

## PYM Religious Education for Children Committee, August 2004

### Our Concerns

"You never shared your faith with us!" This impassioned ministry to PYM propelled the religious education committee forward to explore the state of religious education in our meetings. We found that many, if not most, young people drop out of attending their monthly meetings around ages 11-13. Our young people leave us at about the age that many other cultures recognize as a spiritual as well as physical coming-of-age, the age when many Western mystics had their first transcendental experiences. They don't leave because they have no spiritual awareness or hungers. Why do they leave?

Most of the work with teenagers does not happen in our monthly meetings, but at quarterly and yearly meetings, and at Quaker Camp and AFSC Service Camp, where larger numbers of young people can gather. PYM today is blessed with a vital Young Friend's group, testament to the remarkable successes of these programs in recent years. Yearly and quarterly meetings need to recognize their key roles in transmitting our Quaker faith to our teens. How we can do this work well?

Many people in monthly meetings labor in isolation at the important work of religious education with children and teens. Yearly and quarterly meetings need to discern ways to support this work. One volunteer committee, spread out over the state, is not equal to the work that needs to be done.

### Youth and Quaker Community

Young people who grew up in PYM meetings rarely speak about their lessons or curriculum, and only a small minority report connecting with meeting for worship at a young age. The most common reason given for staying connected to Quakerism is community, the connection with JYM and quarterly meeting friends, and with people in the monthly meeting community.

Our *Faith and Practice* is clear about the importance of including young people in the embrace of the meeting, and instructs, "**All adults in the Meeting should find ways to be involved in the children's lives.**" *Faith and Practice* gives our Oversight committees the job of being "concerned for the nurture of the religious life of children and young people, for their participation in the Meeting, and their preparation for membership." Can we live up to these charges?

## **Our Activities This Year: A Meeting Visitation Process**

Over the past five or six years this committee tried various means of supporting the monthly meetings in their work with children and youth. We concluded that our most useful efforts were visits to monthly meetings. This year we worked on developing a formal visitation process modeled loosely on College Park Quarterly Meeting's State of the Meeting Clinic. We made our initial all-day visit to Central Coast. We look forward to future visits to other meetings, at the invitation of the meeting.

### **Recommendation: Join FGC**

The committee recommends that PYM join FGC (Friends General Conference), with an eye to increasing religious education resources for the monthly meetings, and in other ways meeting our needs as religious educators. FGC develops and publishes curricula which many of our meetings use, and offers an invaluable mail order book catalog which reviews a wide variety of resources for adults, children, and youth. It maintains religious education support staff. It publishes a regular religious education newsletter, which is sent to the constituent meetings of all member organizations. Besides the annual conference, FGC sponsors religious educator conferences and Youthquake. Joining FGC would acknowledge the benefits we already receive from them, increase our participation in the broader Quaker community, and strengthen both FGC and PYM.

### **We're Available**

Looking for resources? Want to know what other meetings are doing? Want to invite us for a visit? Call us, or send email to [quaker-re@yahoogroups.com](mailto:quaker-re@yahoogroups.com).

Gail Eastwood, clerk (Humboldt), Robin Durant (Orange Grove), Susan Hopkins (Grass Valley), Marilyn Mohr (Santa Cruz), Peggy Ramsey (Orange Grove), Robyn Robbins (La Jolla/Redwood Forest), Sue Torrey (Central Coast)