

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS

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If your meeting is looking for materials or needs help organizing its First Day School, call the NEYM Youth and Education Secretary, Chris Jorgenson, at 617-925-4494

About this Fall Issue

We hope this issue will help you as you think about your teaching year. In an effort to get information from a range of meetings, a questionnaire was sent out to a number of meetings and some of that information was included in this issue.

There is also Gretchen's article about being an elementary retreat staff person. Our retreat programs for elementary, junior high and high school rely upon volunteer staff who generously contribute their time and spiritual gifts. If you want to learn more about how you could help, you could call:

Kevin Lee - 508-994-1638 for Elementary

Cynthia Rankin - 508-540-6570 or Nort Salz - 508-263-0862 for Junior High

Chris Jorgenson - 617-625-4494 for High School

General Guidelines for Those Teaching Children

Having a clear sense of boundaries is particularly important to those who teach First Day School. Most of us need to think carefully about class management before we embark upon teaching. The following advice is offered to those who facilitate classes for children:

1. Preparation of the lesson itself is always a step in your spiritual growth. Enjoy.
2. During a quiet period at home, try to envision the children moving step by step through the various activities of the hour.
3. Focus for a moment on the interests and abilities of every child, insuring that there is something that will appeal to each one. Perhaps set your class list in front of you.
4. Upon arrival at meeting, stay ahead of the crowd. Be early. Get your teaching space set up. Try to create a physical environment that encourages quiet, cooperative activity. Otherwise, the children may initiate activities without you, such as climbing on furniture, throwing someone's hat, or "playing" with the infants' toys. This is not the time for you to be in the foyer hugging adults or having a nice chat. Children are your first priority on the day that you are scheduled to teach. If your concentration wavers, so

will theirs. On the other hand, if you model a readiness, such as centering in silence or working on a pre-class activity, the children may do the same. Setting an example is not magic, however. Don't hesitate to remind them to get involved in your gathering activity if necessary.

5. Whatever your opening style, it is up to you as teacher to set the tone for the class. Friends are sometimes reluctant to ask children to cooperate, not realizing that the children themselves are uncomfortable and distressed when one or two students dominate or when the entire group is swept into a sort of mob hysteria. Giddiness, put downs, and silliness are not fun. We are reaching for a deeper sense of satisfaction when we gather as a meeting community. Determine your toleration level for outright noise. Deal with small outbursts before something bigger balloons out of control.

This is from page 13 of Opening Doors to Quaker Religious Education by Mary Snyder, a new publication from Friends General Conference. It is a valuable resource for any meeting. -ed.

The Heart of the Work: Staffing JYM Elementary Retreats

By Gretchen Baker-Smith, Westport Meeting

A couple of months ago, a friend awkwardly asked me a question that had apparently been forming in her for awhile. She said, "Gretchen, do all Quakers go on as many retreats as you do? I mean, is that part of being a Quaker or something?" I laughed and tried to explain why I indeed do staff so many children's retreats. She's never been sure what to make of my spiritual journey, so I tried to answer her without sounding "too religious." But when I was done, my explanation to her felt flat and hollow within me. I talked about how wonderful the other adults are and how much we laugh; how special the kids are and how much fun we have together. All of those things are true -- but none of them are at the heart of why I do this work.

I have been staffing JYM Elementary Retreats with Kevin Lee for 10 years. For a few years, I did two retreats a year, balancing them with the needs of my husband Buddy, and our three young children. But then I got "hooked." Now, it is almost a personal crisis if I have to miss any of them.

I am continually thankful to Buddy, who faithfully takes care of the responsibilities and commitments on the home-front while I'm gone. I couldn't do this without his support.

