

# Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

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

*Vol. 18, No. 1, September 2010*

## How to Add Spirit, Spice, and Kids to Your Meeting

**by Norval Reece**

Why is Newtown Friends Meeting in Bucks County, PA, a lively spiritual community with membership up 36 percent since 1996? One might say it's the kids' doing.

Mark Cary's research for Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's "Making New Friends Working Group" a few years ago indicated that Friends join Friends meetings primarily for two reasons:

- 1) The manner and quality of the Meeting for Worship
- 2) The social aspect of being a valued part of a caring spiritual community.

Based on Newtown Meeting's experience, we would agree and say that these are also key reasons why people remain active in a Friends Meeting. Keeping both of these aspects properly nurtured has been the challenge of Care and Counsel at Newtown while membership in the meeting has increased rapidly. What does growth like this mean to the life of the meeting as a spiritual community?

Rosanne Edenhart-Pepe, clerk of Care and Counsel, says, "During this period of rapid growth, there were some on Newtown's Care and Counsel Committee who wondered aloud if Newtown was growing too fast and too large. While this is a good 'problem' to have, it nevertheless presents certain challenges. When does a simple meeting become an untended flock?"

Newtown Care and Counsel's answer was to reflect on the nature of "tending," and to conclude that the continued vitality of Newtown Meeting lay in two general areas: 1) the *shared nurturance* required to gather it, and 2) the *communication* necessary to accomplish that task.

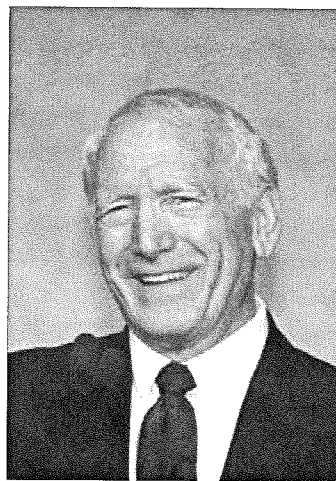
*Editor's note: This is the first in a series of four Pastoral Care Newsletters devoted to concerns and ideas about children and young people and their place in the meeting community. The next in the series: Quaker Parenting, January 2011.*

This brief review relates to these concerns and how Newtown Meeting is addressing them – the spiritual, social and quantitative aspects of NMM's experience in becoming a rapidly growing meeting. It also talks about what some Friends may dismiss as "too worldly," i.e. tools that help a meeting grow and continue to be a caring spiritual community.

Newtown Meeting decided to "go public" several years ago. This was before the Quaker Quest program (see PCN, Vol. 17, No. 2, January 2010) was launched, but the techniques are similar. We opened our doors, told people who we were, where we were, and invited them in. The results are remarkable. Here are a few highlights of the overall growth mentioned above: 31 new members have joined in the past two years; the number of attenders has grown steadily; and 59 child members are under age 18.

"The Children's First Day School program at Newtown Monthly Meeting had 81 children under its care this year, with additional visitors attending each First Day," noted Wendy Kane, clerk of NMM Children's Education Committee in her 2010 report. Newtown has no paid staff, with the exception of our teenagers who provide childcare during most meeting events, and maintenance staff who provide routine mowing, plowing, and cleaning.

**So, what is going on?**



**Norval Reece**

## User-friendly Meetinghouse

In 2004, Newtown Friends Meeting renovated its space to provide a seamless, welcoming space for all generations with ground level access (no steps) to the lobby, gathering room, kitchen, committee room, and meeting room.

### **This has changed the life of the meeting.**

The ground floor has Kids' Corners in both the lobby/library and the Gathering Room with kids' books and materials, including an Edward Hicks-inspired "Create Your Own Peaceable Kingdom" magnet board and a Hicks Drawing Wall for small children. There are "quiet bags" of toys and books for small children to take with them for their twenty minutes with adults in Meeting for Worship. Teenagers have their own lounge/meeting room upstairs.

## Kids & Adults Classes

Our research tells us that, for new attenders, **this is second in importance only to the Meeting for Worship and it is number one for young families.** Quaker education is an attraction with a strong brand name. Newtown Meeting has First Day classes for both adults and children, held before Meeting for Worship.

