

The Children's Religious Education

Annual Report for 2022-2023

Nancy Martin, clerk

The Children's Religious Education program provides opportunities for children from preschool through eighth grade to gather for Sunday worship, fun, fellowship, learning, and service. It is our goal to help our youngest friends form lifelong bonds to community, to Truth and Light, and to the Society of Friends. Each year, our youngest Friends walk away with a deep sense of the history of Quakers, Quaker beliefs, ideals, and what it means to be a Quaker today. We aim to support each child's personal journey as they ask: What does it mean for me to be Quaker? What do I believe?

Make-up of the Committee

This year, CRE welcomed Nancy Martin as the new clerk, while Annemarie Hindman transitioned out of the role and completed a final year on the committee. All members wish to thank Annemarie for her years of service and commitment to the children of our meeting, especially during the difficult time of COVID. She continues to provide guidance and assistance to our children in her current responsibility, as clerk of the School Committee of Newtown Friends School.

Three other members transitioned off the committee this year, They are:

- Kelly Lake who served for several years. We thank her for her service to the children of the meeting.
- Debbie Watts has joined another committee. She has agreed to continue to provide music when needed. The committee thanks her for the beautiful sounds she, her family and children of the meeting gave us in the past and as we move on
- Lisa Li - Coordinated and facilitated her last culinary feat, our Simple Supper, before handing the reins over to Cynthia.

We are presently composed of 6 people. Historically, each member has taken on a specific ongoing commitment necessary for the life of children's religious education. However, we all "pitch-in" wherever and whenever needed. Each of the committee members were asked to contribute to this report. You will hear their own thoughts weaved into it.

1. Kate Fullerton - caregivers and credentialing.
2. Grace Ciccimaro - teaching / planning and facilitating monthly service projects.
3. Cynthia Vandenberg - coordinated the Lasagna Dinner and will take on the task of implementing both fundraisers held each year.
4. Tucker Manchanda - teaching, curriculum planning
5. Julie Forte - our newest member currently unassigned
6. Nancy Martin - teaching, curriculum planning, clerk

The committee could use some help. We would welcome someone willing and able to keep our website up to date.

Our Program

The term *Meeting for Worship with attention to Learning (Meeting for Learning)* was adopted to conform to the language used whenever Quakers gather together. It was explained that being together upstairs is a very special time for us to learn more about our lives as Quakers.

We currently have a strong program with a smaller number of children than we would like. It is important to note that we are grateful to have children. We currently have 8 students on our roster, 4 who consistently attend. Two new students, ages 5 and 3, joined us in the middle of the year. We realized that differentiated instruction was needed for them. A lovely curriculum was found on the PYM site entitled, *Growing in the Light*, We plan to implement short 20 minute lessons beginning in September.

Curriculum and Teaching

We accomplished 16 lessons and 5 service projects this instructional year. Our service projects are mentioned in this section because Grace always includes a short lesson to tie how we live our lives as Quakers to each project.

We implemented the lessons from the Faith and Play Curriculum that were previously purchased. I attended a weekend training for Faith and Play and really like most of the format. There is an integration of the spoken word and the use of manipulatives that brings ideas alive. We have altered the lessons to include the thoughts and voices of our students. It is a risky business, and we are always near going off topic, but it works.

Here are some of the lessons we implemented:

- Our special gifts, Queries, the Testimonies, Prayer, Meeting for Worship, Meeting for Worship with Attention for Business and of course, our very own F&P version of the Nativity.
- Kate took the time to revisit the topic of discernment because the kids had difficulty coming to an agreement on the charity they would support for the Lasagna Dinner. I have a feeling the conversation will come up again and again. Discernment isn't easy.
- In Tucker's own words - "In my short time with CRE, I've led first day lessons for the children, with a focus on the interactions of people with the Light as revealed through scriptures." Tucker also led the kids in a game that revealed a lot of information about different religions.
- Norval Reese visited us on January 15th to talk about when, as a young man, he worked in the Civil Rights Movement with Martin Luther King.

Service Projects

In Grace's words, "In February, CRE began a new initiative to encourage middle and high school Friends, as well as Friends who occasionally attend, to participate with our community through service project work. The work takes place during MFW on the first Sunday of the month. The young friends gather upstairs for the first 40 minutes of worship, join the community for the final 20 minutes, and are encouraged to stay for the shared meal.

The young friends collaborated on service project ideas, and the community supported their projects by donating goods and time preparing materials. To date, the young friends have assembled:

- 100-weekend food bags to distribute to children through TASK
- 50 hygiene bags for the housing insecure in Bristol
- Homemade toys and comfort blankets for pets at the Lahaska SPCA.

The last service project for this school year takes place in May. To demonstrate integrity, the children will wrap up some unfinished work utilizing all the materials donated by the community. We will also discuss ideas about how our meetings will look in the Fall when we pick up our special projects again.

A bonus of this format is the young Friends hear rich messages and feel a different sense of gathering by joining MFW during the final 20 minutes rather than the first."

