

Friends Meeting of Washington
Report of the Religious Education Committee for Sixth Month 2017 - Sixth Month 2018

Committee members: Shannon Hughes (Clerk), Nicole Else-Quest, Robert Vaughn, Susanna Remold, Michael Beer (Youth Program Coordinator and *ex officio* committee member)

The Religious Education Committee rejoices in the work of supporting the spiritual lives of the children in our Meeting. We continue to strive to provide a First Day School experience that serves the needs of a diverse and varying group of children and families. Thanks to the ongoing commitment of our Meeting, we have continued to add volunteers, have sponsored training for some, and are in the process of discerning how an additional paid organizer position might benefit our programming.

First Day Programming

The Meeting offers child care to our youngest attenders (from birth through age 4) in the nursery in the Decatur Place Room during the weekly 10:30 Meeting for Worship and for at least some portion of the monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business (usually until 1 or 1:15 PM). The nursery is staffed by a rotating team of skilled caregivers managed by Makai Kellogg. On average, 3.5 children were in the care of the nursery on any given First Day this year.

Volunteers coordinated by Michael Beer led lessons and activities for the school-aged children. Elementary-aged children sometimes share an activity and sometimes have separate lessons for the younger (4-7 years old) and older (through 11 year old) attenders. The tweens (middle school) and teens (high school) are similarly sometimes grouped and sometimes separate, depending on attendance and volunteers. The younger elementary group is typically our largest class, with 13 children on an average First Day. The upper elementary group averages 4 children and the teens and tweens combined average 5. Because few children come every week of the year, these numbers represent a much larger group of individual children involved in our First Day programming. Our records indicate that over 100 individual children have participated in First Day School at some point in the past year.

Multigenerational Meeting for Learning

Every 1st Sunday of the month, all kids joined a multi-generational meeting for learning. Events included: Coins for Quoins to raise funds for the renovation of the meeting, making cards to hold people in the light, and singing a song for the Meeting.

Employees

The nursery is staffed by skilled caregivers, ably managed by Makai Kellogg. We greatly appreciate her management of the nursery staff and space. Children and parents always receive a warm welcome in the nursery and having this comfortable environment allows parents to more easily participate in silent worship with the rest of our community. FMW's financial support of the nursery is indispensable for including families in the life of the Meeting.

The older children's programming is coordinated by Michael Beer, who has a wonderful way of being with the children in the moment and especially welcoming newcomers and working with children who may have some trouble integrating with the larger group. His sense of playfulness enriches the children's experience of coming to Meeting.

The RE Committee has been working to discern how our budgeted funds might be used to help us address some of the needs of parents and children through the First Day Program. In light of parent responses to our survey last fall and ongoing discussions within the committee, we are hoping to hire someone within the next few months who can assist us with planning curriculum in advance and organizing and guiding volunteers.

Volunteers

We rely on the generosity of volunteers to lead our First Day School sessions. These volunteers are almost always parents of students in the classes, though we would welcome volunteers from the wider community. We were able to sponsor two of our volunteers, Robert Vaughn and Shannon Hughes, to attend a weekend workshop at Sandy Spring Meeting early this year for training in the Godly Play / Faith & Play technique. This is a method of story telling and inviting the children into worship sharing that has been used at FMW some in the past and is used extensively at Sandy Spring Meeting, among others. Shannon and Robert have since shared with the children several stories from Quaker history and the Bible.

Child Safety Policy

In accordance with our Child Safety Policy, all classrooms have at least two background-checked adults with at least two children at any time. We appreciate Debby Churchman for managing the background check process for our volunteers.

Survey of Parents

In the fall of 2017, the Religious Education Committee conducted an online survey of our families to better understand parent's experiences and expectations of our First Day School programming. A write up of those results was distributed by email and handout in early 2018 and is attached. The main themes gleaned from the survey were a desire to foster a sense of Quaker identity in our children and help them enjoy coming to Meeting and feeling connected to our community. In response, we have presented several lessons on Quaker history and testimonies and have encouraged volunteers to end the class period with a cooperative game. Parents also asked for more lead time, guidance, and consistency when being asked to volunteer for First Day School. In response, we have begun posting two months' worth of sign ups and have created fliers with some guidance on how to lead an elementary-aged class, along with a basic schedule for the First Day School hour for that age group.

Conclusion

The Religious Education Committee is looking forward to another year filled with opportunities to nurture the spiritual growth of our children and families. We remain thankful for the generous financial support of our nursery, First Day Program, and staffing. We are especially grateful to our many volunteers who spend their First Day worship with the children on a regular basis.

Lower and Upper Elementary activities for 2017-2018 at FMW (partial list)

John Woolman story from Faith & Play

Great Family story (origins of Abrahamic monotheism) adapted from Godly Play

Mother's Day cards

Exploring queries

Quaker Bingo

Climate change and making a parachute with a message

Elizabeth Fry Story from Faith & Play

Easter Egg Hunt

Book readings and activities: When Sophie Gets Angry - Really, Really Angry, The Quilt Maker's Tale, My Heart Will Not Sit Down, You Are Stardust, Stone Soup

Christmas story and making votive candles

Chanukah activity

Solstice - how it is celebrated around the world

Coins for Quoins project, sorting coins from all over the world for the capital campaign

Quaker Summer Camps presentation

Thanksgiving Tree activity, Community Testimony

UNICEF-raising funds for needy kids

Benjamin Lay story in the manner of Faith & Play - world premiere.

10 chairs of inequality, Equality and simplicity Testimony

Birthday cards

Quaker heritage activities (simplicity testimony)

Native Peoples's Day

Peace Testimony and origami cranes

Testimonies

School supplies for the needy

Singing our favorite Quaker songs

Teens activities for 2017-2018 at FMW (partial list)

Discussion about guns and militarism

Baking cookies for homeless (monthly)

Hospitality committee monthly

How nonviolent protest works

Civics

Business Meeting