First Day programs have been a key factor in the growth of NMM. We have found classes for children and adults to be virtually inter-dependent. The better one is, the better the other one is. Quality is important.

Series (of six programs or so) seem to evoke particular interest, e.g., Spiritual Journeys, Quakers in the Arts, Quakers and Their Vocations, World Hot Spots, My Favorite Book, Quaker Core Beliefs, Religions of the World, What Recent College Graduates Are Doing, The Many Faces of Islam, Quaker Organizations, etc.

Recent classes for children have included studies of the Bible, Quaker heroes, Quaker history, Quaker Ideals, and Getting to Know Adult Members of Meeting (an open Q & A with an adult visitor about his or her life, family, values and work). NMM tries to keep the classes fun for children by playing Quaker Jeopardy and a Quaker version of "Apples to Apples," a humorous question and answer game with card clues.

## Friends Groups

Newtown Friends School (NFS) is under the care of our meeting. Recent renewed efforts to invite school parents to the meetinghouse have been particularly rewarding. We have hosted Parents Association meetings and open houses for NFS parents to get their questions answered about Quakers. Quaker school families are already committed to Friends education and may be

waiting for an opportunity to learn more about your meeting community. Many new members in recent years have come via NFS and other area Quaker organizations like Pennswood Village (a Continuing Care Retirement Center) and George School. Extra efforts to invite others to share your meetinghouse can be highly beneficial for all concerned.

## Community Groups

Some meetings host an annual event for the public to increase visibility as a meeting and its role in the community. NMM tries to be an active part of the greater Newtown area. The meetinghouse is busy: it is on the "Historic Walking Tour," occasionally is on the official annual tour of historic sites, recently hosted a weekly inter-religious worship-sharing group, has hosted the summer Peace Camp of the Bucks County Peace Center, rents its building to a local reform Jewish Congregation for weekly use, and hosts area fifth graders each year with an original skit about Quakers and Newtown Meeting.

The Bucks County Quarterly Meeting has made available a list of people moving into the Newtown area by zip code. (See Resources page 6.) Our meeting sends each a colorful postcard welcoming them and introducing them to Newtown Friends Meeting. Also, a questionnaire recently was sent to members, attenders and visitors to learn, among other things, what people think of the quality of worship and meeting life, and the ways people first heard of us, including the postcard project.

Last year, we decided to celebrate Edward Hicks Day in Newtown to coincide with Newtown Township's 325th Anniversary. By the time we were done, 253 children from nine elementary schools (eight public, one Quaker) had submitted their own paintings of "The Peaceable Kingdom" for an art show at Newtown Friends Meetinghouse, the Governor had declared April 26, 2009, Edward Hicks Day in Pennsylvania, and our meeting had held co-operative events with the Newtown Historical Association, the mayor, the state representative, the Newtown Corporation, and Pennswood Village.

Carolyn Weekley, Director of Museums, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, and author of *The Peaceable Kingdoms of Edward Hicks*, came by invitation to Newtown and made presentations to both Newtown Friends Meeting and Pennswood Village.

## More Kids' Projects

A few years ago, our children decided to make a "Healing Quilt." With great gusto, they inked one hand of everyone in meeting and placed the imprint on a square for a "healing quilt" to be loaned to those who are ill so they will know they are in the "hands and

thoughts of people in the meeting.” The quilt was so popular, a second was made, and a third is in process.

### **Honoring Children**

- Newborn babies are welcomed at Easter after meeting for worship with gifts of potted flowers.
- Fourth graders are presented with their own Bibles at Easter, in a version selected by each young person.
- Sixth graders each select a mentor from among the adults in meeting, with whom informal events are planned, e.g. pizza and game nights at the Meetinghouse.
- Eighth graders are given copies of Faith and Practice in the spring.
- Twenty-one-year-olds are given small reproductions of “The Peaceable Kingdom” by Edward Hicks in recognition of attaining their majority.
- College students and young members of Newtown Meeting living at a distance are invited to our “Quaker Homecoming” during the Christmas Holidays each year, and recognized after meeting.
- Adult Young Friends are invited to make presentations to the Adult Class about their work, experiences and/or spiritual journeys.
- Christmas Meeting for Worship is conducted by the children in a semi-programmed format, with 50 participating last year in enacting Maya Angelou's poem, *Amazing Peace*, with readings, instrumentals, and vocal solos.

