

BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Our Core Curriculum: What Quakers Should Know about Religion at Every Age Approved by BYM's Religious Education Committee, August 2017

On March 19 -20, 2016, at Richmond Friends Meeting in Richmond, Virginia, the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Religious Education Committee began work on a core curriculum to describe what every Quaker should know about religion at every age or stage in life. This work had been requested by the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Ad Hoc Vision Implementation Committee in order to provide guidelines to Monthly Meetings for what to teach to different age groups. Participants have included.....

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Introductory remarks Common to all ages

Some aspects of our work as religious educators are shared across the board. While specifics shift as children mature and adults move through life stages, the following points are important to keep in mind regardless of age:

Reaching out to varying sub-groups within our Meetings:

Parents -- What does Quaker Meeting have to offer them and their children? Some possible initiatives:

- Quaker parenting workshops and family support groups, offered to meet needs of varying age groups
- Periodic multi-generational First Day School (FDS) experiences, such as an occasional "Meeting for Learning" instead of FDS. One idea is an end-of-year celebration of work, projects completed.
- Specific plans to involve interested parents and grandparents as first day school assistants. More parental involvement in the RE committee's work will help build a meeting's cohesion.
- Reaching out to non-Quaker parents, especially in a household where one parent is Quaker, the other is not
- A parent orientation, discussing what is special about each age group and how curriculum changes with age groups to meet the needs of each group
- Tools to encourage discussing RE topics at home

Adult Young Friends

Religious Educators in your Meeting:

Everyone in the Meeting is responsible for implementing child safety guidelines---Baltimore Yearly Meeting guidelines are available on-line at <http://www.bymrsf.org/publications/mop/youthsafety.html>.

Meetings should recognize the need for Increasing self direction of first day experience as age groups mature. Tightly structured teacher-led curriculum often becomes less used at the middle school (junior young friends) level and can completely disappear for a mature teens group (young friends). However, adult mentors should always be present through the high school years.

CURRICULUM THROUGH THE YEARS....CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR THE NURSERY, an informal teachable moments curriculum

As part of our proverbial children's village, the nurseries in our Meetings should strive to provide an extension of the family's love and safety. By expanding the world that kids trust-- even when parents temporarily leave and other children inevitably take "their" toys—we lay another building block for seeing the good/God in others.

These are years for developing awareness of self and others. The nursery provides a laboratory for children growing from infancy to toddler to express their own person-hood, expand their awareness of their impact on their world while fostering an awareness of others who have similar needs and feelings.

The toddler years are also marked by increasing ability to share.

The loving environment and staff's vigilance for those teachable moments are the Nursery's curriculum. While we need to provide books to be read and a portfolio of activities waiting to be played, our children set the tempo and day's activities.

Setting a safe and loving environment requires thought and resources. Since these are the basis of ours "curriculum," special attention should go into picking and maintaining toys, books, and other resources for this age group. A generous ratio of adults to children is important.

In order for the nursery personnel to focus on the positives and not constantly need to restrict and refuse access, important precautions need to be in place. Toys should be appropriate size so not be a choking hazard, carpets and floors should be clean and not cold, and breakable items should be out of sight.

Consistency of "teachers" and staff is important so that the children see a familiar, safe face as much as possible. Given that total consistency may not be possible, a consistent routine across teachers and staff helps, e.g., hanging up jacket, saying "hi" to a favorite toy.

These are years for fostering joyful spirits. The children bring a sense of joy as they explore; teachers can not only take delight in this, but should take every chance to foster this joy and value it as a gift from the spirit. The Nursery years are a wonderful time to be with children as we help lay foundations for the rest of their time in First Day School.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR FOUR-TO-FIVE-YEAR-OLDS

Spiritual concepts developing at this level

Their world is filled with loving people: at home, and at their Meetinghouse.

Quakers work together to build more love and peace. Children do that in their own classroom.

Specific content

Stories of Christmas; and celebration of Easter as time of new growth and life (not biblical Easter Story at this age)

Selected Bible stories designed to teach how God (the Light) can help people –Noah’s Ark, Jonah and the Whale, the Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes. Emphasize how people “messed up” to get themselves in trouble, then God saw their trouble and helped them out. Avoid any suggestion of God visiting punishment on people at this age level.

Dr. Seuss, William Steig, and many other good books for children. Use of lesson plans and books available in Sparklers and Sparklers Too. These will be helpful in teaching Quaker values before the children are old enough to think of abstract values.

More time spent on a simple craft than on listening to books. Some time for friendly socializing among children during craft time.