So, why do I do it? I do it because the Holy Spirit of God is so present in and around those blessedly alive, noisy, dirty, creative, growing children's bodies and souls, that I can almost breath Him in or touch Him with my hands. By Saturday afternoon of every single retreat, the Holy Waters are all around us, and I feel like we are floating in grace. It is like being in a steam bath, without the heaviness of the steam. It's like the bliss you feel being in the midst of exquisitely gorgeous music wafting through a cathedral. It is like a covered Meeting for Worship. It is so holy.

I don't think all of the adult staffers experience this the same way, but I know that some do. It's not something we talk about a whole lot. For one thing, there really isn't time. But even if there was, I'm not sure it's possible or necessary to put into words. Even so, I know that it is our shared recognition of the Presence of God amongst us that so dearly connects those of us who do this work. Often a tender or funny exchange will go on between two children, or one child will just flutter by oblivious to the rest of the world, and two or more of us will look at each other and know in the twinkle of an eye that *there* was the Light of God. Kevin's leadership and pastoral care for the staff deeply encourages such openings. We are nurtured by him as much as the children are, and we pack up on Sunday with hearts full to overflowing.

The children who come to the JYM retreats are a remarkable crew of tender hearts, and the world is blessed by them. While they are with us on retreat, they know that they can frankly and freely talk about, sing to, and *be with* God. Some of them loudly revel in their awareness and openings to God. Others are just comfortable to be. They understand that they are known and loved, even if they don't feel like they can explain themselves. Just as with the adult staff, I am aware that there is an underlying stream within the Holy that flows between us. We know each other within God's Love, and it is more than enough. That is what is truly spoken when a first grader gently puts her hand in mine in the midst of the Saturday din, looks up at me and serenely says, "I love JYM, and I'm so glad *you* come to them, Gretchen." Those moments of holding hands, or having a child plop in your lap -- or come breathlessly running to show you a creation made from Sculpey -- hold treasure troves of trust, love and grace.

The children know that this is a safe and trusting community. They feel able to struggle within their doubts. They express their questions of how God can allow evil and pain into the world and their own lives. They share their experiences of God with each other. They allow themselves to chant, sing, dance, be silly, pray, and create art that celebrates and invites the Holy Spirit in our midst. They repeatedly tell us they can't do or talk about these things, or be with other children -- especially of the opposite gender -- out in the rest of the world like they can in JYM. Many form friendships that deepen through their junior high years and then provide enormous strength and support to them as teenagers and young adults. It is amazing how frequently they express their gratitude.

Being together for weekends allows us time and space to create a working and dynamic community that can't happen in the 45 minutes generally allotted for First Day School. We have time to leisurely nurture and explore our faith in ways that only whole days can provide, with lots of room to laugh, play, sing and create. To have time to be creative *with* the Holy Spirit! It is an incredible blessing to dive into the expressive arts -- whether it's clay, paint, masks, sculpture, drawing, music or drama -- with spiritually open and vibrant children. I love being surrounded by dozens of children whose creative juices are flowing, with God purposefully in the middle. What a gift to be able to fuel their imaginations, and to then watch their doors open and feel them find their centers!

I whole-heartedly know that early openings to God lay a foundation for our tender grade-school souls to build on when they are older. Whether found in nature, beauty or family love, children need us to up-hold their experiences

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of God's Love and Light. For they do know -- they most surely do know -- God in their midst. I believe that nurturing these openings and affirming children's experiences of God is the essence of our work on the retreats. When a child looks at me with complete sincerity and speaks of how she's known God within her, it is the sweetest of joys to be able to look in her eyes, smile and say "Yes. Yes, dear one. I know of what you are saying. Yes." It never ceases to take my breath away. How blessed I am to be there at such moments and to clearly know that Christ has called me to this work.

