

Adult Religious Education Committee Annual Report 2011
September 11, 2011

The Adult Religious Education Committee (ARE) provides opportunities to grow, to learn, and to deepen. We are considering changing our name to **Meeting for Learning**, to emphasize the Quaker spiritual underpinning to all our offerings.

The past year has been a fulfilling one for our committee. The addition of new committee members plus two additional volunteers has created a vibrant, active committee with new ideas and new roles. For example, each session now has an official host, whose job include setting up the chairs, introducing the presenter, acting as a support, and watching the time. The year for us seems to run more naturally from September to August, so that will our reporting cycle in the future. This year, however, we will also include summer a year ago, since our last report was in June of 2010.

In the summer of 2010, Philip Bogdonoff with his wife Jillaine Smith once again led a small but dedicated group working on the exercises in the book Your Money or Your Life. That book followed naturally from the ARE program “Money, Values & Spirit,” led by Robinne Gray, Director of Development at Baltimore Yearly Meeting. She invited us into a dialogue about money, gratitude, generosity, and how we might make financial choices in line with our deepest values.

Last Fall, we repeated Marsha Holliday’s Exploring Quakerism, our current version of Quakerism 101. That program, which we have been offering biannually, is open both to people new to Quakerism and to more seasoned Friends. Each session had around 10 people and brought a number of new people into the Meeting. We began the seven-week program with a potluck supper at Barbara Fichman’s, where Gail Thomas led the program off using the Friends General Conference (FGC) Faith and Play story on Meeting For Worship, based on Montessori storytelling methods. Together with the “What Does It Mean ... ?” series, we hope more of us have gained a deeper understanding of Quaker faith and practice.

We also committed to having an Experiment with Light session quarterly. This guided meditation, developed by Rex Ambler and explained in his book, Light to Live By, seems of great interest and benefit to the Meeting. Ministry and Worship also arranged for Experiment with Light twice during the Meeting for Worship time.

In January, Gail Thomas led two sessions on Bible. The first session was “The Bible as Sacred Story.” The second session, “Who is Jesus to You?” launched our Quaker biography series. Later in the winter, Susan Kaul presented a program on Elias Hicks, and Peter Cozzens presented one on John Woolman. We are open to further biographies this coming winter. Please speak to a member of the committee if there is a Quaker you would like to know more about or a biography you would like to present. This invitation extends to other subjects as well. For example, a member of our committee knew of Bill Dietrich’s Zen practice, so we invited Bill to present on Quakers and Zen in June. That turned out to be our most popular offering this year with almost 30 people attending.

In February, we began our other series for this year, “What Does It Mean...?” This popular series has included Peirce Hammond speaking on “Centering,” Liz Hofmeister on “Simplicity,” Jane Coe on “Letting Your Life Speak,” Stephanie Koenig on “Holding Someone in the Light,” Marion Ballard on “Clearness Committees,” and

Gail Kohanek on “Sense of the Meeting.” That concludes our list of programs except for the July discussion of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) Visioning Statement, which had us all asking ourselves if our Quakerism was too centered on our inward spiritual growth to the neglect of our social responsibilities. To me, this seemed an interesting challenge to future ARE programs.

A special opportunity was a visit to the Folger library, provided by Georgianna Zeigler, who set out a rich array of early Quaker texts and broadsheets. We actually could touch these early Quaker documents. Thank you, Georgianna.

Once again we were in charge of thanking the First Day School teachers – Ellen Harter, Chris Meyers, Susan Rich, Ross Capon, Bill Grimm, Margaret Plank, Peggy Edwards, Sara Anderson, and Lou Molenje. For a second year, Anne Parlin organized the event, which took place one First Day in May at the rise of Meeting for Worship. Anne asked parents to help First Day School students write or draw thank-you notes to their teachers and, at rise of Meeting, teachers were presented with the thank-you notes, and they also received a copy of Celebrating the Quaker Way by Ben Pink Dandelion. We especially thank Meg Wilder of the Religious Education Committee, who provided Anne with information and support.

Addendum report: In a joint effort of ARE and Ministry and Worship, Bill Dietrich, Susan Kaul, and Gail Thomas offered to provide opportunities for people of the Meeting to deepen their spiritual practice with an eight-month long Spiritual Formation Program. The program was modeled on a similar course offered by BYM, and used as a resource Listening Spirituality, developed by former Bethesda Meeting member Patricia Loring. Twenty-four folks committed to the program. Arranged into three reading groups, then smaller spiritual support groups, all 24 completed the program. It seems such a success that we are offering a repeat program this Fall and a second-year program for those who want to continue with new material.

– Submitted by the Adult Education Committee: Grigsby Hubbard, Gail Kohanek, Sandy Mann, Mike Morris, Anne Parlin, Ralph Steinhardt, and Gail Thomas and Barbara Fichman, co-clerks.