Teaching techniques

Name tags, noting with respect peoples’ gifts and differences as we teach. Developmental differences within group should definitely shape how you teach any particular group. Allowing some to silently draw while others are actively involved in discussion may be not just okay, but advisable in meeting such differences.

It is OK to repeat stories, books, and crafts -- children change rapidly and will see new possibilities in them. Lessons will become new and fresh for children through expanded or different craft follow-up activities.

Many opportunities for service can be found, such as caring for the meeting house, caring for people in meeting, service of many kinds

What Quaker Meeting can offer

Calm and quiet, and practice in how to get there

The vocabulary of Friends, such as Inner Light, Queries, modeled informally by teachers, not directly taught. Familiarity with terms might well be taught through songs repeated frequently, such as chorus of "George Fox song"

A safe consistent friendship group

Practice in non-violent communication, especially regarding needs and feelings

A setting in which children will be listened to with respect and understanding

Mixing of age groups in occasional activities

Openness in body perception issues such as shape and size, gender identification, variations in skin color, hair texture, etc.

Acceptance of differences in ability and lessons designed to meet a variety of abilities

Avoidance of teaching limited gender roles, such as differences in boy or girl toys, etc.

Flexibility-- can switch gears if a gladness or sorrow is more important than lesson plan

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR YOUNGER ELEMENTARY (ABOUT 6 TO 8)

Spiritual understandings developing at this level

There is that of God in everyone.

While we can't see God like we see people, we can "see and feel" God's actions in our world, in people around us, and in our own lives.

God works through each of us, and through our Meeting

We can get ideas about doing God's work through stories, whether from the Bible or elsewhere, through knowing what Quakers (past and present) have done in the world, and by being close to God in worship.

Specific content and teaching techniques

Stories about Quakers and Quakerism: Selected Faith and Play stories about Quakerism and notable Quakers, selected stories from Lighting Candles in the Dark, adaptations of stories in older Quaker anthologies, sections of videos, interviews, etc. A good focus might be carrying out Quaker testimonies to that of God in everyone: the SPICES (simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality, stewardship)

Bible stories: Emphasis on feeling leadings from God; on finding ways to follow God more closely; on Jesus as a teacher about how to live close to God. Resources could include: Children's Bibles, Godly Play, short videos, dramatic enactment, murals, etc. Suggested stories are: Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 14-16, John 1 (The light that comes forth in all living things, cannot be quenched) Genesis 1 (God speaking and sending light to the earth, "Let there be light" quote), Noah's Ark, Parables of Jesus and others.

Note on ways to present stories: Some teachers may find more success with telling stories in a lively way rather than reading them. Reading from books will be most interesting if they have pictures and if the language level is matched to the children's comprehension. Examples for less mature children include: The Big Question and other Berenstain Bear books, Obadiah books, The Sneetches and Other Stories, Patricia Polacco books, etc. Older children will be able to concentrate on stories (or excerpts) from anthologies such as "Lighting Candles in the Dark". It is often good, if the range of abilities to process stories is wide, to use simpler material but encourage more mature members of the class to "go deeper" in discussions, perhaps bringing in their own experience.

Songs with Quaker themes: Look for songs with clear melodies and strong choruses, as children will have different abilities to read lyrics. Suggestions are: The Magic Penny, The George Fox Song, My Thoughts are as Free, Dona, All God's Critters, etc.

Games that reflect Friends belief and testimonies: win-win games and cooperative games. Games some classes have enjoyed include:

1. Out of Breath: Wads of paper and straws. Blow the paper across the room across a finish line. (perseverance)
2. Ball games with wads of paper, pompons, balloons, Ping-Pong balls, etc. (working as a team, gentle competition, accepting being first, last, etc.)
3. Rainstorm: In a circle, one person makes a sound of rain by tapping one's hands against one's knees. The sound moves around the circle until everyone is making the same sound. The rainmaker can change the sound. Another person can make lightning strike. When lightning strikes, everyone falls down. (sense of the meeting)
4. How Many Ways to Get There: Each person crosses the room in a different way. (Value of diversity)
5. Belly Laugh: Lay in a pile, heads on each others' bellies. One person begins with a laugh, the next person with two laughs, the next with three. If people begins to laugh uncontrollably, start over. (Empathy)

Learning about Meeting for Worship—Envision the 'light' with candle time and several minutes of silence at beginning of First Day programs, followed by worship sharing. Some "Faith and Play" lessons help teach about Meeting. Family Meeting for Worship with a theme: adults help model the Meeting for Worship experience and worship sharing on topics that kids are interested in, such as Meeting for Worship with attention to Spring, jokes, poetry, keeping journals, friendship, etc.