I am always left in gratitude and awe. I'm humbled by the trust parents have when they place their children in our care. I'm awe-struck by the children. It is an incredible

honor to know them, in all of their struggles and strengths, and to see them grow over the years. To work beside Kevin, whom I always, always learn from, and to work with other talented and centered adults, is one of the greatest blessings of my life. To spend weekends singing, laughing hysterically, rolling over sand dunes, eating Wendyl's food, and breathing joy is really downright decadent. I am endlessly grateful to be in the Presence of the Lord's Grace and glory, and to be a servant of His work in any way at all, during these weekends. As we often enthusiastically sing before retreat meals, *how blessed we are*. "Blessed are we.....festooned in all the graces of the Spirit, the flowers of Love Divine."¹

¹ Patricia McKernon, "Blessed Are We" in *Worship in Song* (FGC, 1996) #228

Quaker Day Camp

Plainfield VT Monthly Meeting has been offering a Quaker Day Camp during a week in the summer for several years. They report that it's affirming for a small meeting, provides outreach to the community (some have begun attending meeting after the Camp), and involves teens in service. This report by Betsy Brigham about the 1998 Camp was published in their meeting newsletter. -ed.

This is the 4th year of Quaker Day Camp. Each year we have had slight variations on leaders and campers. The coordinators this year were Betsy Brigham and Rachel Walker Cogbill, along with the assistance of Justin DeAngelis, a 15-year-old of our Meeting. We had 14 lively campers ranging in age from 5 to 11. Ten of these children have a connection to our Meeting, although they may not be able to come often. In addition there were four campers from our immediate area, two of whom have come before. Because of the enthusiasm of campers and parents about Quaker Day Camp, we feel this is a real outreach on the part of the Meeting to families peripherally involved with us and local people who would like to know more about Friends and Friends' values. Our regular First Day School attenders not only learn and grow, but feel affirmed to be part of a larger group and to share what Quakerism is about. Again we had many comments from children about counting them in for next year.

THEME Our overall theme for this year was refugees. Each day introduced another aspect of this theme: homes, losing homes, what it is like to be a refugee, resettlement, and what we can do to help. We were lucky to find some good books that touched upon refugee situations from many times and places including boat people from the Caribbean, the Holocaust, a Cambodian settling in Boston, and many others. We told the story of Exodus.

GUESTS Guests broadened our experiences. Jean Lathrop of Vermont Refugee Assistance brought photographs of many refugees who have come through Central Vermont and also taught us how to make tortillas. Jo Chickering shared a grace she had learned from a Vietnamese refugee and reminded us of the uniqueness of

each individual through an exercise with sand dollars. A Montpelier woman who has resettled here from Bosnia came to share her story. Carnie Bagnall brought photos of her work with World War II refugees in Holland.

SIMULATION Throughout the whole week, we had the special privilege to process our experiences through "Little Peeps", sculpy and pipe cleaner people who had homes, a village, and a refugee journey past patrols, swollen rivers, and border guards, ending up at a refugee camp. A part of this simulation became very real when some of the campers made guns to defend themselves and we had a far-reaching discussion about how much security guns actually provide. Watch for this adventure to show up in print, as one of our leaders plans to submit it to *Tolerance* magazine and *the NE Friend*.

OTHER ASPECTS In addition to our refugee focus, we had great fun climbing Spruce Mountain and playing variations of tag on the Martin Meadow field. We did service projects around the Meetinghouse (a new banner for the meeting room, planting blueberries, decorating the children's bulletin board) and further afield at the Vermont Foodbank. We sent off hygiene kits to refugees through AFSC. We sang with Betsy's banjo and had deep but brief periods of silence. Our week ended with a program for families including a series of tableaux about refugee experiences, songs, and a closing period of worship.

PARTICIPANTS Melissan Dezotelle, Riley Carlson, Gavin Fischer, Carson Young, Drew and Allena and Tory Emerson, T.K. and Kyra and Daniel Blanchard, Casey and Elsa Engstrom, Alexander and Becky Cogbill.

A number of Monthly Meeting First Day School (FDS) coordinators were asked about their programs, and here are some of their answers:

What are the most successful things that your meeting tried in FDS in the last few years?

