
Quaking Post

Baltimore Yearly Meeting RE Newsletter – Spring 2003

New for Yearly Meeting 2003: First Day School Teacher Scholarships

In its efforts to support and recognize the important work of First Day School teachers in monthly meetings, the BYM RE Committee has decided to devote half of its budget to scholarships of \$100 toward BYM fees this summer.

The scholarships will be offered to Friends who have taught First Day School (for adults or children) for at least six sessions during the past school year. Twenty scholarships will be available, while they last. To apply, include a brief letter with your BYM registration form, outlining your FDS work in the past year. (On a family registration form, both parents can be eligible, if both teach.)

The Committee has long been under the weight of the expense of attending BYM sessions, especially for families. These scholarships, drawn from our own budget, is a way of putting our money where our mouth is.

Religious Education In Wartime

By Chuck Fager

What does the beginning of the Iraq war mean for Friends?

Consider an analogy: most fire departments work hard at fire prevention, and each actual fire means a setback for this work.

Yet a conflagration does not put the firefighters out of action. To the contrary-- they then redouble their efforts, take risks, and absorb casualties, in a struggle to contain the fire, roll it back and ultimately put it out. Once this is done, they return to their prevention campaign.

Friends are, I believe, in a parallel situation. The outbreak of war surely marks a setback for our months of marching, vigiling, writing and FAXing to head it off. But it does not spell defeat, and much less a reason for withdrawal into depression or feigned indifference.

There is still much To Do. And even more, there is still much To Be. I will not speak here of what To Do; there are many possibilities and opportunities for action, and they are widely advertised.

Rather, let me focus briefly on what, for Quakers, there is To Be.

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RE Plans for 2003 BYM Sessions



Paulette Meier

Put it on your calendar! The RE Committee is planning another exciting program at BYM 2003 sessions, in support of local first Day School teachers and their work.

We've started by inviting two RE consultants/visitors, who will bring very special gifts to Friends and our children: Paulette Meier and Robin Wells. Here's more about them, and the skills they'll bring to us:

PAULETTE MEIER: Paulette

is a member of Community Friends Meeting in Cincinnati. She's also a musician and conflict resolution specialist, working especially with schools and kids. At BYM she'll visit classes, conduct workshops and consult with individual Friends.

She's made an exciting CD, *Come Join the Circle*, which features music that jumps out of the speakers; great tunes, catchy and memorable arrangements and orchestration, with lyrics that were easy to remember and hard not to sing along with. The songs deal with some very concrete issues of conflict resolution, in ways very accessible to kids. They also cover a wide range of genres, from country to Celtic, hip-hop to blues.

The tunes on *Come Join the Circle* were written as what she calls "lessonsongs," to support Paulette's work in conflict resolution in schools, which she did for seven years. (There's more about this at her website: www.lessonsongs.com)

"I have done a variety of things with children and with adults over the years," Paulette writes. "I was a lead trainer each summer for about 5 years for "Peace Camp" in Cincinnati, a week long experience based in the inner city, for ages 6-12. For two years, I was the "artist in residence" at Peace Camp... one year I taught songwriting to all the students in their respective age groups, and we held a concert at the end for each group to perform the songs they collectively wrote, all about peacemaking.

Mostly I've worked in schools, teaching peer mediation, doing programs in classrooms, (always in the context of training teachers how to teach conflict resolution

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and cooperative learning skills), and doing in-service trainings for teachers in a variety of violence prevention and community building topics. I've tried to use singing as a vehicle in everything.

Singing and leading others in singing has been my side hobby for years. I can't begin to say how many peace and justice rallies, demonstrations, marches I've performed at over the years. Some of the highlights of my life have been getting large crowds at the downtown Federal Building here singing wonderful harmonies in rounds, calling for peace.

ROBIN WELLS is the First Day School Coordinator of Asheville Friends Meeting (North Carolina) and an active member of the FGC Religious Education Committee. She is the mother of two boys, ages 5 and 7. Besides visiting classes at BYM sessions, Robin will be offering workshops. here are descriptions:

Let's Play! ~developing games to use with First Day School

Break out of the mold and create some new ways to teach Quakerism and liven up multigenerational gatherings. Participants will learn about some games used in the FDS classroom and will have an opportunity to develop some of their own.

