

NOTES

QREC Conversation Circle: November 9, 2017

*Exploring how to introduce young Friends to the Bible
in a manner consistent with Quaker faith and practice*

Pam Cole, Mattapoisett Friends Meeting
Beth Collea, Wellesley Friends Meeting, NEYM
Elizabeth Engle Munger, Friends Meeting of Austin, SCYM
Sally Farneth, Middletown/Langhorne Meeting, PhYM
Karen Greenler, Madison Meeting, NYM
Harriet Heath, Schoodic Worship Group, NEYM
Christel Jorgenson, Friends Meeting Cambridge, NEYM
Ruth Ralston, Saratoga Meeting, NYYM
Daniel Read, Durham Meeting, NCYM-c/PFF¹
Gale Schultz, Mattapoisett Friends Meeting
Melinda Wenner Bradley, West Chester Meeting, PhYM
Andrew Wright, Durham Meeting
Liz Yeats, Friends Meeting of Austin
Yanire Zamora, Mexico City Monthly Meeting

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- Welcome
 - Centering Silence
 - Introductions and What draws you to this conversation?

Dan shared his sense that parents don't share the Bible with their children. They see this as something they should do, but release to someone else, who "loves" doing it, which he does.

Beth's meeting has enjoyed Godly Play stories; about 1/2 of the children's RE programs in NEYM use Godly Play and Faith & Play. The open-ended approach to the story has helped people get over hard experiences in the past. For children and all-ages RE, children and adults have found that storytelling mode vital. Has deepened worship in the next hour in worship.

Karen's children are now young adults, and they used "Beginner's Bible" when little. Recommends book of stories told by a mid-19th century man telling stories to his daughter through his own lens — Let My People Go: Bible Stories Told by a Freeman of Color
Patricia C. McKissack, Author, Fredrick McKissack, Jr., Author, James Ransome, Illustrator

Liz has had fun telling stories with story cards, mostly done with New Testament; found images online. Produced a small booklet for the children, who are younger children. Don't print the words with it, just the images because pre-readers. Uses wondering questions from Godly Play and Faith & Play. Friends Meeting of Austin no push back about working with the Bible among Friends. Nice to be able to do Old Testament for a whole year. At least once a month using a Godly Play story and then using other resources with their children, who are in two age groups.

Sally shared that the "Mrs. Noah" book has been good. Have an intergenerational week at her meeting — Made a "Bible Cake" (*see resource now on QREC website*)

¹ North Carolina Yearly Meeting - Conservative and Piedmont Friends Fellowship

Karen approaches this work as “The Bible for Skeptics” — middle school group of skeptics, trying to open up the middle ground between being an atheist and being a zealot. Created a “Big Bang” story using Godly Play techniques. Asking them what kinds of questions they might have.

The question was lifted up among the group: How can we explore the Bible and use it without it being too preachy?

Daniel offered that rational society and school system can make it difficult to bring Bible into discussion in any way other way. Important to engage the kids and see what they have to say!

Daniel was having technical difficulties with GoToMeeting, and needed to sign off. Andrew shared more about how Daniel approaches this work at Durham Meeting: Working with 4th/5th and sometimes 3rd graders, shared Bible stories and talks about them in a way that is authentic, sharing about what he believes and asking them about what they believe. There are cookies and games! The group always reads a gospel, picks one and reads it. Daniel is a gifted teacher.

Andrew shared that Durham is doing Godly Play and Faith & Play stories once a month, including using with middle schoolers; will kind of complain but then actually like it and opens up for them — *Grounded in silence to help them understand what worship is about.*

Andrew also recommended two movies for children — “Joseph” and “The Prince of Egypt.”