- Increasing contact with a neighboring meeting- reported by *Lewiston and Northampton*
- Bill Kreidler's elementary curriculum on Peace - *Northampton*
- Students made their own book about spring - *Northampton*
- Children's pages, with activities, sent out in the meeting newsletter (see sample in this issue) - *Bennington*
- The clerk of the meeting meets monthly with older students to explore the meaning of queries and advices. - *Westerly*
- Service projects connected to A.F.S.C. - *Lewiston*
- Making a quilt for the Ronald McDonald House - *Providence*
- The all-FDS picnic - *Providence*
- Representatives from different religions coming to speak and explain their tradition and symbols, emphasizing "show and tell" - *Westerly*
- Yoga with older kids (didn't work with young kids, who didn't see it as centering) - *Westerly*
- After singing for ten minutes and silent worship for ten minutes with the whole meeting, a volunteer takes the children for a walk on nice days or for drawing and reading on inside days - *Quaker City Unity*
- In February, making valentines, many saying "God is Love", and passing them out at the close of meeting. Some could be sent in envelopes to Friends and relatives.- *Wellesley*
- A Young Friend led a discussion on Quakerism - *Westerly*
- Some of the William Penn K-4 curriculum (Then and Now activity) - *Northampton*
- Sailboating and canoe trips, when talking flowed naturally - *Northampton*
- Using "units", three main curriculum topics in the year -- Bible (alternating years of Hebrew and Christian scripture), Quakerism, and Social Concerns/Environment) - *Wellesley*
- Study of queries with 6-9th group, writing a couple of queries (one was about sportsmanship) - *Dover*
- Bible study lesson using a lesson in a box created from *Young Children and Worship* by Jerome Berryman. - *Dover*
- Lighting a candle and turning lights down to create a quiet atmosphere for worship or guided meditation - *Amesbury*
- Using the *Jubilee* curriculum (see additional article) - *Westport*

- Reading *Talking Walls* by Margie Knight, a springboard for a discussion on every page - *Vassalboro*
- Reading about Moses and the plagues and parting of the waters; all age children working on a mural, with each taking a part to illustrate; telling the story to the rest of the meeting - *Vassalboro*
- Having a "Quaker" seder - *Lewiston and Northampton*
- Making a banner every year for the CROP walk (i.e. "The Real Food Pyramid" showing one person on top of a pyramid of others, progressively thinner) - *Acton*
- Drama -- the group loves theatrics and presented several plays to meeting (e.g. "Holly and Ivy" by Rumer Godden) - *Acton*
- Creation of a Christmas play centered around study of sweatshop labor/ human rights issues - *Dover*
- Putting on a Christmas play as part of the Meeting's Advent pot luck. Original plays include parts for all ages. -- *Westport (Providence* also reported their Christmas gathering with skits and music)
- Supporting the Box Project, which matched the meeting with a low-income family, by preparing lunch for a fundraiser, collecting items to send, writing letters. - *Acton*
- Making the Sundays before and after school vacations (low attendance) into all-ages hands-on activities days: games, arts and crafts, gardening, cooking, etc.- *Wellesley*
- Anything hands-on (most are quite young), projects like painting a table cloth, drawing, crafts, writing a big poem to share with the rest of meeting - *Cobscook*
- Using five weeks at the end of the year for a series on "Treasures". Using stories from *Friendly Story Caravan, Eight is Enough, and My Book of Quaker Saints*, reading the story, discussing "what was the real treasure?" and then doing a related activity. - *Allen's Neck*
- Buying a quantity of chocolate "coins" on sale after Hanukkah to be used as lesson illustrations (parables and N.T. stories) or for games - *Allen's Neck*
- Hiring childcare for those under three years old (meeting members sign up to call and give a ride to one of the several usual babysitters) - *Amesbury*
- Family worship once a month, semi-programmed, with one adult planning songs and a story to be read (successful until there were many very young children) - *Amesbury*
- Naming each First Day School group after a Quaker personage at the start of the fall. They study their person throughout the fall (George Foxes, William Penns, Lucretia Motts, and Elizabeth Frys (for small frys!). Classes keep their names as they move from year to year, connecting them to an important Quaker and giving them a class identity. - *Burlington*
- Recognizing First Day School teachers at the rise of meeting at the end of the school year, with children

presenting cards and flowers, the same Sunday as welcoming new babies. - *Cambridge*

