

Journeys in the Spirit

inward outward upward downward

Issue 7

June 2009

Young People



Creating Community, Creating Connections

This youth edition for 12–18 year olds comes out three times a year and seeks to offer activities for one-off sessions or weekends. This is offered with the intention of providing an opportunity for exploring, creating and learning in an atmosphere of worship in partnership on our shared journey in the spirit.

Included are **getting ready**, for those coordinating the programme; **gather**, meeting, centering, focusing; **engage**, beginning to think about the theme; **respond**, activities linked to the theme; **reflect**, ending appropriately; and **review**, evaluating what has happened. Some of the activities are included on additional sheets. Timings are not stated as this will depend on the group and how the activities are used.

There are four directions to our spiritual journey. Inwards to ourselves; outwards to others; upwards (or even further inwards?) towards the deeper mystery; downwards to the world we live in. “Journeys in the Spirit” offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with children and young people.



Offering a range of ideas to use with young people in a Quaker context at a weekend or a series of sessions. This youth edition for 12–18 year olds comes out three times a year.

Getting ready

Yearly Meeting Gathering 2009 will explore the theme “Creating community, creating connections”. The theme of Junior Yearly Meeting is Ubuntu (a person is only a person through their relationship to others). Ubuntu is a Zulu word and does not translate easily into English. It emphasises our interdependence and our sharing in one another’s joys and sorrows. It’s meaning is expressed well in the words of Michael Sorensen:

We are all poorer for the crushing of one man, since the dimming of the Light anywhere darkens us all. Quaker Faith and Practice 23.09

This issue brings these themes together. The activities approach the idea of community from a variety of angles, aiming to prepare young people for the YMG and JYM programmes.

Some questions for getting ready include: Is the room prepared? Do my colleagues and I feel supported and comfortable with our plans and ourselves? Have we been able to find a moment of quiet to hold the coming session in the light? Are there particular needs and situations I may need to be aware of in this session? Am I confident of the health and safety arrangements? Have I reflected on the theme?

Equipment Needed:

Check for equipment listed within each section and on the additional sheets. Ensure that you have the materials required for the numbers you are working with. Always try to use quality materials.

Underpinning references

Quaker Faith and Practice 10.03

The Bible
Matthew 5:43-48

If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anyone can do that. If you simply say hello to those you greet you do you expect a medal?Live generously and graciously towards others.....

*Matthew 5: 46 & 48
The Message Bible*

Gather

Start with a period of silence, to settle and centre. Ask two of the young people to act as elders and end the silence when they think it is right. You could use one of the readings in the side bar on the right to introduce the theme. You might decide to ask one of the young people to choose one to read for themselves.

In a circle, ask everyone to introduce themselves and say where they feel most 'at home' and why.

Engage

Where do you find community?

Community is usually defined by location, but in the age of the 'global village' community is no longer limited to where you live. Over the last 50 years there has been a major shift from your community being your neighbourhood, to finding community within a whole host of different networks. Perhaps the most comprehensive definition is to say that people are in community when they hold something in common.

Ask the group to make a list of all the communities they are part of (family; school/college; clubs etc.). What are the requirements for membership of these communities? What do the people in each of these communities have in common (for example age; a shared interest; a skill etc.)? Invite individuals to consider their feelings towards each community they are part of. Share these feelings in the group. Ask when people think that connections become community.

Pseudo-community versus authentic community

Introduce the idea of 'pseudo-community', which in essence is: *keeping people who annoy and irritate us at a distance and moving on when personal encounters become difficult*. How are our Quaker communities similar and different from the communities that have been listed in the above discussion?

Pseudo-community could be described as superficial and shallow. Authentic/real community has strong foundations. Using the Sheet 7.A, split into smaller groups and ask the groups to arrange the blocks in order of importance for building an authentic community. Are there any elements missing? If you could choose only three, which would they be and why? Ask different groups to share back and present their case. Can the whole group agree on the three most important?

An image of community

Ask someone to read from the Bible Genesis 18:1-15, then spend some time in silence looking at the picture on Sheet 7.B.

Explain that this is an *icon*, a picture used as a window to the Divine. They are often full of symbols. This icon was painted by the Russian Andrei Rublev in the fifteenth-century and is called The Hospitality of Abraham and Sarah. It is a picture of the three angels who visit Abraham by the oaks of Mamre. They also symbolize the three persons of the Christian Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Ask the group to share:

- What is their immediate response to the story and icon?
- What do they think the story has to say about community?
- What do they think the painter is trying to say about God?

Advices & Queries
18 and 33.