### **Small Group Activities**

These are the social and interdenominational lifeblood of our meeting. “Friendly Eights” (dinners or teas, or desserts at people’s homes) are popular and include whole families. Each fall, interested people sign up to be sorted into groups mixing old and young, new and seasoned Friends and have three or four events during the academic year before re-organizing for the next round of Friendly Eights.

### **Fun Family Events**

The meeting encourages kids to invite a friend(s) for game nights, movies nights for teenagers, ice-skating, and so forth. Enthusiastic members of a caring spiritual community are the best advertisement. One visitor recently was so impressed with the number of children filing out of meeting after the first 20 minutes and rushing back in after meeting had broken, that he gave \$400 “for

the children to use for some fun project.” The kids went bowling and invited everyone in the meeting.

### **Kids’ Fundraisers**

Children are sometimes better at this than adults—and they have fun and learn from it. Mainly, the children have organized the fundraisers for Haiti and Katrina, Food for Friends in Bucks County and other special projects. The public is invited to these events, and they are hugely popular and successful. The children select the charity, sell the tickets, collect the money, wait on tables and help wash the dishes. Our children have at least two fundraisers a year: a Simple Supper (soup and bread) and a Lasagna Dinner. These are great inter-generational mixers, foster good community relations, raise several hundred dollars per event, and get wonderful stories and photos in the local papers.

### **Nametags**

Kids love them. It gives them a sense of belonging. Newtown Meeting has had nametags for about 20 years, though some Friends initially considered this “commercial” and unfriendly. Nametags are now a valued commodity. Getting a nametag has become a kind of stepping-stone to joining meeting. People seem pleased to be asked if they would like to have a nametag after they have attended a few times. Ditto for the kids. Newtown uses a plastic clip-on badge. Stick-ons probably don’t carry the same message.

### **After-worship Refreshments**

This is a great mixer -- prime time to chat with visitors and children around the coffee, juice and snacks table.

### **Newspaper Stories**

We have one person with delegated authority to place stories in the local papers. Other meetings might consider this as well. Children are your best ambassadors. Newspapers love pictures of kids. Their photos say to the world, “We have a place for children in our meeting.” Weekly news releases have been standard practice at Newtown Meeting for many years featuring adult class speakers, children’s projects, meeting projects, new clerks, new members, etc. If your newspaper doesn’t print your story, stop in to see the editor and ask how you can make your news of interest to him or her. Stories in the newspapers attract walk-ins.

### **Web Site**

You need one today. Otherwise, people think you’re dead or dying. It should be kid-friendly, with lots of photos of families and children. After eight years,

Newtown Meeting's web site has evolved into a major part of our communications network with members and the public. Our newsletter is also on the web, in addition to having hard copies. An increasing number of new attenders are coming via our web site at <http://newtownfriendsmeeting.org/>.

### Newsletters

Feature the children in your newsletters as well. It increases everyone's interest. We have a special section each month with an interview and a photo entitled "Meet a Young Friend."

### Accessible Visitors Book

The book has space for kids' names and ages, phone numbers, and email addresses. NMM designates someone to follow up during the next week. It's nice to ask visitors to sign up if they wish to be put on the Newsletter list, as we used to do, but sometimes it seemed to end there. We now ask for more information in the guest book and we call those who sign within a few days to answer any questions and/or tell them about upcoming events. This seems to make stronger connections.

### Questions for Reflection

1. How can we better understand and value the spiritual lives of children?
2. How can we make our meeting more children/family friendly?
3. What events might we plan so that children and families feel comfortable in inviting their friends?
4. How can our meeting make membership easier for attenders?
5. How can we reach new neighbors who may be looking for a spiritual home for their families?
6. How can we use modern tools (web site, email, news media etc.) to share our story?
7. What ways have we explored to be part of the broader community?
8. How can we help groups – both Quaker and community—feel welcome in our meeting house?
9. How do we regularly honor the children in our midst?