- After a unit about racism and the underground railroad, Junior Highers raised money for the Interfaith Pilgrimage by designing and selling teeshirts. - *Cambridge*
- A visit to the class from the "real" Lucretia Mott - *Wellesley*
- After studying Hebrew scriptures, doing four weeks on Exodus (see additional article) - *Burlington*
- Having a brief social time together for each class (snack). Sometimes classes make snack for all the children or even for the adults. - *Burlington*

How long do teachers teach?

Monthly rotation seems the most common pattern. Some meetings have teachers for the whole year, but usually there are scheduled "non-First Day School" days, when there is child care or family worship planned by someone else. Sometimes there's a main teacher or a team responsible for a third of the school year or the whole year, with others recruited to assist.

Other organizational ideas?

All seem to feel that a strong planning committee and Meeting support (material, spiritually, and teaching) is important. Sometimes the FDS committee all teach, sometimes the committee primarily plans and recruits. Teachers who sign up consistently each year are a wonderful asset.

One meeting's teachers had staff meetings during First Day School time once every few months, with child care available provided that Sunday. One meeting's committee met monthly early on First Day morning over muffins at a local restaurant.

Northampton has four committee members, each member supervising one age group or planning the Prelude (15 minutes before worship, an intergenerational program with rotating volunteer leaders).

Hanover rotates the clerkship of the FDS committee, having four clerks who take three months each. They also have a day-long retreat each year for adults ministering to children.

Wellesley continues to work on "bins". They have one for each class, with sections on each of the units, plus a few more. Each bin has files with material for that category (Bible, social action, etc.) that previous teachers have thought worked well for that age group. There's an extra Bible bin and a Quaker one with folders on famous Quakers and Quaker organizations. The bins are kept in the office, on a shelf at a convenient height, because things in file cabinets go unused -- "out of sight, out of mind".

Westport encourages team teaching, so that teachers can alternate staying in meeting for worship. Each team works out their own rotation, alternating weeks or months. They also have a list of volunteers if someone is unable to teach.

Allen's Neck suggests that reporting what the FDS does is very important for meeting support. List activities in a report and/or the meeting newsletter, particularly if the curriculum is in response to requests from the meeting.

Themes and Materials:

- Reading from *Lighting Candles in the Dark* and doing skits from it - *Acton*
- *Timeless Themes*, a UUA Bible-based curriculum - *Vassalboro*
- Each spring The Committee on Friends in Unity with Nature teaches a month - *Burlington*
- Using the Beacon Hill idea (*March 1998 Christian Education Newsletter*) of a core value each month (respect, love, justice, etc.), incorporating queries, Bible stories and other stories - *Cobscook*
- Three parts to the year: Bible stories (lessons from *Young Children and Worship* and *Sparklers*); Nature and Us (using *Earthcare for Children, a First Day School Curriculum*); and world religions (program developed by teachers) - *Dover*
- Three parts to the year: Quakerism; Bible (Christmas to Easter, reflecting Jesus' life); Social Concerns and the Environment. - *Wellesley* (*Burlington*, similar, with Bible, Quakerism and "other" (Native American, world religions, nature, etc.))
- FDS committee's members choose some topic of personal interest to teach one or two months. E.g. this year: William Penn's life, John Woolman's teaching, truth-telling, outreach to a local shelter, the Bible and its historical context. - *Westerly*
- Teachers choose what they want to teach. E.g. this year: Heroes of the Bible; William Penn (using *William Penn, the Sword and the Feather* curriculum); *Food for Body and Spirit* from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting; a "Quaker Hagaddah." -- *Lewiston*
- The youngest group studied virtues. Middle group studied how we use our time, talent and money in the practice of our faith. Older group wrote a book of the interviews they did with meeting members. The oldest group discussed their interpretations of the gospels (comparing gospels). - *Providence*
- Teachers choose what they want to teach. There is a list of ideas and an inventory of available materials to help teachers find activities, by topic: Quaker, Meditation, Bible, Values. -- *Amesbury*

