



All Together Now: Welcoming Families and Youth

December 9, 2021 with Old Chatham Meeting, NYYM

Melinda Wenner Bradley

In this time together:

- ❖ Invitation, Welcome, and Inclusion
- ❖ Signs, Schedules, and Spaces
- ❖ Rethinking Practices and Structures



Crossing the Threshold:

- Welcome the adults on their spiritual journey.
- Provide spiritual nurture and religious education for the children in the family, who may come at different ages and developmental stages.
- Support their search to find a spiritual home for their family.

What are you most passionate about?
What do you like to do?
What's the best thing that happened to you today?
What are you most excited about right now?
What are you working on?
If money were no object, what would you do with your life?
What do you do for fun?
What's something you're really into right now?
What's the most interesting thing that's happened to you lately?
How do you feel your life has worked out so far?
What was the best part of your week/weekend?
What did you want to be when you grew up?
What are you looking forward to right now?
What's the last picture you took on your phone?
What is your favorite thing to spend money on?
What's the nicest thing anyone's ever said about you?
What habit or improvement are you working on?
What cheers you up?
What's your favorite word?
What cause are you passionate about?
What's on your mind lately?
What personal habit are you proudest of?
How do you spend your days?
What problem do you wish you could solve?
What's the most interesting thing you've learned recently?
What's your favorite emoji?
Whom in the world would you most like to share a meal with?

Reimagine the membership dynamic: *“The Great Reversal”*

Believe

Belong

Behave



Behave

Belong

Believe

*“The Great Reversal is returning back to a beloved and beloved community,
a way of life practiced in the world, a profound trust in God, mercy and justice.”*

Diana Butler Bass, Christianity After Religion

Learnings from the Vital Meetings Project of NEYM-NYYM:

- ❖ Experimenting with time and schedules
- ❖ Looking at spaces with fresh eyes
- ❖ Playing together & sharing meals (Friendly 8s, retreat, game night)
- ❖ All-ages worship & finding ways to talk and teach about the experience of unprogrammed worship across generations
- ❖ Developing opportunities to talk about spiritual gifts
- ❖ Inviting relative newcomers into participation & leadership positions
- ❖ Meetings find informal ways for exchanges between children and adults about how they put their faith into action in the world individually and collectively

Signs, Spaces,
Schedules:

Spoken and
Unspoken
Messages



What is a Friends Meeting?

About Us

Calendar

Directions

Donate

Witness

Our First Day School

Our Library

Links

- Websites include what to expect in worship, and in children and young people's meetings.
- Young people are involved in website development. Include artwork there and newsletters.
- There are links to Quarter and Yearly Meeting opportunities. *Local meetings are the bridge!*



Information is Welcome

La reunión Cuáquera y yo Quaker Meeting and Me

Una guía para los niños a la reunión para la adoración
A guide for children to Quaker meeting for worship



West Chester Friends Meeting — Youth Religious Education Sundays 10:25–11:30am

The Youth Religious Education committee of the meeting offers the following information in the spirit of love and community as we seek to care for one another.



Child care is available for infants–preschool age children. *Childcare is provided by experienced, paid baby sitters during worship.* While the childcare room best serves children from ages one until they are ready for First Day School, parents with infants are welcome to stay with their child in the childcare room and babies may also remain with parents in worship.

Children's Meeting: Our religious education program for children ages 4 – 5th grade gathers at 10:25 on the porch of the meetinghouse. *The Children's Meeting is a spiritual community for the children within the larger spiritual community of our meeting, and is a welcoming place for all.* The program includes Quaker religious education curricula, Faith & Play stories about Quaker faith and practice, Godly Play (Bible stories), children's books, art and service projects. Our spaces for child care and the children's meeting are next to each other, to meet the requirements of the meeting child safety plan. At 11:25, the children return to the meetinghouse to join their families in worship.



Young People's Group (YPG): Youth in 5th grade – 12th grade are welcome to join in the activities of the YPG. 5th graders are invited to attend either the children's program and YPG as they are led, depending on the week. *YPG offers a community for older youth to explore issues related to being a Friend, how we live Quaker testimonies, and to do service work in fellowship with their peers.* YPG walks to the downtown one Sunday each month to discuss issues important to them in an environment that is "outside" the meeting house. YPG gathers on the meetinghouse porch at 10:25 returns to the meetinghouse to join the final part of worship. On days when there is no YPG program, youth are welcome to attend the children's program, but are encouraged to stay in meeting for worship with the adult community.

Community Worship is when we gather with all-ages in waiting worship together. While children are always welcome in meeting for worship, Community Worship is intentionally multigenerational. It often begins with songs or a story, and young people may choose to sit on the floor and work with quiet materials to support listening inwardly during worship.



Parents are responsible for their children at all other times while at meeting: during coffee hour, shared lunch, and other programs. Child care will be provided during Meeting for Business and adult religious education programs, and for committee meeting by request to the Youth RE clerk.

