

Journeys in the Spirit

inward outward upward downward

Issue 25

March 2009



Children

Belonging and joining

Part 1

This children's work edition of "Journeys in the Spirit" comes out monthly. It offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with children aged 4 –12 years in a Quaker setting. It 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 sections on: **getting ready**, for those co-ordinating 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. To offer a balanced session you should aim to do something from each section. Some of the activities are included on additional sheets. Timings or ages are not stated, as this will depend on the group and how the guidance and activities are used.

Underpinning each issue is the idea that there are four directions to our spiritual journey. **Inwards** to ourselves; **outwards** to others; **upwards** towards God, the deeper mystery; **downwards** to the world we live in.



The seventeenth in the series exploring Quakers: a people of God: being and doing

Getting ready

In this, and the next issue, we offer ways to enable children, and adults, to explore and express belonging and joining. How are we, of any age, part of a people of God? What does that mean for what we actually do?

These are issues at the heart of children being in the Society of Friends, in Meeting – how they see it, feel it and own it. It is about participation – participation as a way that belonging can be facilitated and expressed. It is about membership - membership as a way of expressing belonging and a desire to be part of and give to Quakers. And, it is also about some fundamentals of the Quaker way.

There is that of God in each of us - it is in me – it is in you. Yet, also, I am in it and we are in it together. It is a place where we belong, that also belongs in us – a bit like air; all around us and in us at the same time. This is true for children or adults – it is just that the ways each of us have or express our experience may vary. We hope you enjoy the range of thoughts, processes and activities we have devised.

It is important to remember that there are still objections in some Meetings to the very idea of children's meeting and the notion of children being on a spiritual journey is alien - belonging is difficult and joining impossible. Equipping children, and adults who work with them, to consider and verbalise thoughts and feelings about belonging and joining is an ongoing issue in most churches. It is about the continued assertion of the inclusion of all in the building of the kingdom of heaven on earth and doing so with love and tenderness.

Underpinning references

'Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.'

Elders at Balby, 1656 – in the Introduction to Quaker Faith and Practice.

(This, and quotes on page 3, were in the first of this series, Journeys in the Spirit 9, – they are included again to link back to that issue)

Gather

Invite the children to sit in a circle. Explain that today's meeting will be about 'belonging' - the important feeling that we have when we feel 'at home' with a person or in a group or place. When we feel that we belong, we may feel happier and more confident to really be ourselves. Jesus said to his disciples (his closest friends) 'Make your home in me, as I make my home in you'. You could ask the children to reflect quietly about whether there is someone who might say that to them, or that they might want to say it to. Do they ever feel they can have that sense of belonging with God, or Jesus? See *Sheet 25.A Resources: You will need 2 or 3 balls of wool (any colours but avoid very 'hairy' wool)*.

Engage

Three ways are offered to engage with the belonging aspect of this theme. They are suitable, with adjustments, for all ages – child and adult.

1 The story of the beautiful city.

This is a story that began life with the writer dreaming, thinking and talking about the church that she grew up in. It became a story about leaving one place of worship, living and believing and travelling in the 'desert' and finding another 'home' – in between the beautiful city and the desert.

Depending on the ages in your children's meeting you could read the story in one go or over two sessions. Read it yourself first and then decide. It is a tale to be read slowly and with care. See *Sheet 25.C*.

2. My own space.

Begin by inviting the children to think about their bedroom. You could ask how many people in the group have a room of their own or share with someone.

- Explain that we all need our own space - even if we share our room with someone else, there's usually a corner of it that feels especially ours, even if it's just our bed!
- Ask 'How would someone coming in to the room know that it was your space?''What makes it different from your sister / brother / friend's room? Invite the children to close their eyes and picture their bedroom in their mind. Invite them to picture things like their stuff, posters, clothes, how it's decorated, special furniture or bedding, washing up lying around, half made models or projects etc... Then get the children to open their eyes and share two or three things each that makes their space 'theirs'.
- Invite the children to look around the 'Quaker' space they are in now. Does this place show that this is 'our space'? How? What things make us feel more at home here?

3. Hermit crabs find a home.

Begin by asking if anyone has been on holiday to the seaside & gone rock-pooling. What creatures have the children seen in rock-pools? Has anyone ever seen a hermit crab? Can they say what it's like?

- Read all or a section of the information sheet on hermit crabs See *Sheet 25.A* (or use a good quality children's information book).
- Start a conversation with "I wonder why hermit crabs feel so at home in snail shells?" and follow up with "I wonder what sort of shell you would like to have if you were a hermit crab?"



References

"When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouth" -

Boy aged 4 in response to a question, 'What does love mean?' asked of children aged 4 to 8 by Out North West a gay magazine for young people.



"Dwell in me, as I dwell in you."