Many thanks to the people who took the time to respond. I hope that reflecting on your program was a useful exercise for you.

If you would like further information about anything here, you could contact me (617-625-4494) and I could give you the name of the person to get in touch with. -ed.

Putting LIFE into Hebrew Scripture

This is an excellent example of a creative approach to bringing scriptures, both the drama and the principles, to life for First Day School. - ed.

In May, Burlington Meeting did a four week unit on the book of Exodus to finish the Hebrew Scriptures unit that they'd started in the winter. Jean McCandless supplied these details of their multi-age activities:

Week 1: We studied Moses and the Burning Bush, prepared props, rehearsed lines and presented the episode to all the adults right after Meeting, complete with five or six youngsters being flames.

Week 2: With much advance preparation by two teachers, we set up in front of the Meetinghouse as the Exodus of the Hebrew people from Egypt. All meeting attenders would come out the front door and start on a path that took them through or past all the plagues, complete with frogs dropping out of one tree, ice cubes dropping out of another (as hail), etc. etc. (de-emphasizing the deaths of animals and children) and ending up with people having to "wade" through the Red Sea, created by children pouring red colored water down sheets of plexiglass. Adults were asked to join us in singing "Let My People Go". Much work, but the children were very excited and interested in this elaborate street theatre, and will remember this lesson for a very long time.

Week 3: We studied Commandments, including trying to write some of our own commandments. At the rise of Meeting, we asked adults to fill out a questionnaire asking them a) to write down as many of the Commandments as they knew, and, b) write down any personal guidelines for their lives that were currently important to them.

Week 4: We reviewed Commandments and story of their creation. We made "stone tablets" with the commandments printed on them for the grownups (since only two of them knew all ten Commandments!) Adults' personal "commandments" were cut out (printed from data of last week) and pasted on a giant paper chain which we presented to the adults at the rise of meeting -- noting that our community is held together by members' commitment to living out personal and group "commandments".

I saw this prayer in the Catholic Worker, and have shared it with the Young Friend resource people from time to time. You may find it speaks to you about religious education ministry, as well. -ed

Prayer of Archbishop Oscar Romero

It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that should be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted,

knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything,

and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something,

and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete,

but it is a beginning,

a step along the way,

an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter

and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,

but that is the difference

between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders,

ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future that is not our own.

Amen.

Report from the Field, Westport

Westport Meeting responded at length to questions, having used them as a basis for evaluation by their Religious Education (R.E.) Committee. I've excerpted from their report:

How does your meeting decide what to teach?

First Day School content comes from three sources. 1) The R.E. Committee and teachers meet with parents to describe intended content so that parents can express their concerns and suggestions. 2) We have curriculums from Mennonites, FGC, FUM, Friends in Unity with Nature, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and others. In the coming years, we intend to expand our curriculum. 3) Teachers are encouraged to shape the content according to their comfort with the material and their leadings. Some teachers develop original units while others select from more than one curriculum through the year.

What themes did you cover this last year?