Beginning group planning of service projects using simple Quaker Business Process: Planning together simple service projects, recording decisions clearly. Select service projects carefully and plan ahead for safety. Examples of service projects for this age:

1. Gardening at the Meetinghouse
2. Making food for homeless shelters

3. Making crafts, cards, bookmarks, etc. for others with a perceived need (while remembering that the children are also very needy.)
4. Neighborhood trash pickup (Use gloves and wash hands.)
5. Inter-age service activities and 'buddy' programs at Meeting within First Day program or with elders.

Crafts. Craft materials good for this age: clean reusable objects, carpenter's tape, double stick tape, wiki sticks, play dough, stamps, ribbons, string, yarn, tissue paper, chenille stems, poster paint, colorful markers

What Quaker Meeting Can Offer

a chance to use new skills to do service projects for others

an affinity group; space to have times to talk among themselves and play while learning

multi-age grouping for social learning

a chance to find an individual voice and speak to a group in a non-hierarchical setting

a place to begin learning Quaker testimonies, Quaker process, Friends songs and history

a chance to feel closer to God during Meeting for Worship as they consider a certain story, problem, thing of beauty, etc.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR OLDER ELEMENTARY: ABOUT NINE TO ELEVEN

Spiritual understandings and practices developing at this level

In class and other discussion sessions, respecting those who have different experiences, ideas, perspectives, and leadings

Listening for the genuine spirit behind the words

Expressing opinions without righteousness, comfortable with knowing those times when they themselves are speaking from the Spirit. Monoprix

In silent worship, centering-listening -waiting on the spirit—being attentive to the spirit speaking within self and through the words of those giving spoken messages...sense of being part of an important Quaker process

Our understanding of God comes from continuing revelation

Specific content

Our Quaker values and the testimonies we find meaningful can guide and motivate our daily behavior

Quaker Faith and Practice result from prayerful consideration of continuing revelation, as discovered in meeting for worship, in class and through individual words with an worship and study

Testimonies are applied by real people today, including: embracing various family structures, developing meeting projects for community services, serving through wider Quaker world work, especially if their own meeting members can talk about what they do or have recently done to carry out this work.

We find help in developing and carrying out our testimonies from a variety of sources. These include learning about Quakers today and in history who wait on the spirit and then carry out individual and group leadings. They display courage and drive, caring and follow through. Teach

Bible Stories as a source for thought: A vehicle to discuss Quaker values as part of continuing revelation by introducing some historical context. Somewhat more difficult or controversial stories can be introduced at this level, with children encouraged to find meaning in even hard to understand stories.

Teaching techniques

Timeline: Use with Bible Stories and Quaker history to reinforce continuing revelation as basic understanding

Storytelling: Use of appropriate trade books to help students discern right behavior regarding interactions with others; develop empathy. Other input could be bible passages, true stories collected from meeting members, excerpts from DVD's, music, art, etc.

Art: including group art, such as a mural, models, puppet theatres. Children at this age can enjoy medium length group projects that don't necessarily finish in one lesson. They are beginning to have pride in group efforts that belong to the class, not just themselves.

Worship: Continuing use of symbols to help in centering for short periods of class worship. If a candle is used, teacher can mention that in Jewish tradition, the hottest, bluest part of the flame (Light) is called the "Shekhinah Glory of God" and it means "Dwelling" or more

simply, “Where God lives”. Compare this to the Inner Light and show the children the long, ancient history that Quakers draw upon.

Discussion questions: Provide more time for discussion. Discussion techniques to produce variety might include pair discussions and small groups presenting to the large group. Topics can be chosen from current life as well as being suggested by stories. Teacher questions might include:

What would you do if? Prompts, with students suggesting solutions

What’s been your own experience? Does this make sense to you?

What do you think will happen next?

Intergenerational activities: This age doesn’t need as much time for crafts. Many children like to pick their own follow up activity from a range teacher offers. They can enjoy helping younger children with crafts.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR JUNIOR YOUNG FRIENDS: ABOUT 12 TO 14

Spiritual practices and understandings developing at this level

Centering can be helpful in dealing with the "fidgets", daydreaming

Thinking deeply about a query- worship-sharing...Some classes can embrace surprisingly long periods of silent worship, as long as hands can be kept busy if needed

Building community-accepting diversity; recognizing and resolving conflict

Developing sense of spiritual self; the Quaker way of seeking your own spirituality rather than accepting a set creed

Refining a personal Spiritual Practice –a path; discernment, continuing revelation; begin to form challenging queries