Caregiving and Credentialing

In the words of Kate Fullerton, "Newtown Monthly Meeting has seventeen certified childcare providers available to assist with watching the young people of the Meeting. Childcare has been provided weekly during worship this past year, including during the service projects on the first Sunday of the month. Per CRE policy, children younger than 5 or who have special needs are taken care of by adult childcare providers. This policy has been followed with all appropriate children.

CRE greatly appreciates the work of Sharon Hulihan, who has assisted with the transition to Kate Fullerton as Childcare Coordinator and has continued the Sign-Up Genius that coordinates who is providing childcare when. The childcare providers are preparing for summer worship and providing childcare during the weeks of earlier worship. If anyone is interested in becoming a childcare provider and has questions about becoming certified, they can reach out to Kate Fullerton for details."

Decision regarding Caregiving

1. The committee decided that any member of our meeting who has attained the age of 14 will be considered eligible for child caring. Clearances and interview are still necessary.
2. Our religious education program will be diverse and inclusive. We are open to all children whose parents want them to be raised in the Quaker faith. We will work to make sure all our students are in a safe environment. Parents will be consulted as to the needs of their children and how we can best meet them.

Miscellaneous

- **Christmas presentation of the Nativity Story - 12/18/22**
The children listed the facts they knew about the Nativity. They listened to two books that told the Christmas Story. Like the Faith & Practice lessons, we thought about which characters and what parts of the story weren't necessary and why. We then began to tell the story using the characters in a children's stable. The kids presented their lesson followed by queries that our older young Friends and Adult Friends answered.
- **Easter and presentation of Bibles - 4/9/23**
In Annmarie's own words, "...This year, Easter included the presentation of Bibles for two of our Meetings' children, Jack Ciccimaro and Meredith McDonald. Both read a short passage from scripture aloud. The Easter Egg Hunt had smaller attendance than in prior years but was still great fun for all."
- **Simple Supper - 11/4/22**
Words of Lisa Li, "Simple Supper, fall of 2022 supported the Aark Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center. Roughly 75 people were served delicious soups and desserts made by Meeting Members and Attenders. Our young Friends took orders served and cleared tables. Leah Stallings, the Executive Director, of the Aark Wildlife Rehabilitation and Education Center, spoke at the Supper. She brought a one-eyed screech owl and shared fascinating facts about its rescue journey with everyone." **The proceeds totaled \$2,340."**
- **Lasagna Dinner - 4/21/23**
Will Reid and Betsy Crofts visited the children to explain how the Right Sharing Program benefits women and children in Guatemala, India, Kenya and Sierra Leone. The African American Museum of Bucks County was another idea discussed. After discerning the benefits of each program, the decision was made to give the proceeds of the Lasagna Dinner to Right Sharing of World Resources.
Our spring fundraiser was a big hit. Members and attenders prepared delicious lasagnas. Our young friends took orders, served, and cleared tables. In Cynthia's words, "Thank you to the members of the meeting who not only brought the delicious food, but also attended the event and made generous monetary donations to Right Sharing of World Resources." **The proceeds totaled \$4,008.**
- **A Minute written to Princeton Friends**
One of the children mentioned the fire at Princeton Meeting. All the children wanted to know the details. Was anyone hurt? Did the meeting house burn down? It was suggested that they write a letter to express how they felt. Huddled together, the children wrote their note and then shared it with the adults. Kate explained that they had written a Quaker Minute. It was sent to the clerk of Princeton Meeting.
*Dear Friends,
We were so upset when we heard about the fire on the porch of your meeting house. We hope repairs are smooth, and if you need anything, our meeting house will provide. We wish you support and strength throughout this time, and we are holding you in the light.*

Children of Newtown Meeting

- **Bucks Quarterly Meeting - 5/21/23**
Sarah Armour spoke on behalf of our young Friends. She mentioned both fundraising dinners and their monthly service projects.

Thoughts about next year's program-

- It is our goal to provide the meeting with a comprehensive calendar listing, all dates of lessons, service projects, dinners, and holiday presentations at our opening session in September.
- We would like to hold lessons more often than we did this year.
Tucker wrote, "I've planned future lessons on discernment and continuing revelation, with the goal of explaining how the SPICES originated and helping the children to build their own definition of their faith. Over the next year, I hope to develop a cohesive and comprehensive first day curriculum, with a series of 30 lessons. These lessons will help students to describe what Quakers do and believe in and build on their ability to express their own personal beliefs. They will also build the skill of listening to the voice within and be able to participate fully in an all-ages meeting for worship, with an understanding of the role of individual ministry as well as the process of discernment. This includes significant exposure to world religions and historic Quaker texts.
- Our older young Friends are almost absent from the Meeting House. Committee members have discussed at length how to entice their return while others say that this is a natural occurrence. We are requesting help from the meeting to form a very small *ad hoc* committee, perhaps over the summer or early September, to discern if a need exists. The committee should be made up of a couple of adults who understand the needs and wants of teens and the teens themselves.
- We would like to collaborate with the administration of Newtown Friends School to set up a couple of dates when interested parents and their children are invited to spend time at the Meeting House on a Sunday. The parents might attend worship (or a short intro to Quakerism before going into Meeting) while the children attend a monthly service project or Meeting for Learning upstairs.