Schedules & Spaces:

- ❖ Groups and committees are held at family-friendly times. Ask when this is!
- ❖ Child care is available for committee meetings, worship, meeting for business, adult RE events.
- ❖ Don't assume that people who are parents can participate, *or that they cannot!* How can the opportunity be made possible for them? (time, child care)
- ❖ Spaces for children and youth programs should model welcome and accessibility.
- ❖ Children and young peoples' views can inform how a space is decorated and furnished — this might be especially important for teens.
- ❖ What's on the walls and the bookshelves? Images and illustrations create an opportunity for wider inclusion with attention to bring anti-racist.
- ❖ Is there a booster seat or highchair? a small table and chairs in a fellowship space?
- ❖ Is there a place to change a diaper that's safe and sanitary?
- ❖ Does the worship space have a basket of books, coloring, and other quiet things to support children be settled — and included — in worship?



Liminal Space: What is the opportunity?

Loss of momentum . . . will require



Time
Patience
Love

Link to YouTube: [Where are the kids?](#) (Rev. Brian Wallace)

- ❖ Rest and reconnection are important in returning/rebuilding community and healing
- ❖ Planning that centers our “why” may reveal and reshape “how”
- ❖ Asking parents for their comfort levels with in-person/online/hybrid centers family needs
- ❖ Creating synchronous and asynchronous programs supports flexibility and inclusion
- ❖ Worshipping with all ages together nurtures generational connection and religious identity



LOOK WHERE YOU WANT TO GO . . .

- ❖ age-based groups → multigenerational meeting for learning
- ❖ instruction/lesson → experiential learning, practicing
- ❖ one hour/Sunday → new times of week, online, at home
- ❖ minutes in worship → all-ages, community worship

Chicken-Egg Nature of Families & Children in the Meeting:

How can we be family-friendly when there is no family community to join in the meeting? No peer group for kids?

How does a meeting fully welcome children if there is no program for them?

What we all have is worship.

How can we welcome families in worship?



The Invitation

- ❖ To Community
- ❖ To Practicing Faith Together
- ❖ To Life-long Spiritual Growth



**All-ages worship is:
worship in which people of
every age are understood to
be equally important.**

**Worship connects us to one
another and our identity
and experience as Friends.**

An example of Community Worship Preparation:

Community Sunday!

November 10



West Chester Meeting on "Quaker Block"
Community Worship 10:30-11:30am
followed by fellowship with our neighbors

You're invited! West Chester Meeting Friends of *all ages* will gather for songs with T. Jeff Domenick, a story, and waiting worship together during this special semi-programmed worship. We're inviting our neighbors from West Chester Friends School, the Hickman, and Goshen Friends School to join! Questions? wcfmeeting@gmail.com

Welcome to Community Worship!

This morning, all ages gather together for a semi-programmed, multigenerational meeting for worship. We will begin with songs and a story, and then settle into waiting worship for the rest of the hour. Anyone is welcome to sit on the quilts on the floor, and there are quiet things there to keep hands busy while we listen in the silence. Our child care helper, Sam Smith, is also providing care in the Classroom Building for younger children or those who stay in worship for part of the time. A West Chester Meeting member will end worship with a handshake, and then we will do introductions and hear meeting announcements. You are invited to join us for fellowship in the social room afterward!

Recipe for: multigenerational worship

ingredients

- Friends of all ages!
- Space to sit comfortably, wiggle, lie down, stretch, etc.
- Quiet materials: crayons, paper, trays to work on, coloring mandalas, basket of Friendly books, finger labyrinths
- Patience, Love, Open Hearts
- God will provide the rest!

Directions

- Gather with intention, greeting each Friend.
- *Optional, but recommended:* begin with song, prayer, story, or build an image of community together with art materials, blocks, or natural objects.
- Make space for each person to center in their way.
- Practice listening with your whole self.
- When something gets noisy, or bumps you from the silence, notice it, and release it. Center again.
- Keep listening with your whole self.
- At the rise of meeting, share fellowship with all!

From the kitchens of  Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

- ❖ Change in worship is a primary means by which congregations adapt. Congregations that adapt in this way tend to grow, but congregations that remain the same do not.
- ❖ Worship is central to collective identity and spiritual vitality necessary for a congregation to grow. Many congregations find other, more tangential activities and identities to crowd out the core function of a congregation.
- ❖ When children do not have experiences worshipping with the body, they are less likely to stay connected.



All Together Now:

Creating all-ages community is vital to the future of our Religious Society.

Sources:

- ❖ Fostering Vibrant Multigenerational Meetings: Final Report of NEYM & NYYM
- ❖ Melinda Wenner Bradley, “Families at the Threshold: How do meeting communities prepare for and engage in active invitation to families and children?”
- ❖ From Britain YM: “All are welcome: Growing our all-age community” and “Being ready for children in your Quaker meeting”
- ❖ Howard Vanderwell, *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together*
- ❖ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*
- ❖ C. Kirk Hadaway, “FACTs on Growth: A new look at the dynamics of growth and decline in American congregations based on the *Faith Communities Today 2005* national survey of congregations”
- ❖ Tim Wright, *Sunday Schooling Our Kids Out of Church*