

Children's Religious Education

By Annemarie Hindman

Year in review. The 2020-2021 CRE year has been challenging in light of the COVID-19-related distancing, but we have tried a number of new ideas to stay connected, and we have managed to grow together in the Light with our young friends.

Spiritual Care Packages. The backbone of our interactions this year were semi-monthly Spiritual Care Package packets. Much like our typical CRE classes, packets tackled social and natural science topics of interest to younger children and used these as springboards to highlight the spiritual elements of the world around us. In general, packets included a two-page document with some explanation of the topic and some thought-provoking quotes ranging in complexity from simple to more complex (for our older friends). Packets also included an item, such as a package of seeds or a notebook, for children to use. In summer 2020, we sent our first packet, which targeted the Perseid meteor shower (and included a moveable constellation tracker) and another about seeds and plants (which included seeds). In September, our packet focused on how children and families can worship at home. In October, we focused on how children are stewards of the world in their lives. In December, our packet highlighted celebrating the advent. In January, we sent out gratitude journals and pens and invited children to keep track of things in their lives for which they are grateful. Our May/June packet will focus on celebrating good moments from the year.

Gatherings. In addition, we got together in person several times. In September, we began the year with a socially distanced outdoor gathering of preschool, elementary, and middle school families at Annemarie's house. We discovered that children enjoyed arts and crafts, as well as outdoor games, and particularly time to chat with each other. We gathered together again in October at Friends Home and Village for a socially distanced Halloween party; children dressed up and trick-or-treated (at a distance) with residents. Once the weather warmed up again, we gathered for a socially distanced Easter egg hunt. We plan to have a year-end picnic as well.

Meditations. CRE posted several meditations for children and families, in an effort to help families find their center and rest in the Light. Some included audio and were shared as YouTube links, and others were posted as images so that families could read the meditations on their own.

Fundraising dinners. In October, Lisa Li was led to organize a fundraising dinner. She graciously re-joined the CRE committee and, with support from other members of the Meeting, led a lovely socially distanced soup dinner. Friends brought their soups to the Meetinghouse, where Lisa and a team of adult and teen volunteers packaged the soups for takeout. Donors then drove to the Meetinghouse and picked up their soup, and later that evening Lisa convened a Zoom gathering. Children selected the Pennsylvania Association for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PSPCA) as the recipient of the funds. A total of \$1,982 was raised. In spring, Lisa again led a socially distanced, takeout lasagna dinner, with Mercer Street Friends as the recipient. More than \$3,000 was raised. **(UPDATE: as of 5/12/21 the grand total raised is \$3,358.)**

Holiday programs. In December, Kelly Lake organized a fantastic Christmas program that involved a video compilation of children reading sections of the Christmas story, some in costume. In addition, children shared wishes for the world. At Easter, several children shared hopes for new beginnings at the Rise of Meeting.

Presentation of Bibles. At Easter, CRE presented Bibles to two young friends. Aubree Hirschbuhl is in fourth grade this year, and Anna Sherwin is in fifth grade. Aubree shared a short reading with the Meeting.

Other activities. The other primary activity this year has been the careful construction of a database that includes (to our knowledge) all children under 18 in the Meeting, along with their contact information and their grade. This database enables us to reach out to both elementary and middle grades friends, as well as to teens in high school with differentiated messages.

Goals for the next year. For the coming year, we have several goals. First, we hope to resume more frequent group gatherings in some way. Children have really missed one another, and as our group gets older, they are ready for thoughtful conversations together about their own spirituality. Second, we would like to brainstorm ways to keep teens involved. Teens may not be interested in regularly coming to the Meetinghouse on Sunday mornings; however, they may appreciate other gatherings or even email resources and updates. Third, we hope to expand our pool of teachers so that we can better distribute the workload as well as better access the rich array of knowledge about Quakerism and spirituality more generally. We will hold a (zoom) planning meeting in late May/early June.

Concluding thoughts. The CRE team would like to sincerely thank the Meeting for its support over the past year. Friends have been incredibly generous with their time and very flexible with

access to the Meetinghouse, for which we are deeply grateful. We look forward to the next year together.