

Religious Education

Version: 10/7/2017

Religious Education is important for everyone who participates in a Friends meeting. Each individual is on a spiritual journey which continues throughout life, and everyone needs the opportunity to continue the search with others. Meetings can support individuals by providing a First Day School program for children from infancy through high school as well as an adult religious education program. Most meetings have a committee or committees to plan and coordinates these programs. See 'Religious education committee', pp. xx–xx.

Children's religious education programs will vary depending on the size of the meeting and the number of children. In a large meeting with lots of children, the children may be grouped into appropriate age groups and classes designed for their respective developmental stages. In smaller meetings or meetings with few children, it may be necessary to have a multiage group. In this latter situation the program needs to be designed to maintain the interest of all the children. That may mean having older children assist their teacher(s) by acting as mentors for the younger ones.

The children's religious education program may begin with the very youngest children learning how to share, manipulate materials, and listen to stories. As the children get older they need a more focused program that exposes them to general values; Quaker faith, testimonies, and practices; the Bible; and other religions. The program should be set up in a manner to ensure they have a grounding in Quaker faith and practice before they finish high school, a grounding that includes being a part of the meeting for worship on a regular basis. Curricular ideas can be obtained from appropriate yearly meeting committees and staff, Friends General Conference, The Religious Educators Collaborative, or someone involved with children's religious education in another monthly meeting.

The selection of teachers for First Day School is a weighty matter for any Friends meeting. While most adult Friends will feel they are not experts in teaching, it is important for the children to experience a variety of members as teachers and for adults and children in the meeting to get to know each other. Meetings are encouraged to be sure the teachers are not always parents of the children.

It is important to create an environment that is welcoming to the children. Whoever is responsible for leading a class is encouraged to be sure the room is inviting, and that it has been prepared before the participants arrive. Children will be happy to see materials ready and to be in a space that makes them feel important and welcomed. The teachers need to pay attention to how the children react during class in order to determine whether it is necessary to take a different approach or even change topics.

There are a variety of ways to approach adult religious education programs. They may occur before or after meeting for worship or at another special prearranged time. Their purpose is to

help members and attenders become more spiritually grounded, to provide the opportunity to share spiritual journeys, and to reflect together on how our faith guides our daily lives. The program will therefore focus on Quaker faith, testimonies and practices; the Bible; writings by Quakers; or other matters that arise out of spiritual concerns. A session may be a discussion of a pamphlet or book, a time devoted to worship-sharing around a query, a presentation by one individual who has had a unique experience or has studied a particular topic, or the sharing of spiritual practices. Friends have found that such programs help them deepen their experience of the Divine.

Adult education programs should be of interest to newcomers. In order to facilitate new attenders learning more about Quakers, a meeting may also want to host a special newcomers' class periodically.

In addition to these educational opportunities for children and adults, a meeting may want to have special times to gather. These may involve a day of shared activities around a specific topic or spiritual practice. They may be retreats that last a weekend at a place away from the meeting house. For either of these, a meeting may choose to invite someone from outside the meeting to be a facilitator; alternatively, a meeting committee may take on that responsibility. Retreats can be for adults only, designed for a specific age group of children in the meeting, or intergenerational. Other all-meeting activities could be picnics to celebrate the beginning of First Day School in the fall or to mark its end in the late spring. A meeting could participate in a peace vigil or other sort of demonstration based on Quaker testimonies. In every situation it is important first to have a discussion about how the event relates to our Quaker principles.