The Bible
Romans 12:9-21
1 John 3:17-18

Quaker Faith and
Practice 10.11 and
22.27

*Embodying: changes
in relationships*
p146-153 in
Listening Spirituality
Vol. I: Personal
Spiritual Practices
Among Friends by
Patricia Loring
(1997)

*The Blessed
Community* from A
Testament of
Devotion by Thomas
Kelly (1941)

For a fuller
explanation of
pseudo-community,
see –

Listening Spirituality
Vol. II : Corporate
Spiritual Practice
Among Friends by
Patricia Loring,
especially Chapter 2
*Listening for the
Spirit among Us as It
Shapes Our Human
Relationships in
Community* (1999)

See
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
Rublev](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rublev) and
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/
Trinity\(Andrei Ruble
v\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity_(Andrei_Rublev)) for more
information on this
icon

Ubuntu

This Zulu concept is the focus for JYM at Yearly Meeting Gathering in 2009. Sheet 7.C has on it some quotes that could be read out and considered in order for the group to explore their understanding of this idea. If possible show the YouTube clips (on a lap top or even better through a projector). Sheets 7.D and E have an activity to facilitate young people's engagement and response to the notion of Ubuntu. This is further explored within the poem on Sheet 7.F.

See *Take This Bread* by Sara Miles (2007) for a moving autobiography of building community through food.

This is adapted from *The Blessed Community* from A Testament of Devotion by Thomas Kelly (1941) pp.58-59. Older young people may wish to read the original extract or the whole chapter.

Respond

Friends

This activity is particularly suitable for the younger end of the age bracket:

Just because we are the Religious Society of Friends doesn't mean we all like each other! The mark of true community is how we love those people who irritate us and make our lives difficult.

- Ask the group to make a list of things we can do to help us get along with people who we find difficult to like.
- Ask each individual to think of some people they see regularly (maybe at school/college or in their family) who they find it difficult to like.
- Each person can make a private journal to keep over the next week, detailing how they deal with these difficult relationships.
- When the group next meets, discuss this experience. It is important to establish an atmosphere of trust, stressing that their journals are private, there is no compulsion to share anything, and anything that is shared should not be discussed outside of the group.

Family

This activity is suitable for older young people:

Jesus made a number of challenging statements about family. Read Matthew 10:35-37 and 12:46-50 (from The Message Bible if possible). Ask the group to share their responses, questions and insights.

Food

Support the young people in planning a shared meal for the meeting (or for your host meeting if you are a Link Group), with *Ubuntu* (see sidebar) as its theme. Things to consider include: special diets, food hygiene and safety.

Use this statement as a starting point for discussion at the shared meal:

When we eat a shared meal, we make visible what happens in Meeting for Worship. We bring what we have and all are fed. If everyone arrives empty then no one can be filled.

After the meal, ask the question to everyone present: 'What do you bring to Meeting for Worship?' Discussions to take place at the tables where people are sitting. Then ask each table to share their thoughts.

Fellowship

Just as we can't solve all the world's problems by ourselves, we can't look after everybody all of the time. Quakers often find themselves called to particular jobs and to particular people to care for.

Ask the group to spend some time in silence, thinking of those people they feel especially drawn to care for, and holding them in the Light.

Encourage individuals to create a visual network of support, care and love with themselves at the centre. Circling out from the centre, they can write the names of/draw those people they feel called to uphold. Remind them that as well as carrying them inwardly in our hearts and minds, there are many things we can do to carry them outwardly. Around each person in their network, ask them to write/draw all the ways they can serve that person. Encourage young people to make their creations carefully and neatly, demonstrating the value that they have for these people. Have available good quality paper and creative materials.

Reflect

Ask individuals to think about what they have explored during the session. Use the following questions:

- If you were to join a new community (of any sort) tomorrow, what would you look for as the marks of a real community?

Ask individuals to discuss the following questions in pairs:

- Choose a community you are part of. What could you do to help build real community there?
- What difficulties might you face?

Give the pairs the opportunity to feedback to the rest of the group.

Can the group agree to uphold one another as they build real community where it's needed during the week? Ask them to agree how they will check back with each other what they have done in relation to this.

Finish with a time of quiet reflection.

Review

For adults to consider after the session:

- Did everyone get the opportunity to speak and be listened to?
- Did everyone get the opportunity to listen to others?
- Did everyone have the opportunity to reflect?

How did the activities encourage young people to ...

- Identify what creates an authentic community?
- Reflect on their own ability to create community?
- Apply community building ideas to other communities they are part of?

Links to other organisations and resources

Christian Aid: mpower resource for young people: www.christianaid.org.uk

Cafod Youth Topics: monthly activities on world issues: www.cafod.org.uk

Youth Work magazine: a monthly publication: www.youthwork.co.uk

RHP: resources for working with young people: www.russellhouse.co.uk

Oxfam: produce resources for youth work: www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet

Leavers: Quaker performing arts project: www.leavers.org

This issue was written by Mark Russ and edited by Howard Nurden. Thanks to Cat Waithaka for the Ubuntu activity.

The next young people's issue of *Journeys in the Spirit* will be on the theme of Living as a Quaker and will come out on October 1st 2009.

Your meeting as a community?

Encourage the young people to devise and carry out a survey of their meeting. They might like to explore the connections that those in the meeting have to each other and that the meeting has with other organisations. A questionnaire could be created and done with all members of the meeting to find out this information. The young people could then find a way of graphically setting out their findings. This creation would then be displayed under the banner heading 'Creating connections, creating community'.

Make links if your meeting is doing the YMG 09 study materials written by Woodbrooke.

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