the meeting and the parents can participate in small groups that speak to them.

A final structure point: The concrete variables of time and length of the event are essential and need to be planned considerately. Reflect on who is intended to attend and what their constraints are: a meeting in the evening on a school night is not going to include younger children or their parents. An event on Saturday morning needs to be compelling enough to compete with soccer practice. If the event runs too long for young attention spans, it will be hard to convince those Friends to come the next time.

Change is hard for anyone and so asking for a change in the corporate structure of activities and events in the meeting is always a challenge.

Embrace the Risk

A multigenerational approach is asking adults to change the way they do things. It's requiring them to plan, think and act differently. It's asking them not to allow their tried-and-true methods to dominate and it *continues* to do

so (the continuation is even harder for adults than trying it just once!).

Change is hard for anyone and so asking for a change in the corporate structure of activities and events in the meeting is always a challenge. It is asking the people who are in charge (adults, and usually a specific subset of adults) to change the way they are in charge to allow other people to be equally in charge in a totally different way. This is *really* hard!

My experience is that the first time, adults are happy to make changes to include children and teens. But as a way of life, they are not so much happy as challenged. To deal with the challenge, they sometimes have perfectly valid reasons *not* to continue. ("We don't get enough done when we include children and games; we worked all together last month; the kids don't like it.")

The hitch is that there are also so many reasons to continue: including children and teens as active Quakers *now* rather than as Quakers-in-training; welcoming an alternative way of seeking; focusing on process rather than outcome; building friendships and deeper community. The journey is the destination.

A multigenerational approach is also challenging to individuals, not just the corporate structure. It asks adults to try something new like drawing, pretending, or talking in short sentences.

Children are not used to being given equal space to share and if adults jump in to take up the slack when children hesitate, the kids learn the unintended lesson that adults don't really want to hear what they have to share. So there is also a risk of empty space. And of course there is always the risk of failure. We need to remember that in learning something new, failure will happen and that's okay!

Begin with a Single Domain

Worshiping, learning, serving, making Friends, having fun together—in each of these domains there are many opportunities to work and play and be together. Pick one and give it a try. Then evaluate how it went and try again.

- **WorshipHeart-sharing** (a variation on Worship Sharing): Use short queries, ask everyone to respond with a one-sentence response immediately from the heart, repeat contributions are okay. Each query/response shouldn't last more than 4-5 minutes;
- **Heart-sharing**: putting on a Christmas play with children and adults participating as actors/writers/techies/audience;
- **designing and writing cards** for members who are sick or attenders who have not

been seen for a while;

- **discerning the peace work objectives and activities of the meeting**;
- **contra dancing** (if you haven't seen lively, multigenerational, Quaker contra dancing here's a hint: younger kids sometimes run in circles around the outside and love it and experience themselves part of the dancing);
- **reflecting on what we individually are called to in our lives or in that particular week.**

The multigenerational community respects and nurtures the divinity inherent in each person. It strengthens Quakerism as it encourages Friends to explore multiple sides of their own connection to Spirit and expects children and teens to be an equally vital part of the radical and powerful structures of the Religious Society of Friends. There are risks involved in finding ways to be inclusive and it's worth it.

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Christie Duncan-Tessmer serves Philadelphia Yearly Meeting as the Children's Religious Education Coordinator. Her work supports the practice of making space for nurturing children's spiritual lives in First Day School, Monthly Meetings and the Yearly Meeting community. She is also the mother of eight-year old Moxie and six-year-old Ezra and wife of 37.5 year old Zach, all of whom are artists and bike riders.

One Meeting's Experience

Chambersburg Friends Feel Blessed In Sharing Their Worlds

Chambersburg Friends Meeting is a small meeting in rural central Pennsylvania. While children's worlds and adults' worlds are often separate in our meeting, we have been blessed and feel most whole when we join and share our worlds.

Sometimes at the rise of meeting the youth will **share something that happened during First Day School** that morning—an insight, a question, a craft. Adults usually respond and extend the sharing. In addition, our monthly adult discussions at the rise of meeting have been expanded to **intergenerational discussions**. Last

fall we focused on different aspects of "power."

Once a year the **First Day School** has hosted a **Junior Meeting for Worship** to which the adults are invited. Sometimes they prepare queries for us to speak to as a form of worship sharing. A memorable set of queries addressed how we used silence and how we worked at sitting still when we were children.

Once we had an **old-fashioned Quaker Meeting** where the men sat on one side, the women on the other, and the children sat in Quaker attire on an improvised "facing bench." They shared various aspects of early Quakers—

language, beliefs, and humor—as well as a period of silent worship.

Our children enjoy drama, and have developed performances, including one about Esther (including some songs adapted from *VeggieTales*®*), another about Indians visiting an early Friends meeting for worship.

We have had several **intergenerational gatherings for both fun and learning**: games night with multiple board games (some cooperative, some competitive), a “paper party” where all kinds of paper were available to assemble into imaginative crafts, an evening of **HIPP (Help Increase the Peace)** exercises where we learned about each other personally and collaborated in picturing the world we want to build together.

In the last few years the older children (with adult assistance) have developed their First Day School schedule, usually using one or two First Day sessions to develop the plan. They gain practice in Quaker process (not to mention synchronizing busy personal schedules), and usually invite different adults from the Meeting to help facilitate the lessons/discussions. Any adult is also welcome to attend their First Day School activities.

