

## CRE Annual Report

During the 2019-2020 academic year, CRE followed the theme of Stewardship. We construed Stewardship broadly, including caring for our environment as well as caring for our fellow humans and animals. This theme ran through our First Day School lessons and our major events. We were led by two co-clerks, Sarah Buxton and Annemarie Hindman, and members included Steve Bacher, Michelle Caramenico, Grace Cicchimaró, Irina Dmitrenko, Kelly Lake, and Deb Watts.

### First Day School

*Early & elementary group.* The early and elementary (preschool through fifth grade) group is our largest group, with approximately 15-20 children in the Meeting falling into this age range. Through the first half of the year, weekly topics included bees and pollinators (with a field trip to the Hunt family's Happy Honey Farm), the origins of our food, recycling, and composting. Leading up to the Christmas celebration, we wove in a focus on Jesus and the Christmas story. After the holiday, we continued with stewardship topic but also included more traditional Bible stories as well (Noah's Ark, Moses and Exodus), in large part to prepare our fourth graders to select Bibles that the Meeting would present at Easter.

Plans for the last third of the year included exploration of other faiths, including a week on Buddhism and a week on Islam. Although the quarantine interrupted our time together this year, the Worship and Ministry committee has been hosting a 15-minute zoom gathering (from 10:45-11:00 am) each Sunday with a question or prompt for children to respond to, which has helped tremendously to keep the children connected to one another and to the Meeting.

We initially planned to separate the early elementary (PreK-first) from the older elementary, leading two relatively parallel groups but with different levels of complexity to the discussions. However, we found that attendance was variable, ranging from 3 children to 12 children each week. (Our records suggest that special presentations, such as the focus on Bible stories, were relatively better attended.) Consequently, combining the group often made more sense. This group was largely taught by Annemarie Hindman and Sarah Buxton. We also welcomed Owen Buxton as a support teacher; he shadowed Sarah and Annemarie through the first part of the year and then sometimes led instruction with one of us as a support.

*Middle school group.* This year we piloted a special small group for older elementary and middle school children. We selected the first day of the month of this meeting because we have found that the shared meal is meaningful for children in this age group, as they get to see friends and, of course, eat. Grace Cicchimaró led this group, and topics included factory farming, plastic pollution in the ocean, and fast fashion. The group tackled slightly more complex topics, often without clear right answers, making use of media sources such as documentary videos. Attendance at this group was variable, ranging from 1 to 6 children, but discussions were rich and challenging. The consensus of the Committee was that having this separate group was an asset for the middle schoolers, although we acknowledge that their lives are busy and that attendance can be a challenge.

## **Fall Soup Dinner**

This year's fall soup dinner raised funds for Habitat for Humanity, supporting a team of people from Newtown Monthly Meeting, led by Scott Hoskins, to participate in a Faith Build project. The dinner was skillfully coordinated by Cynthia Vandenberg, and CRE also greatly appreciated the many other members of the Meeting who, at the last minute, shared their expertise in the locations of such key items as tablecloths and serving utensils. CRE's children served approx. 10 different soups for several hours and raised more than \$5,000. CRE was delighted to have Susan Hoskins and Claire Staffieri visit the children during First Day School in February to share how the Faith Build went, so that they could see the fruits of their labors.

## **Holiday Program**

The Holiday Program generally followed the same structure as in previous years, with an opening poem, after which children presented lines from the Christmas story, and the Meeting sang hymns connected to those lines. CRE is tremendously grateful to Deb Watts for coordinating the music again this year; the music is a critical part of what makes the Holiday Program such a unique departure from our usual worship, and bringing musicians of various ages and backgrounds together to play multiple songs with minimal rehearsal time is a complex feat.

## **Lasagna Dinner – To Come**

Given the quarantine, the lasagna dinner will not be held in person. However, Sarah Buxton feels led to organize an alternative, in-home experience that might involve lasagna delivery throughout the area and a joint meal by Zoom. Proceeds would likely benefit Mercer Street Friends or another local organization that is supporting those in need at this unprecedented time. Details will be forthcoming.

## **Presentation of Bibles at Easter – To Come**

In light of the quarantine, the presentation of Bibles did not occur for fourth graders at Easter this year. CRE would very much like to have this event face to face later in the year, but because some of our fourth graders were very excited about the Bibles they selected, which are currently awaiting them in the Meetinghouse, we are considering doing this at an online, end-of-year CRE celebration. Logistics would likely involve families purchasing and mailing Bibles to Annemarie, who would then inscribe and mail back, so that children had them in time for the ceremony and could read a passage to the Meeting if they chose to. CRE would appreciate feedback on this issue from the Meeting.

## **End of Year Celebration**

CRE hosts a picnic at the end of the academic year to celebrate the fellowship and learning of the previous months. This year, it is unlikely that a face-to-face gathering will be possible. However, we would like to have an event of some sort that marks the end of the year and communicates to the children how proud we are of them and how much we have enjoyed being with them over the

previous months. We are still considering a number of possibilities and would appreciate feedback from the Meeting.

### **Plans for Next Year**

As CRE looks ahead, a challenge for us is meeting our commitments to the Meeting. This Committee has a relatively high workload, including First Day School three times per month, two fundraising dinners, the Christmas program, supporting the Easter program, and preparation for and presentation of Bibles and Faith & Practice. Over the past year, we sometimes found ourselves understaffed. Looking ahead, though, we have five individuals who are interested in teaching regularly (Sarah Buxton, Grace Cicchimaró, Annemarie Hindman, Kelly Lake, and Michelle Caramenico). Two additional members have volunteered to support events (Cynthia Vandenberg, soup dinner; Deb, music at the Holiday Program). We have also discussed the possibility of coordinating with Inreach/Outreach on our two fundraising dinners, so that other members of the Meeting might be able to offer some logistical support.

If, however, we wish to run a separate group for middle schoolers, once a month or more frequently, we may need a larger teaching staff, particularly if we want to keep the early and older elementary students together with two teachers. We have considered the possibility of hiring a teacher who could provide 1-2 structured lessons per month, and our CRE members could supplement these. We would welcome discussion with the Meeting, which might lead to a proposal to the Meeting.

### **Notes of Appreciation**

Members Steve Bacher and Irina Dmitrenko have both served on CRE for several years and are rotating off in the coming year due to other commitments. We are very grateful to both of these members for their work; Irina has led a number of mindfulness and movement classes for CRE, and Steve has played a key role in curriculum planning and in leading the Christmas program. We greatly value both of their contributions and appreciate all of their work.

The Committee would also like to thank Sarah Buxton for her incredible work as Clerk of the Committee for the past several years. We also appreciate her time as a co-clerk in 2019-2020 to support Annemarie Hindman in learning the role. Sarah has been a dedicated, innovative leader and we are delighted that she will stay on the Committee as a teacher.

Finally, CRE wishes to thank the Meeting for its continued support of our Committee.