Honoring the Religious Potential of the Child—especially our 3-6 year olds

If we truly recognize the relationship that exists between God and child, the question arises: What is our role as religious educators? How do we provide opportunity for personal experience of the Divine in our classrooms and in Meeting for Worship? Come with ideas to share.

Religious Education Roundtable

Starting up a First Day School in your meeting? Looking for fresh ideas to revitalize your current program? Interested in creating adult classes but don't know how to begin? Come prepared to share what is working (and not working) in your Meeting.

OTHER RE PLANS the RE Committee also expects to have our traditional RE Cake Decorating event, and will show some Quaker-related videos which could be of use in local meetings. We'll be busy at BYM sessions this summer, and we hope you'll want to join us!

Reviews

by Sarah Buchanan-Wollaston

How to Teach Peace to Children by J. Lorne Peachey

(Herald Press, PA: 1981)

This small booklet may have been written a while back, but its message of concern for living our lives as a testimony to peace, and in so doing set an example for our children, is timeless. In its pages you will find a rationale for why the responsibility of teaching of peace lies in the home and meeting community. There are also many specific suggestions for how to support our youngsters in learning the way of peace. This booklet could be useful in the home, or as a guide for First Day School activities for all ages.

Stargirl by Jerry Spinelli

(Knopf, NY: 2002)

This is a great story about a girl who deals with the high school pressures to conform through creativity and kindness. She demonstrates that it is possible to have the courage to be unique, though it can be difficult to overcome public disapproval. Stargirl seeks strength from inside herself, giving readers an idea of what it takes to center down and focus on the divine within. This book is appropriate for 12 year olds and up.

I'm Like You, You're Like Me: A Child's Book about Understanding and Celebrating Each Other by Cindy Gainer

(Free Spirit: 1998)

This book, with colorful illustrations, is a gentle introduction to diversity. Children will read about various races, how people speak, listen, cooperate, and how feelings and body size differ from person to person. The clear message of this book is that through our differences our world is enriched and can be more joyful if we appreciate our diversity. It is best for 4-8 year olds.

All of the above titles are available from

Quaker Books of Friends General Conference,
1-800-966-4556, www.quakerbooks.org

A First Day School Lesson:

By Sarah Buchanan-Wollaston

If you would like to simplify your FDS, try this! Instead of the teacher using a curriculum for a guide, choose a story that is meaningful and age appropriate for your group to use as a basis for your lesson. Here's how it might go:

Prepare yourself and your FDS space: read the story a couple of times, so you really know it well. Prepare your FDS space by providing fun and interesting materials for the children to explore with (art materials, dress ups, simple building toys, dolls/doll house etc.). You don't have to start with tons of materials, you can build on a simple assortment from the start.

To open your lesson greet the children, invite them to briefly share what's going on in their lives. Sing a song or two, then read your story aloud. Then have a few moments (or minutes) of silence to contemplate the story.

Next, invite the children to wonder about the story (discuss it). Ask them questions that will draw out their reaction to the story like: "What do you think was the best part? Why?", "Has anything like this ever happened to you? How did you feel?". etc.

Have the children describe how they would like to respond to the story today, individually. Maybe someone wants to draw a picture of their favorite part. Someone else would like to act out a favorite scene, and others join in. Still another wants to make a clay model of something from the story. When they can describe what they wish to do, release them to begin.

Support their choices as much as possible, within the parameters of your classroom expectations (rules). Engage them in cleaning up before the end of your time together. Some children may want to save uncompleted projects for the next session, try to accommodate any needs that come up.

Try to have a brief gathering circle, so the children have some closure to the time period.

This process is meant to lend experiential support to each person in their spiritual journey, instead of being an experience of teacher led instruction. It may be used for any age group, and mixed ages! Simply alter the reading material - move from stories for children, to passages from great works for teens and adults! It is adapted from Mary Snyder's "Discovery Group" approach to teaching FDS in her book *Opening Doors to Quaker Religious Education*.

RE In Wartime – continued from page 1

At bottom it is straightforward and simple, so much so that we can easily overlook it: It is, in George Fox's phrase, to "keep to our meetings," that is, to maintain and deepen our life as a worshipping community. And our religious education work is an integral part of that "keeping."

This cultivation of a deep center will not only help sustain us as individuals in a dark time. It also, and

perhaps more importantly, can maintain our meetinghouses as places of refuge from the spirit of war.