### Involving New Attenders

We try to put people to work soon after they have attended meeting a few times—it seems to increase the value of the meeting experience for them and the meeting benefits as well. Consider inviting attenders to become co-opted members of meeting committees. Let new people know early on that volunteers conduct your affairs, and that you rotate leadership for committees and officers of the meeting. Newtown Meeting has one two-year term limit for clerks and assistant clerks of meeting and a limit of three consecutive terms of three years each for most other offices and committees. We are convinced that term limits have helped the meeting grow by sharing responsibilities, developing new leadership, and discouraging ossification.

### Making Membership Easy

Have "How to Become a Member" on your literature table (one page, five short steps). Quakers shouldn't worry about being too up-front about membership. We are much more likely to be guilty of the sin of omission rather than commission. Our Care and Counsel Committee holds "Attenders' Gatherings" once or twice a year. Like most Quaker meetings, we have no regularly-scheduled "membership classes," so attenders sometimes find it difficult to ascertain the membership process. Anecdotes abound about people who, after attending for years, were never asked to join, until they began to think they didn't qualify.

So there you have it. Newtown Friends Meeting feels fortunate to have such a wonderfully diverse and robust meeting family. We try to give children their own space and treat them as having full voices in the affairs of the meeting. We have a lot of fun together as a growing spiritual community. Come for a visit!

**Author's note: You should definitely try this at home. But be aware of the warnings on the label: "Results may not be immediate. Persistence is recommended. You may find strangers in your midst."**

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# One Meeting's Experience: Faith & Play for FDS Inspires Spiritual Renewal

by Joy Duncan  
57th Street Meeting of Friends  
Chicago, Illinois

One Sunday last fall, just before the rise of Meeting for Worship, I realized that more than a quarter of Friends attending were children! It was a new breath of life for a meeting that was nearly laid down just a few years before, a meeting where my husband and I once doubled the attendance when we walked in the door. Now we were gathered in worship with a room full of Friends—and all those kids were there with us! It was amazing—and it is still happening.

It might never have happened if I had not stumbled on a new path. I was teaching First Day School (FDS), but, to be honest, I only had agreed to teach because our wonderful teacher had moved away. I had struggled with saying, “Yes,” because I felt that a FDS program should be inspired. I didn’t feel inspired.

We have a small meeting and someone had to do it, but it was hard. I began to feel that FDS was little more than a pre-school curriculum with a superficial Quaker overlay. I knew that we wanted—and needed—something more, something deeper, but I didn’t know how to accomplish that.

I felt stuck.

Then Michael Gibson of Friends General Conference (FGC) told me about Godly Play® and Faith & Play. (See “How It Works” this page. See also Resources, page 6.) It sounded promising but the required training seemed impossible. Could I, a Chicago mom with preschool-age twins and a baby, travel to Pendle Hill in Pennsylvania for training? No way!

But there was a way. Quite out of nowhere, a friend told me about a Godly Play® training — right across the park from my house! Laura Pedelty, a F/friend from our meeting, agreed to go with me. Suddenly, we could feel the Spirit at work.

The Godly Play® training was remarkable: both wonderful and intimidating. It was *more* and it was *deeper*. And it was scary. We would be replacing our piecemeal approach with an extensive, multi-faceted curriculum. More than a curriculum, it was a whole new way of thinking about children and spirituality.

We know children have their own spiritual lives. It is for us to nurture, but not get in the way. I realized that I had never thought deeply about children and religion.

“If you aren’t present in the story yourself,” our trainer told us, “the children won’t be there with you. ...When you ask the ‘Wondering Questions,’ you have to have a true sense of wonder within yourself.”

This was not about telling some stories to kids. It was about *living* the stories, about being fully present as you told them, about searching your own soul while you learned and taught. It was about the mystery of the Presence of God.

That was just what I needed. I wasn’t stuck anymore. As our program began to take shape, Laura and I could feel the momentum building. Our meeting had discussed adding an outreach committee to our overburdened committee structure, but in the end FDS became our outreach.

It was truly a meeting-wide effort with one artist Friend painting cards to use with the stories, other Friends serving as doorkeepers (part of each storytelling team) and the meeting as a whole pitching in and buying some props that we needed.