We had four classes this year: Pre-School (4 and 5 year olds), Lower Elementary, Upper Elementary, and Junior/Senior High. The Pre-School and Upper Elementary used the Jubilee curriculum. The Fall theme is based on stories from the Old Testament and the Spring theme uses stories from the New Testament. The Upper Elementary class took a break from the Jubilee in the Spring and developed their own unit on Mystics and the mystical roots of our Quaker form of worship. The class did lessons on Hildegarde, St Francis of Assisi, Brother Lawrence, Julia of Norwood, Art and chanting forms, and George Fox. It culminated in discussions of our Quaker faith and form of worship. The Lower Elementary class used two curriculums from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting: *Teaching Old Testament to Quaker Children* and *Teaching Jesus to Quaker Children*. The class made a large relief map of the Holy Land, marking the special places and events described in the Bible stories. The class also did a unit on the George Fox song, from a back issue of the *Christian Education Newsletter*. The Junior/Senior High class was more self-guided. The class was presented with the idea of building a Peace Garden on Meeting property. The class would plan the garden and work with Meeting for Business to build it. Around this project, the class learned about prayer, Zen meditation, and Quaker process. The Peace Garden project will be continued into the next year.

.What's been a success for your First Day School?

A few years ago, we purchased a religious education curriculum called *Jubilee*, published by Mennonites, Quakers, and Brethren. It's organized by grade levels, beginning at pre-school and going through 8th grade (we use it for preschool and upper elementary). The Fall cycle focuses on the Old Testament and the Spring cycle is based on the New Testament. The curriculum package comes with a teacher's manual, student books, and thematic materials such as stickers, cut-outs, and games. The teacher's manual is very thorough and well organized,

offering background on the Bible story that is the focus of every lesson, with plenty of activity suggestions to choose from. As well as being easy to use and making class preparation easier, it provides a cohesive foundation in the Bible and Christian Faith that has made the exploration of Quakerism, other faith traditions, and contemporary challenges to our Faith more meaningful in our other First Day School classes. Teachers have the flexibility to follow the curriculum structure or improvise on the theme as they may be led.

How are you structured and what changes do you foresee?

We have a loose structure, but have been blessed with teachers who have long term experience and stability. Teachers share among themselves their experiences with the children, noting what they have learned in each other's classes. At the same time it is important to stress that our structure is "loose" and it is our flexibility that brings vitality and freshness to the program without sacrificing some basic continuity from one class to the next. Encouraging teachers to experiment with curriculum is one important source of innovation. But we have also been challenged by parents who, through their questions and suggestions at open meetings, have encouraged the committee to try new approaches or consider content area's we may not have touched upon. Our Summer Meeting program came out of concerns raised by parents and we have included more content on other faith traditions in recent years.

Our "structure" emphasizes Christianity and a strong relationship to the Bible, beginning in the Pre School and through the elementary grades. The Bible is the source for exploring the concept of God, foundations of Christian Faith, and the roots of Quakerism. Using the Bible is a skill that is emphasized in the upper elementary grades. In the elementary grades, children are introduced to Quakerism, starting with some Quaker history and important Quaker people. In the Upper Elementary class, there is more content on Quaker faith traditions and some introduction to other religions in comparison to Quakerism. The oldest class tends to focus more on the contemporary issues of examining one's faith and being a Quaker in today's world. The approach includes more discussion around issues facing junior and senior high kids. The group is also more self-directed than any of our other classes and has not used a curriculum in recent years.

After lengthy discernment, the monthly meeting approved changes to enable teachers to participate more in Meeting for Worship. First, our time in Meeting for Worship will be extended another 10 minutes and classes will run past the time that Meeting for Worship is brought to a close. The adults will stay a little longer in the Meeting House so we do not lose class time. Second, the last Sunday of every month will be Family Worship. All but those who need childcare will stay in Meeting for Worship.

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We are also planning changes in our oldest class. Given the number of children in that group, we will be splitting into two classes, one Junior High, one High School. We are also looking at using some curriculum with this group in addition to continuing the Peace Garden project.

Share Your Parenting!