Specific content

Definition of Quakerism. It can be helpful to develop an "elevator" speech, a 2-minute summary of what is my Quaker faith

Learn "Quaker Speak"- traditional and contemporary language, a deeper understanding of SPICES (the testimonies of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship)

Introduction to Faith and Practice, emphasizing the what and why, not detailed study

Quaker process and practice: in our home meeting, how we fit into the wider Quaker groupings

Spiritual journeys: old and new, historical and with home meeting members; "convergent Friends"

Service: who is calling us and how are we called to serve and minister

Social justice: the importance of speaking truth to power

Compare and contrast with other faith communities; study world religions

Work on mature conflict resolution skills. Talking about this is probably more valuable than role play at this age

Teaching Techniques

Make a "safe" space, recognizing the dilemmas of feedback to and involvement with parents

Encourage experiential learning, linking concrete situations and current events to deeper faith and practice questions

Practice skills. knowing what can be taught in group, e.g., about leadership, "owning"

Plan events, especially student designed, that engage learners; consider a project to open and close the FDS 'year'.

Sequence topics, such as service, other faith traditions, our beliefs. It is good to vary time periods and cycles.

Encourage family learning about other faiths by visiting other religious services. It is also possible to have children draw up interview questions and interview by video, Skype, tape recording, etc. Audio visuals can be very effective here and something interested students can help create.

What Quaker Meeting can offer children this age

An open, accepting and respectful space to sort out spiritual questions
The gift of silent worship to over-busy children
A support group for individual struggles to find identity in a complex world

Special challenges for Middle School teachers

Cliques, can be shifting alliances and could be based, for example, on kids in same school, camp, neighborhood, time in this meeting, at same development level, physical maturity...

Identity formation, boundary pushing, being "cool," "recognition of important transitions (rituals)

This age can be uncomfortable being taught by their own parents.

Perceived lack of clarity and vagueness of Friends beliefs can bother parents and students. Questions may arise about challenges from more explicit creeds and from doctrines of other faith communities. Serious examination of Quaker faith and practice may suffer from irregular attendance.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR YOUNG FRIENDS, HIGH SCHOOL AGE

Spiritual development at this level

Yearning for authenticity

Sense of community, acceptance

Awareness of hypocrisy (self and others)

Being nurtured and listened to

Space and safety for doubt and questioning

Formal processes of faith formation—resistance and questioning

Mentors and Friendly Adult Presences

Specific content

Methods for Conflict Resolution.

How to create safe space within groups

Core practices: worship sharing, sense of the Meeting in decision making

Actions and beliefs come out of each person's values, including our shared Quaker values.

Understanding of the diversity of theology and religious thought within Quakerism

How my meeting functions: committees, practices, membership, connections to the wider Quaker world

Teaching techniques

Content/learning grows out of conversations/questions of teens

Forge connections between teens and (mentoring) adults in Meeting.

Model deep listening.

Model and share personal experiences of how adults live their values through action. Invite guest speakers from in and outside Meeting.

Experiences of Fun – parties, sleepovers, camping, etc.

Give teens responsibility to structure, organize their gatherings.

Hold Meetings for Business for/by teens.

Service learning (preparation, action, reflection)

Service on Meeting Committees

Get teens connected to teens in other local meetings; visit other meetings

Resources

Our own experiences as teens

Fun and lightheartedness and joy

Our experiences of attending or teaching First Day School

Google, You Tube, and Internet resources

Existing curricula – Faith and Play, for example

Our teens – asking and listening

NOTE: The section on Religious Education for Young Adult Friends was not completed. There is work to be done! We hope that this section will be completed in the near future.

RELIGIOUS ED FOR ADULTS, INCLUDING YOUNG ADULT FRIENDS AND SENIORS

Spiritual practices and understandings

Adults in Meetings come with a lot of religious training, with some religious training, or with none. Some have been involved in Quakerism a long time and need new types of learning opportunities. Therefore, Adult Education needs to be both for new-comers and old-timers.

Experiential learning is essential.

Systematic learning is desirable, especially true for those without prior religious education.

Although who sponsors adult education at the monthly meeting level is not a concern, a variety of experiences need to be available over time. Some examples include adult RE committees, Young Adult Friends retreats, the Spiritual Formation Program, Friendly Eights, conversations, meeting retreats, and forums. An ideal time period for learning is at least 1 ½ hours.

People should also be pointed to resources outside the Meeting for religious education.

Specific content: What does it mean to be a Quaker?

