

# Children's Program Committee Report to Annual Session 2022 Pacific Yearly Meeting

Thank you for the opportunity to present to the Annual Session. The Children's Program Committee has not done this before.

Our committee provides programming for children at PacYM. We have done this diligently, often by the same people, year after year. We have seen a decrease in children's attendance not only at Pacific Yearly Meeting but also at Quarterly and Monthly Meetings. Though there are many young people who find that their beliefs line up with Friends, the actual attendance by younger Quakers is declining and participation by families is at an all-time low. What could be the cause of this decrease? Is there anything that we can do to reverse the trend?

Last year, our CPC Lead Coordinator developed a series of Quaker gatherings for families, which were small, intimate field trips held outside, following Covid-safe protocols, that included both Quarterly Meetings. We were pleased with the overall success. The families connected with one another and even brought families that had not previously attended Monthly Meetings. There is a need for connection that can be addressed by "Quaker field trips". This committee believes that fostering connection can be key to gathering families into the Quaker structures, providing a welcoming environment and giving us continuity to the future.

However, there is a serious disincentive that families experience in our Meetings: a bias towards making children "other". Much work has been done in the last few years to build an inclusive Quaker community. We have examined the ways in which we exclude people without meaning to. Those who are different are put into categories as 'other', keeping them at arm's length; while appearing polite, we show them in subtle ways that they don't belong.

Unfortunately, we have experienced Friends 'othering' our young people. Many Friends, when asked to help with the children's programs, say they feel uncomfortable working with children. Many are too busy with important projects, saying "I did my duty when I was a parent." When we organize intergenerational activities, very few adults attend. For many of us, 'intergenerational' means an activity we can skip. We ask the Yearly Meeting Community – would you find this refusal to engage acceptable if we were asking Friends to participate in interfaith, intercultural or interracial gatherings?

Our children are ours. They are not 'other.' Even if they are other people's children, they still belong to us. They are among the most exciting and insightful people in this rapidly changing present. They are our future.

So, we want to address this overall problem in two parts:

First, we have organized gatherings throughout the state where children and their families can meet. Most field trips are scheduled after Annual Session. We have nine more scheduled this year, ranging from Los Angeles to Humboldt County. In these gatherings, children will meet with children from other meetings and enjoy fun activities based on Quaker values. Their parents have the opportunity to meet other Quaker parents. Quaker families can invite their friends to experience Quakerism. These field trips are fun for children and parents alike.

The second part: we challenge committees to provide activities for children and youth which would engage and educate them about what committees do and how children are important to us. We ask people at the Yearly Meeting to spend time with children, sitting with their families during meals and asking children what they are thinking. We request that you attend the intergenerational events, (there are three planned). Finally, we ask that you bring home to your Meeting ideas of how to include children and families in worship and your Meeting life.

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There are many good ways to address this problem and we would very much appreciate your input and support.

We have one further request for you today: since these field trips are held outside of Annual Session, we request that the budget for these trips be \$7000 to \$8000 per year out of general fund, with our Annual Session budget to be determined at RepCom.

Respectfully submitted by

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