

PYM Religious Ed Notes

#1, April 2006: On Sharing Our Questions

An Electronic Publication of the PYM Religious Education for Children Committee

Write to the Committee: This is the first edition of our newsletter; help us to make it serve your needs! What do you want to read about in this newsletter? Share with us what you are doing, what you are thinking, what you are asking. You can reach the committee members by sending email to quaker-re@yahogroups.com.

Listening to the Questions; Wondering Together

By Gail Eastwood

One day, I was driving home in a mental fog after a wearying all-day trip doing errands in town. Suddenly a very alert and relaxed voice pipes up from toddler Michael in the carseat behind me, “What are people for?” I can’t quite wrap my mind around this question. So I hedge and ask, what does he mean? “Well, telephone poles are for telephones, right?” “Right...” “So what are people for?”

A few years later, his sister at a similar age asked me, “Where do people come from?” She understood that babies come out of their mother’s tummy, “but where did the *first* people come from?”. Her four-year old mind digested my dry story of evolution. “You mean Berna”—her close friend—“and I are related, because if you go back far enough we have the same great-grandmothers?” Later: “I’m related to everybody, because if you go back far enough, we have the same great-grandmothers!” Maybe a year later, the picture expanded: “I’m related to every living thing on earth, because if you go back far enough, we have the same great-grandmothers!”

Faith’s wonderings and her illumination of the evolution story brought me to a feeling of awe about the way in which every cell in my body has been alive since the beginning of life on earth, and is kin to every other living cell of every living being on earth.

People complain, “We have so few children in our meeting, such a stretch of age and character and interests. The curriculum is haphazard, with not enough volunteers to teach the lessons.” But if we look at the condition of the small meeting from another angle, we can see the precious chance for the meeting to hear the particular wonderings of each child in the meeting, to notice each child’s gifts and struggles.

We Quakers do not have a neat catechism to teach. *We have profound questions and living truths—truths that must be brought to life anew in the experiences of each generation.* Our children’s questions and their attempts to answer them connect them to the living waters of our faith. They press us to go deeper. They make us explore our own frontiers.

When my children first started challenging me with their seekings I felt inadequate; my responses weren't "good enough." But do we need to have the answers? Surely, when children ask us questions we need to share our honest responses, and share the wisdom of our culture and our faith. But it's just as important to witness and to hold in our hearts their questing and finding, the wisdom they own because it grows from the seed within.

"What are people for?" It's a good question, deep enough to grow and blossom and fruit over the course of a lifetime.

Queries for Reflection or Worship Sharing

What spiritual questions and insights do/did children share with me?

What did I wonder about as a child?

What did I hear about God as a child? Who from? Did what I heard make sense to me?

Tell the committee about your children's spiritual questions and insights, or about your childhood memories. Send email to quaker-re@yahogroups.com.

Resource Corner

FGC Bookstore

To refresh your understanding of the joy of queries, pick up a copy of *Benjamin, the Meetinghouse Mouse* by Clifford Pfiel, available from the FGC Bookstore at www.quakerbooks.org. Then share it with the children. They may become fond of this little mouse, who learns about the need for deep questions, and grows into vocal ministry to the meeting—with a query.

Queries for Children

When the appointed person rises in Orange Grove Meeting to read the monthly queries from *Faith and Practice*, a child also rises to read the parallel children's queries, developed by the M&O and children's committees of the meeting. Robin Durant comments that people often respond during worship to the children's queries, which are written in simple language and may have a sharp cutting edge. One of the queries on simplicity, for example, reads, "Do I want all the toys I see on television, even though my room is full?" On integrity: "If my heart tells me something is wrong, do I speak up?"

The Orange Grove Queries for Children are available on the Pacific Yearly Meeting website at: <http://quaker.org/pacific-ym/2005/queries-for-children.htm>

Pass this newsletter on: The committee is still building its distribution list. If you know someone who would enjoy this issue, please forward it to them. Or, print it and hand it out at meeting. The newsletter is also posted at the PYM website, www.quaker.org/pacific-ym.

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