We sometimes have special programs that integrate all of us around the same theme. Two recent ones were about **teen relationships** and **environmental responsibility**. Each featured a program primarily for the teens, followed by a joint activity. The relationship program featured music and discussion with guest John Scardina and the youth, followed by an **all-meeting “fishbowl”** with each gender listening to the other about what they liked and didn’t like about their gender (ages 12 - 95!).

Our second guest was Hollister Knowlton, who shared an activity about **environmental footprints** with the youth, then shared with all of us the plans for the greening of Friends Center in Philadelphia.

We often work as a meeting on a **material aids project** (the AFSC kits were popular). Sometimes this was prompted by First Day School, sometimes by the Peace and Social Concerns committee. We also help support our youth in their personal endeavors. For example, one teen sold us homemade note cards to support her youth ambassador trip to Australia.

We have sometimes had youth on our committees. We are excited that an upcoming clearness committee for membership of a long-

attending family will include two youth members of similar age as the family’s children. We know all will be enriched by the sharing and exploration of the Spirit and will grow in understanding what it means to be a Friend.

One of our favorite traditions is our **Christmas potluck gathering** where following our meal we have intergenerational entertainment, varying from music to gymnastics to stories to jokes to magic tricks—some solo, some group. We conclude on a more serious note with singing of carols and the reading of the Biblical account of Jesus’ birth.

Of course, we have challenges. Of course, not everyone shows up for every meeting or event. Of course, some attempts go better than others. But what I can say “experimentally” is that the fullness of Quaker community when all ages are involved is powerful, meaningful, and even sometimes just plain fun.

At this writing, we have an unfinished activity. A few years ago we read Leo Leoni’s book, *Frederick*, in which one mouse’s contribution for the stores of winter was words and colors and pictures. As a meeting we wrote and colored our “**spiritual**

QUAKERS IN PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING

Grief Broadly Painted

Quaker Hill Conference Center

Richmond, Indiana

April 10-13, 2008

The annual QPCC conference offers connection and deep refreshment, as well as stimulation and professional development. For those who need CEUs and CCEs, it is an opportunity to obtain hours in an atmosphere congruent with your beliefs and sense of call. QPCC Friends will gather April 10-13 in Richmond, Indiana, for:

- Interactive plenary sessions
- Worship-sharing groups
- Ample time for conversation, walks and rest
- Opportunities to play and plan together

QPCC is an organization of Friends who are called into ministry in the areas of pastoral care, counseling and chaplaincy. We share a commitment to taking our Quaker practice seriously and grounding our work in our faith. *If you want to belong, you can.*

Interested? Visit www.QPCC.us or contact the registrar:

Ted Taylor [@comcast.net](mailto:comcast.net)

stores” for bleak times and put them in a chest to take out for winter’s day. When we open that chest, we expect a wonderful surprise to share!

Sandra Grotberg
Chambersburg (PA)
Friends Meeting

**VeggieTales® is a series of children’s computer animated films featuring humorous, anthropomorphic vegetables and conveying moral themes compatible with and often based on Christianity and Judaism.*

Questions for Reflection

1. How can we welcome our children and young people so that they feel part of the meeting for worship and are able to bring vocal ministry to the community?
2. What ways can we create to share the tools of faith—like centering down, discernment, and seeking a sense of the meeting— with our children and youth?
3. What activities or events can we create so that we can know our children and young people better? How can we help them to know us personally and spiritually?
4. What regular opportunities can we find to listen to the goals, the concerns, dreams, and needs of our young people?
5. How can we as seasoned Friends find joy in sharing our knowledge, our stories, our spiritual paths?
6. Do we plan regular social activities that unite all generations in fun and fellowship (story telling, music, skits, service projects, games, etc.)?

Resources

Religious Education Newsletter, Making Space and Nifty Ideas for First Day Schools available on line at <http://www.pym.org/education/relednews/index.htm>

Heart-Sharing, a multi-generational, friendly variation on worship-sharing: http://www.pym.org/education/children/heart_sharing.pdf (Browse this fine website for more.)

Spirit Games by Barbara Sher, Wiley 2002 http://www.quakerbooks.org/spirit_games.php

Family Meeting for Worship in the Monthly Meeting, by Christel Jorgenson, News and Resources, FGC Religious Education Committee, Issue 10, Autumn 2005

Sharing Faith Across the Generations: A FDS Project that Enriches the Entire Meeting. by Beth Collea, News and Resources, FGC Religious Education Committee, Issue 11, Autumn 2006. (These and other resources can be found at <http://www.fgcquaker.org/library/teachingresources/>)

Building a Multigenerational Community within Monthly Meetings, by Christie Duncan-Tessmer, Friends Journal, July 2007, http://www.pym.org/education/children/multigen_JF_article.

Learning Together across Generations, Tools and tips for “home-grown” multigenerational events: <http://www.elca.org/christianeducation/pdf/learningtogether>

Children in Meeting for Worship, by Susan L. Phillips, Friends Journal, Oct. 15, 1984, http://www.pym.org/education/making_space/2006_12_FJ_kids_mfw.pdf

Gently Lead: How to Teach Your Children about God While Finding Out for Yourself, by Polly B. Berends (available on Amazon.com)

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