The importance of this "witness of worship," the "action" of "being," came home to me on the morning the First Gulf War's ground invasion began in second Month 1991. It was First Day, but a work day for me, at the post office. All that morning, it felt as if the winds of war were howling around me like a hurricane: from the radio, from TV, in the voices of my co-workers, both anxious and excited, echoing and reinforcing a crescendo of violence.

In those years I was permitted to punch out for a couple of hours to attend meeting. And when I arrived at our modest building and stepped inside (a bit late, as usual), the door that closed behind me marked a transit into a qualitatively different space: a place of quiet, in which the noise of war was muffled, kept at bay, even if only briefly.

It is hard to overstate the contrast of this worshipful atmosphere with what was outside and all around it. At one level the meeting was unremarkable: Friends sat in somber silence; the few messages, not especially eloquent, voiced grief and anguish in the face of what was happening without; one or two Friends wept quietly.

Yet for me it was a lifesaver, a resource that made it possible to maintain some sense of balance and hope in that maelstrom. It enabled me to finish my work shift with some composure, and then to turn to my other "job" of planning and taking part in outward witness.

This was my personal experience; yet it was not mine alone. In the next weeks, our meetinghouse filled up, as many from the surrounding community, pilgrims seeking a similar respite from the war-spirit, likewise found refuge on our plain benches. By "simply" being who we were, we ministered to many who did not know where else to turn.

And I also believe that this atmosphere affected the children in our meeting as well, became a part of or RE "program," even if we didn't have a formal spot for it in our curriculum.

From a worldly perspective, the meeting did not "accomplish" much. Our few feeble public actions were ignored or ridiculed, as the ugly war ground on to its foolishly triumphalist conclusion.

Yet we did achieve something, which I am convinced is more lasting than many a noisy protest: the meeting's presence and character helped sustain the hope of many. It certainly sustained me. By the time the tide of that war receded, I was convinced this was one of our most important tasks during wartime: the task of being, rather than, or better yet, undergirding all our doing.

It also seemed likely to me that this task would come to us again. And so, regrettably, it has. As we continue to rush about doing all that we can to stem the tide of war, let us not forget that much of our most potent peace witness will grow out of our being, as a worshipping community, rather than our doing. the same goes for our work of teaching, both adults and children.

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Using the Web as a RE Resource – II

From Josh Humphries: As I write this, the US is on the brink of war. It has left me in a state of confusion. That's why I like to read things that take a different, less worrisome view of the world. I read sites like "Pray The News" (www.praythenews.com), a site run by the Carmelite Sisters of Indianapolis, and "Real Live Preacher" (www.reallivepreacher.com), a exas preacher with a compassionate Friends-friendly view of the world.

But, I suppose we also need to talk about RE, that after all is the whole point of the *Quaking Post*, ain't it? So here it is....First there's Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors (CCCO) at www.objector.org Then there's Center On Conscience and War at www.nisbco.org and finally, for great resources for things like First Day School: www.nonviolence.org. That's all for now, I bid you peace.

From Chuck Fager: Here are some more online resources for Religious Education, mostly for adults:

The Jesus Seminar, while controversial, is very accessible. Its web site offers lots of details at:

http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~religion/jseminar/jsem_b.html

For Bible searches and comparison of many translations, try the "Bible Study Tools" section of crosswalk, at: www.crosswalk.com. This site also has any commentaries available, all from very conservative or fundamentalist perspectives.

If you've dipped into commentaries or theological tomes and been puzzled by the technical terminology, help is available from this theological dictionary:

<http://www.carm.org/dictionary.htm>

And for a very different and challenging perspective, take a look at the Skeptic's Annotated bible: <http://skepticsannotatedbible.com/>

Closer to home, there are many books of Quaker Faith & Practice now available online. The largest, and possibly weightiest, is the 1995 edition from Britain Yearly Meeting: <http://www.qnorvic.com/quaker/qfp/>

New York Yearly Meeting's latest is at: <http://www.nyym.org/quakerism/fnp/>

Philadelphia's can be found at: <http://www.pym.org/publish/fnp/>

(Alas, only few excerpts of the BYM *Faith and Practice* are on the BYM web site.)

For contrast, one of the earliest published books of this series, the 1806 *Book of Discipline*, has been uploaded at:

<http://www.users.voicenet.com/~kuenning/qhp/olddisc/>

This is a very instructive document, well worth study and reflection.