Chris lifted up that she was hearing program ideas that revolve around someone gifted, committed, long-term. And that doesn’t describe all First Day School programs and their condition. Want to rely on the adults of the meeting sharing their faith — caught in that dilemma that that faith doesn’t exist among adults so one place to start is with the would-be teachers. Great to have someone inspired in your meeting, but how do we pull that curiosity into the Bible? People think the testimonies are “safe” and so the Bible is a lot riskier, even if you love it — that’s why it’s been around so long, it’s not a morality story. Experience pulling the teachers into the experience to the point that they feel equipped, interested, and involved.

Liz first got engaged through Mary Snyder’s “Jesus, who was he?” (available from FGC) and talks about how to understand the Jewish context that Jesus lived in. A good way to introduce young people to how to read the Bible. Adults could learn a lot from reading the curriculum and picking out the things they want to teach from it. Biblical meal for the meeting — Could do at Christmas time.

Beth offered that a Godly Play training can be a place for adults to begin; feel stories come alive and have something to say. Another basic resource — the book “Bible for Dummies.” When began exploring Bible in RE at Wellesley, no curriculum plan. Whole meeting involved in the planning/discussion — people had really strong, grounded thoughts about which stories to work with and which to do as a second tier, and the meeting had buy-in to teaching these stories. The need for training is huge. There are fewer teachers in the mix of people who are working in FDS, and many coming from other faiths.

Sally shared that one of the collections of stories used last year was trying to tie to relevance in today’s world — a Reader’s Digest collection. ART and paintings by masters. May be a way to open the door. (*see resource now on QREC website*)

Pam offered several suggestions: Years ago we stopped teaching anything about the Bible in public schools. There were wonderful stamps based on the Bible — taught stories through stamp collecting. Take care to watch for balance of male and female stories being shared in children's Bibles. Story of Daniel and Abigail is an example of relationships and speaking kindly to people. David taking care of Jonathan's lame son. The story of the Woman of Shunammite illustrates what life was like between men and women in Bible times.

Andrew was reminded of the story of the Syrophenician woman in Matthew 15:21-28. She confronts Jesus for being racist, because the message isn't for the others. Jesus gets called out and is corrected by a girl.

Liz lifted up using puppets and drama with children's groups, and recommended the book, "Wisdom's Daughter" by India Edghill for adults.

Melinda commented on the importance of authenticity for young Friends, and a hope that we make the connection between Bible stories, Friend testimonies, and our witness in the world — they are related, not separate and siloed. Biblical literary for young people balanced with taking children's voices seriously and being open to wondering together about the stories. Appreciates the larger questions, existential issues, that Bible stories help us come closer to, and the spiral curriculum approach inherit to this work in Godly Play. There's a post on the QREC Facebook page about images of Jesus in art and Psalms for children. Recently discovered resources for exploring the Psalms — RE materials for other denominations often have ideas can adapt.

Beth spoke to illuminating life in community in the US— Where can Bible stories be allegories for things we need to be talking about in our society today? How do we live in these times and walk in the world as Friends; compassion and justice through stories from the Bible.

Chris reference to Psalms and family worship at Friends Meeting Cambridge. Has used Psalm Mad Libs! High school groups connect with the parables, particularly the sower and the seed. *(see these resources now on QREC website)*

Beth wondered about memorization of Bible passages — does anyone do this anymore?

Issues of language were discussed by the group — Different language in different versions of the Bible. Need to pick a version and stick to it.

Sally spoke to the issue of different kids and ages in FDS; trying to help them understand and remember the sequence of the Bible heroes. They created a family tree of people from the Bible stories. Kids drew pictures to illustrate the stories that they had heard in sequence — hung from balcony in the meetinghouse; one adult said, "I never thought of it like that." Hung there for a long time, kids could help to tell the story, could name the part they liked best — Visual context helps kids remember.

Chris recommends books from Jewish Lights Publishing (jewishlights.com). Creation story, Midrash, "We created . . . Who is the we?" The book, "Does God have a Big Toe?" by Marc Gellman is another one to consider— themes of the stories are really interesting.

Closing, and grateful, silence.