

Bethesda Friends Meeting
Religious Education Committee
Annual Report, July 2011

The theme for First Day School this past year was the New Testament and links to Quaker faith and practice. A total of 43 children registered for First Day School. The largest class was K-2 with 18 registered. There were 10 in grades 3-5, 9 in grades 6-8 (middle school), and 6 in grades 9-12 (high school). While attendance varied from week to week, there was a core group in each class most First Days.

Teachers included Ellen Harter, Chris Meyers and Susan Rich for kindergarten, first and second grades, Bill Grimm with Ross Capon for third, fourth and fifth grades; Margaret Plank with Peggy Edwards for middle school; Sara Anderson and Lu Molenje for high school. Ross Capon led Sing on First First Day, beginning in November, and arranged the music for the Christmas program. We look forward to adding a second and third grade class next year, with many of the same teachers. We want each class to have a co-teacher and support from the committee.

Several regular annual events were held during the year. In October, students helped raise money and awareness about the homeless by walking in the Fannie Mae Walkathon. Planning for the annual Christmas Pageant began in October with letters to teachers and parents seeking support and direction. The high school students took on a leadership role casting for the pageant before Thanksgiving so that rehearsals could begin in December. Middle School students opted to make their own Christmas presentation a week before the pageant, and they sold cookie-making kits to raise money for student scholarships. The Christmas pageant and music was much appreciated. The children dyed Easter eggs for Martha's Table on Easter with help from teachers, parents and committee members. In May each of the First Day School classes prepared some food for Spring Fling to raise scholarship funds for the Friends School in Ramallah. We gave Bibles to fourth and fifth graders in June.

The committee accepted a proposal from Ministry and Worship to celebrate the presence of children in the Meeting by having a child read the query each month. This practice began in January. We also accepted a proposal to nurture the Light within children by adapting the Experiment With Light program. This is scheduled for October in place

of First Day Sing. We invited teachers to attend committee meetings in November and April to improve communications, and several of the teachers sent regular emails to parents and committee members describing class activities. We drew on parent support for the Christmas pageant and Easter program and for child care over the summer. We noted that there are many opportunities to strengthen our community by family participation in community service activities such as Friendly Gardens, Friendly Eights, and Catocin camping weekends.

Some committee meetings were dedicated to the topic of curriculum. We explored the idea of creating a study group to seek support from the Meeting to determine what it is we would like our children to learn. While this is an ongoing concern, the committee accepts the current three-year cycle: Old Testament, New Testament and Quaker Faith and Practice. We agree that Bible should be related to Quaker faith and practice each year. In the coming year, we will focus more directly on Quakers, faith, and practice.

This has been a year of transition for the Religious Education Committee with old members leaving and new members joining in September, January and March. The clerks of the meeting inventoried curriculum materials over the summer and oversaw First Day School registration in September. The clerk of the meeting and representatives of Ministry and Worship and Pastoral Care attended committee meetings through the fall. Tina Warnick became acting clerk in September, and Catherine Weiss became her co-clerk in January. Now Catherine Weiss is moving to Philadelphia. We are grateful for her help organizing Christmas and Easter activities and exploring the idea of a curriculum study group. Meg Wilder became co-clerk in May.

The committee is stretched over the summer with hospitality and playground responsibilities. At a time when many of our committee members are unavailable, we are recruiting teachers, reviewing curriculum details and preparing for First Day School registration in September. We have struggled this past year. We would like to ask Nominating Committee to find a few more parents with good organizational skills who are willing and able to support the teachers and help carry out the many tasks of this committee.