Spread the gospel of simplicity

The Center for a New American Dream works to raise conscientiousness about ways that the myths of commercialism have found root in us and our culture and what we can do about it. They would like your help, here is their request:

Many parents are concerned about the recent increase in marketing to children, the intrusion of corporate advertising into public schools, and the rising number of companies targeting younger and younger kids. They are struggling to raise their kids with healthy self-images, values and behaviors in an increasingly noisy, commercial world. The Center for a New American Dream is working to address these serious concerns.

The goal of our campaign is to raise awareness of the hidden costs of commercialism for our children, families, and the environment, and to support parents who are taking steps to protect their children from the influence of marketing and advertising. Components of the campaign include a survey of American attitudes about the effect of commercialism on children, a free brochure with practical tips or parents/guardians, and a more detailed Guide to Parenting in a Commercial Culture available for sale.

A major part of our campaign will be communicating our message through the media. We are looking for parents who would be willing to talk to the press about what they are doing with their children to combat commercialism. If you would be interested in sharing your stories with the media, let us know. Please email me with the following information:

- Your name
- Your address (city and state are very important in order to correctly match reporters to people in their area)
- Your phone number and the best times to call.
- How many children you have and their ages
- A brief description of the steps you have taken/are taking against commercialism

I look forward to hearing from you. Please reply to newdream4@newdream.org. You may also call at 301-891-3683.

Thank You Very Much!

Trish Wotowiec

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Inner Tenderings by Louise Wilson.

Friends United Press

Review by Gail Thomas, NEYM C.Ed. Committee

Inner Tenderings does not lend itself to chapter by chapter study, but is excellent for adult discussion groups. This book is both a straight-forward story of a spiritual journey and a story of miracles-both the small and large miracles in a life that opens itself to loving God. Louise Wilson struggles with deep issues such as how to balance a spiritual calling with marriage and family; how to discern a leading; how to reconcile the mysticism of Quakerism with ordinary day-to-day life, providing many opportunities for similar searching and sharing.

I first knew Louise Wilson as an educator when she was Head of Virginia Beach Friends School. Then I attended one of her workshops at Pendle Hill, "The Balm of Gilead", and experienced her as a healer who call out loud for Jesus, startling to a liberal FGC Quaker like myself. Finally, last summer, Louise Wilson was an evening speaker at New England Yearly Meeting. There she surprised me again, reflecting with humility and faith on her spiritual journey and the challenges of caring for a frail, aging husband.

Part of the charm of this book for me is how ordinary Louise Wilson's life is. A Quaker child leading a typical Quaker family life, nevertheless, her longing for God teaches her to listen and she finds her self beginning a Friends Meeting in Virginia Beach, being recorded as a Friends minister, and helping to start and later head a Friends School. As her faith deepens, she meets Howard Thurman, who becomes her mentor and spiritual friend. Thurman, she says "challenged me at the heart of my being." She also becomes a regular speaker at Quaker gatherings, first within FUM, then ecumenically within Friends. Always, Louise Wilson shows honesty regarding the lessons she is learning, the "tenderings" of her heart. Her approach is practical and down-to-earth in a life that contains visions and other nonrational events. Her acceptance helps us see God in the day to day. "We cannot drift beyond God's love and care," she writes, "to whomever we listen we will be taught...God surrounds us with every word, every person we need for our soul's growth."

Later in life, Louise Wilson writes of becoming part of a healing circle and struggles to understand more about prayer, particularly intercessory prayer. She seemed to ask our questions like, Who is the Christ? How do we know God's will? How do we reconcile God's will and a partner's needs? These are a few a questions that Louise Wilson confronts, lives with and answers .

Testimonies, life stories, help us reflect on and tell our stories. By sharing with us how she opened herself to spiritual growth and a closer relationship with God, Louise Wilson can help us to do the same.

Bennington Meeting has responded to that perennial problem of sporadic attendance by printing Children's Pages in their newsletter. This is an example from April, 1999. Sorry you can't see the color!

Illustration not available in this web version