The Bible: John 15:3

"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. "

The Bible: Isaiah Ch.11 vs. 6 - 9



'We have wondered whether there is anything Quakers today can say as one. After much struggle we have discovered that we can proclaim this: there is a living God at the centre of all, who is available to each of us as a present teacher at the very heart of our lives. We seek as people of God to be... prophets of joy who know from experience and can testify to the world, as George Fox did, 'that the Lord is at work in this thick night'. **Young Friends from 35 countries 1985 North Carolina**

"..the Religious Society of Friends is a people raised up to bear witness to the universality of the divine light in all, and the priority of the spirit and the truth as the basis of religion over forms, hierarchies and doctrines". He also suggests that "A people of God is different from a society, a community, a family, a movement or a revival although they might all describe aspects of what we do, wait in."

Chuck Fager, in presentations to Canadian Yearly Meeting 1997,

Respond



1. The story of the beautiful city.

Follow the story reading with some wondering questions:

I wonder which part of this story you like the best?

I wonder which part of this story you think is most important?

I wonder which part of this story is in you or you are in?

I wonder if there is any part of this story that you could leave out and still have all the story that you need?

When you judge that everybody who wants to speak has spoken say that there is now time to use any of the creative and arts materials laid out around the room to make something to do with the story. Include simple writing materials as well.

Resources: Newspaper, cardboard boxes, coloured magazines masking tape, scissors, a tray of sand, PVA glue, glue sticks, paints, brushes, coloured tissue, pencils, pens, white paper of different sizes, coloured paper and card, oil pastels, wax crayons, paper doilies, pipe cleaners and anything else you can think of. Always use good quality materials.

2. My own space.

Ask the children for suggestions for ways to make this Quaker place feel more like *their* space, like they belonged there. These ideas might include things like: changing the space in some ways; putting up pictures or a mural; making an 'About Us' book or poster. How could you make spaces for quiet, for creative stuff, for reading, for thinking about the world, for worship as a whole group?

Spend some time talking about the children's suggestions. Invite the children to consider which ideas feel like the best ones to put into action now. Remind the children that the Quaker way of decision making involves trying to feel what is right for the group, even if it's not necessarily what we suggested ourselves!

When you have settled on one or more ideas for making this space more a place of belonging for the children, you can make a start on putting them into action.

Alternatively, have an array of resources as outlined above but add a selection of shoe and other boxes and say that people can make a box that shows what their 'own space' is like or what they might want to have in a space if they could make one up all of their own.

3. Hermit crabs find a home.

Invite children to draw/colour a shell that could be theirs if they were a hermit crab - it is their place of belonging, where they feel safe and at home. They may like to use one of the provided templates on *Sheet 25.B*.

Talk about how we may have many different places (or times) that we belong, or feel at home. Encourage the children to give suggestions eg. at our house, at dad's or mum's house, at scouts, with our best friends, when our cat is snuggled up on our lap, at Quakers, under a favourite tree, at a favourite holiday place, at gran's, when we're with our football team.

Suggest that the children can reflect all the different places that they belong when they design their shell, by using different colours or patterns for different 'belonging' places.

Resources: Beautiful colouring and drawing things, paper and card

Reflect

Share the plans and beginnings you have made. Review what else needs doing. How do we feel now? Share excitement & any uncertainties. Ask for one or more people to share the children's ideas and plans with adults in meeting.

Share the shells that have been designed. Children may wish to explain what the different colours or patterns represent (but some may prefer not to share this).

Review

The review can happen at the time or later – it maybe by yourself or with others. Some useful questions for the use of volunteers to look back over and learn from the session include:

Have children been able to participate in their own way? What went well and why? Has each child been able to reflect, even a little, on something about her or his thoughts and feelings about God, the Divine, the big questions? What is there for you to learn from this session? What might you do differently another time?

Topical activity

Good news about our planet



It is easy for people of any age to feel despair about the damage being done to our beautiful planet and the creatures that we share it with. Despair can lead to a feeling that there is nothing anybody can do to make a difference or change what is happening. Good news is important. Just today, February 23rd 2009, there was news that the numbers of Albatross being accidentally killed by fisherman in South Africa has gone down by 86%. People who know all about birds have been helping fishermen be more careful with hooks and nets.

In our country the beautiful Red Kite, which nearly vanished because of the use of poisonous chemicals has been reintroduced to different parts of the country and is doing really well. It is so lovely to see it swooping and gliding over wood and fields. Share these stories and others that you can find. Look at the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds web pages – see below for the web address. What could children's meeting do? Does the Meeting have a garden that could be used or changed in anyway? Are there conservation projects that could be helped?



Links to other organisations and resources

www.quaker.org.uk/cyp and click on the Ideas Store.

www.quaker.org.uk/cyp - the Quaker Life Resources Room can be found via this link - phone and email for resources on the contact details below.

www.rspb.org.uk/ - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

This issue was written by Ginny Wall and edited by Chris Nickolay who also wrote the topical activity.

The next children's issue of *Journeys in the Spirit* looks at belonging and joining once more and will be available from April 1st. This is followed on May 1st by the first of the new series – Our Quaker Stories.

Ways for all ages to connect with each other around the theme of belonging include:

Reading the story of the beautiful city in a shared meeting for worship and having all the craft activities available for everyone.

Talking about hermit crabs and getting everyone to design their own shell and describe it to at least one other person in a quiet worship sharing time.

Involving older Friends in helping to change the children's meeting space.

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