A new family emailed for information and then walked in the door. Peripheral attenders became reliable, at least on FDS days, and one young Friend started bringing his best friend with him. From an afterthought, First Day School had become an important part of revitalizing 57<sup>th</sup> Street Meeting.

This was a gift of the Spirit. My service from a sense of obligation was transformed into spiritually meaningful work. I can feel energy flowing out to the children, the adults, the meeting community, and back again. It knits us together; it brings us all one small step closer to the Light.

We asked for more, we asked for deeper, and this is where the path has led.

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## Faith & Play: How it Works

The Faith & Play program is described as a “Montessori-inspired resource that helps children find words and images to express their experience of holy mystery and wonder in their lives.”

Based on the Godly Play® method of telling Bible stories (See Resources p. 6), Faith & Play stories and materials have been developed especially for Quaker meetings through a collaborative effort between Friends General Conference (FGC) and Philadelphia Yearly

(continued p. 6)

Meeting (PYM). Michael Gibson is FGC's Religious Education Coordinator and Melinda Wenner Bradley clerks the PYM Faith & Play working group, of which Michael is also a member.

"When a meeting with no previous grounding in Godly Play® begins thinking about using the method (or its Quaker supplement, Faith & Play) the first step is discernment," advises Michael. "Because this method involves investments of time, money and human resources, and because it could mean a shift in the way the meeting community sees and values children, the relevant committees will want to discern if this method is right for the meeting. Teachers might observe a class, talk to an active teacher or invite FGC to offer the meeting an introductory/exploratory workshop."

As writer Joy Duncan states in this issue, Faith & Play is more than learning to tell stories. It is a spiritual experience shared equally by teachers and children. Here's a brief sketch of what might take place at a meeting on any given Sunday.

The children are expectant as they arrive. They know that, inside the classroom, their teacher has been getting ready. She may have chosen the Godly Play® story of *The Great Family* (Abraham and Sarah) and so will have set up a sand tray. Symbols of the desert journey are at hand to use as the story progresses: small, plain figures, blue yarn to suggest the rivers, small rocks, simple things. The teacher centers down as she prepares for this spiritual experience.

The children gather outside the room and as they begin to enter, a Friend at the door quietly asks each one, "Are you ready?" Inside, the children take a place in a circle. When all are quiet and listening, the teacher may begin by sweeping her hand slowly back and forth across the sand.

"The desert is a dangerous place," she may say softly and the timeless story unfolds. All eyes are on the desert scene before them. The "wondering time," an essential and perhaps the most mystical aspect of the experience, comes at the end of the storytelling. "I wonder," the teacher asks, "what part of the story you liked best?"

The story has given language and images to the children. They may express their own wonderings and the story's effect on them.

## Resources

- Godly Play® Foundation web site: <http://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/newsite/Main.php>
- Faith & Play, Friends General Conference (FGC) web site: [www.fgcquaker.org/faithandplay/](http://www.fgcquaker.org/faithandplay/)
- Faith & Play, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting web site: [http://www.pym.org/education/Pages/Childrens\\_Faith\\_&\\_PlayVWG.htm](http://www.pym.org/education/Pages/Childrens_Faith_&_PlayVWG.htm)
- Postcard outreach: "New mover" lists can be obtained from American Church Lists, web site: [www.infousa.com](http://www.infousa.com). The fee is based on zip codes requested. As a project of a Quarterly Meeting, cost can be shared.
- 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](http://www.pym.org/education/making_space/2006_12_FJ_kids_mfw.pdf)
- Religious Education Newsletter, Making Space and Nifty Ideas for FDS, <http://www.pym.org/education/relednews/index.htm>
- 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. (<http://www.fgcquaker.org/library/teachingresources/>)

FGC publishes Faith & Play stories and relevant materials, available from Quaker Books, and sponsors training and support. PYM also offers training and support for member meetings. For example, two events included an introductory session and a "make your own" story materials workshop. For full information about these programs and how Friends have been trained, have created materials, and integrated these powerful curricula into their religious education programs, visit the Faith & Play website: [www.faithandplay.org](http://www.faithandplay.org).

*Note: This information has been obtained from Michael Gibson and Melinda Wenner Bradley, from workshop observation, and from relevant web sites. —Carol J. Suplee, editor*

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