

# THE YOUTH PROGRAM CORNER

FROM PACIFIC YM'S YOUTH PROGRAM COORDINATOR & SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

**D**éjà vu: A teen, an older adult, and I are reflecting on the teen cuddling that occurred throughout the gathering we just attended and the varying levels of comfort and concern we noticed.

Where should the line be, we muse, between appropriate and inappropriate expressions of affection among teens at Quaker gatherings? Does it make a difference if it's between a romantic couple or platonic friends? If sexuality is a gift from God, what are young Quakers to do with this gift? What is the definition of 'sex' when it comes to the community expectation at our gatherings of "no sex outside of pre-existing, consensual [adult] relationships" ... which translates as "no sex" for teens? What should or shouldn't a FAP (Friendly Adult Presence) or fellow teen do if she sees a teen couple touching or kissing? If we want to nurture loving Quaker relationships, including between teens, where and how can we do this safely? How can we do so while respecting the varied needs and values of a range of Quaker families? (And how can we get adults to have these same conversations about their own relationships?)

In January I had the privilege of attending a facilitator training on the acclaimed *Our Whole Lives* (OWL) sexuality education curriculum, a series for six age groups from children through adults, produced by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ (see sidebar on next page). OWL's assumptions and values of "self worth, sexual health, responsibility, and justice and inclusivity" align well with PYM Friends' beliefs. Sexuality is defined in OWL as "a good part of the human experience" and "much more than sexual

## SAVE THE DATE!

**May 18-20** College Park Quarterly Meeting teen and intergenerational activities. Ben Lomond Center.

**Summer Youth and Family Camps** at Sierra Friends Center and Quaker Center. Register now!

**July, Woolman Teen Leadership Camp** (15-16 y.o.)

**July 22-28 Peace Action Camp** (10th-12 gr.) in San Diego, CA, a Quaker Center on the Road activity.

**August 10-12** "Seeking Spirit All Together: Intergenerational Faith, Fun & Fellowship." With Alyssa Nelson. Ben Lomond Quaker Center.

## QUERIES OF THE MONTH:

How do Quaker values inform your views and feelings about sexuality? How should young Quakers learn about sexuality as it relates to our faith and practice? Why provide sexuality education and resources in our faith community? How can we find unity about what constitutes age-appropriate intimacy and physical affection among youth at Quaker gatherings?

When did you realize that you were a sexual being? What does it mean to be transgender/genderqueer/female/male/intersex/boy/girl/woman/man in your family or community? How and when did you learn about gender and sexuality? How and when did you discover your sexual orientation?

behavior." OWL makes its values and assumptions transparent, stating for example:

"We are called to enrich our lives by expressing sexuality in ways that enhance human wholeness and fulfillment and express love, commitment, delight and pleasure."

"Sexual intercourse is only one of the many valid ways of expressing sexual feelings with a partner. It is healthier for young adolescents to postpone sexual intercourse."

The particular training I attended focused on the 7-9th and 10-12th grade curricula. In addition to providing valuable tools for working with young people, the training gave me a framework for thinking about questions of sexuality as relates to Friends.

The OWL trainers asked us to bring something personal to contribute to a group altar. Mine was a copy of Pacific Yearly Meeting's *Faith and Practice* (F&P), which I introduced as being a description of PYM's values. I explained how the book is revised each decade or so to reflect continuing revelation. Our current F&P has little to say about sexuality; yes, it affirms same-sex marriages, proclaims sexuality as a gift "in a loving adult relationship," and decries abuse. But, I told the OWL training group, there is room for plenty of revelation in our F&P when it comes to sexuality.

At Pacific YM's annual gathering, Junior Yearly Meeting (JYM, which includes teens around high school age) has a mid-week "Respectful Relationships" evening workshop facilitated by

Young Adult Friends that earns some of the highest ratings on JYM participants' final evaluations. In recent years, this workshop has covered the topics of appropriate physical touch, consent, safer sex (STI risk, prophylaxis, and birth control), abstinence, non-sexual expressions of affection, abusive and respectful relationships, and the prevention of drug and alcohol abuse. Presentations and activities have been followed by small group discussions and worship sharing divided by age and gender. Daily "support groups" meet for continued reflection.

Despite the consistently high ratings of Respectful Relationships, the JYM planning committee (made up of teens and adults) sees room for improvement. Teens have said they like the safe space to ask questions, get facts, and develop their own understandings about sexuality further than what they get (if at all) in school, but that there could be additional focus on the context of Quaker values. Some teens who have participated numerous times want more variety and thoughtful exploration each year. Parents want to know what's being conveyed in Respectful Relationships. Meanwhile, some Young Adult Friends who lead the sessions have been discussing their wish to have mentorship from older adults when it comes to their own sexuality, relationships, and transitions through life.

And so the JYM committee, Young Adult Friends, and I are working together to figure out how Respectful Relationships could incorporate more explicit discussion of Quaker values in the context of sexuality and to broaden the scope to include multiple activities on diverse topics throughout the annual gathering week. Just as OWL affirms that parents/guardians are the primary sexuality educators of their children, JYM intends to improve parental consent and orientation processes. With the OWL resources and focused attention, I hope we can begin to find shared answers to the recurring questions not just of sexual behavior at gatherings, but about our roles, rights, and responsibilities within the Religious Society of Friends as we nurture our whole community toward developmentally healthy expressions of sexuality and faith.

*You can reach Alyssa Nelson at [pym.youthcoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:pym.youthcoordinator@gmail.com). Alyssa's direct support on this topic and others is available to all of PYM, and she is including sexuality as a topic in workshops being held for adult allies and Friendly Adult Presences. Friends from any Yearly Meeting are welcome to sign up to receive information about youth programming - just "like" the Pacific Yearly Meeting Youth Programs page on Facebook!*



A residential Quaker camp affiliated with IMYM, located in Tincup Colorado. At Mountain Friends Camp, we live simply and in harmony with the natural environment and have a great time exploring, learning and sharing. Openings are still available for campers aged 11-15, and we are seeking camp staff. Camperships are available. 2012 Sessions: 06/23-06/30 and 06/30-07/07



Contact camp director Anastacia Easterling  
(435)554-1132 / [MountainFriendsCamp.org](http://MountainFriendsCamp.org)

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

*Our Whole Lives* sexuality education curriculum and its companion books, *Sexuality and Our Faith* and *The Advocacy Manual for Sexuality Education, Health and Justice: Resources for Communities of Faith*, a joint endeavor of the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ.

<http://www.ucc.org/justice/sexuality-education/our-whole-lives.html>

<http://www.uua.org/re/owl/>

The *Our Whole Lives* (OWL) curricula is designed for six separate age groups, from K-1 to adulthood.

What would it take to make sexuality education and advocacy part of the life of your Meeting or Worship Group? OWL may already be offered in your community: ask your local Unitarian or UCC congregation if they would welcome Quaker teens to join their 7-9 and 10-12 grade OWL sessions. Or organize two certified facilitators and a few like-minded groups for a critical mass to start a new OWL program. Facilitator training dates can be found on the UU and UCC websites. <http://www.uua.org/re/owl/18217.shtml>