A meeting should assess regularly (perhaps annually) whether it should offer formal review of Quaker fundamentals to all interested adults. These fundamentals include the following:

Quaker worship: What is the experience? How is it personal and corporate? What are the different ways people experience the Spirit in worship?

Vocal ministry: How do you listen to the Spirit for a message that you should pass along? When do you rise to give a message? What is the significance of silence?

Quaker Testimonies: What are they? What do we do with them? How do we live them? How do Queries help?

Quaker history and practice today:

How well do we understand the Christian tradition from which we come and Hicksite interpretations?

Quakerism came out of (was in reaction to) Anglicanism. How familiar are we with the roots of our faith community? Do we know about the roles of George Fox, John Woolman, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Fry, among others?

Do we appreciate the inclusiveness of Quakerism (programmed and unprogrammed) and the variety of Quaker faith and practice in the world today, including in Africa and Latin America?

Do we recognize the historical and present importance of elements of the wider Quaker world? Are we familiar with the work of organizations such as Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM), Friends General Conference (FGC), Friends United Meeting (FUM), Friends World Committee on Consultation (FWCC) and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)?

Are we familiar with Quaker involvement in social issues such as women's rights, abolition of slavery, the anti-war movement, racial justice reform, prison work, hospitals and mental illness? Does our Meeting know about and support the peace and justice work its current members are doing?

Shared ministry:

Do we understand the implications of the shared ministry of all Friends? Do we appreciate its impact on the need to accept committee responsibilities, to be there for important life events such as weddings, memorials, and pastoral visits to the sick? Do we understand the legal implications of shared ministry, such as our state's policies on Quaker weddings?

Quaker decision-making:

- Clearness and Support Committees
- Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business
- Threshing Sessions
- Worship sharing or listening circles to hear different points of view

Special attention might be given to how Quakers make a decision when there is difference in the Meeting. Concepts that are important include: the difference between "Standing in the Way" and "Standing Aside". The Meeting can go forward when one individual has a different point of view if the Clerk discerns that the Meeting has made a decision.

We need to appreciate committee life in the meeting as both work and worship

Clerking:


Meetings should have training sessions on clerking every couple of years so that people who are new clerks of committees can think about how their role is different and members of committees can learn about how they can support the clerking.

Quaker literacy includes:

- Spiritual skills, how to worship, how to pray
- Conflict resolution
- Forgiveness
- Eldering (as calling out gifts)
- Spiritual guidance (sometimes 'correction')
- Continuing revelation
- Holding the community and helping it make decisions
- Understanding that current affairs affect our testimonies.
- Knowing of and understanding different Quaker organizations: Monthly Meetings versus Yearly Meetings, FUM, FGC, FWCC, AFSC, Pendle Hill, FCNL, Evangelical Friends Alliance
- Quaker language: Holding one another in the Light, Way opens, That of God in everyone, Sense of the meeting

General religious literacy includes:

- Studying of world religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity. This includes understanding the diversity with all these religions and the main tenets of each
- Understanding that the United States is the most religiously diverse nation in the world
- Knowing what percentage of the world's population ascribes to each major religion and how many of each are in the United States;
- Knowing other peace churches: especially the Church of the Brethren and Mennonites, who have an extensive social witness program, and organized giving program that provides insurance and investments to Friends.

Knowing how to distinguish between Quakers and Amish: Quakers are very much 'in the world'; Amish separate from the world and are given special legal permissions. 

Biblical literacy Includes:

- Study and discussion of the Bible in Quaker Meetings and understanding its functions in society at large
- Being aware of important personages (Moses, Samuel, David, Jesus, Paul, the prophets) and definitive stories (Good Samaritan, exodus, crucifixion/resurrection, birth of Jesus).
- Understanding the Bible's literary and historic importance, including within Quakerism
- Knowing the similarities and differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament
- Understanding the Christian context of Quakerism
- Recognizing that the Bible is used in spoken ministry (Jesus serves as an example.)

Resource list for adult religious education

GENERAL:

Beal, Timothy. *Biblical Literacy: The Essential Bible Stories Everyone Needs to Know*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2010.

Harvard Divinity School. "Religious Literacy Project." <http://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/definition-religious-literacy>.

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Prothero, Stephen. *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know--And Doesn't*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008.

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Kelly, Thomas. *A Testament of Devotion*. New York: Harper & Row,

Nelsen, Russell. "The Religious Society of Friends," <http://www.quaker.org>.

Samuel, Bill. "Quakerinfo.com," <http://www.quakerinfo.com>.

Steele, Douglas V., ed. *Quaker Spirituality: Selected Writings*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1984.