

QREC Conversation Circle: *Welcoming Young Adult Friends, March 4, 2015*

Aaron Sakulich	Worcester Friends Meeting (NEYM)
Beth Collea	Wellesley Friends Meeting (NEYM)
Karen Greenler *	Madison Friends Meeting (NYM) *member in Iowa YM (Conservative)
Marsha Holliday	Friends Meeting of Washington (BYM)
Elizabeth Piersol Schmidt	West Philadelphia Friends Meeting (PYM)
Gabrielle Savory Bailey	Chatham Summit MM (NYYM)
Sara Smith	Concord Friends (NH) (NEYM)
Nia Thomas	Beacon Hill Friends Meeting (NEYM)
Melinda Wenner Bradley	West Chester (PYM -- attender NYYM)
Liz Yeats	Friends Meeting of Austin (SCYM)

After introductions, we shared around this query: *When have you seen or heard about Young Adult Friends being beautifully welcomed by a local meeting?*

Elizabeth: Doing check-ins at beginning of worship (West Philly WG). When moved away and went to college, went to meeting – felt so welcomed, seen and known. Because was not someone’s child, people were interested in getting to know me as an adult. Wasn’t new to Quakerism, knew about service and was plugged in right away. Wonderful to be invited to dinner by meeting members, given rides. Felt like a part of the community.

Gabi: Has heard from YAs that taking opportunities to get to know someone is vital. People feel new for a long time -- stick with it! Including inviting people over to dinner. Really need to feel personally welcomed.

Marsha: Every Sunday during announcements at FMW, there is a YAF who introduces self and says, “see me after MFW if you want to get on our email list,” and announces activities for the next month – effective to make a weekly announcement of their presence and a way to connect with them. They often have good leadership among themselves.

Liz: FMA is large, and have 3-4 YA newcomers a week; feel that we ALL need to be welcomers. Had three YAs come to meeting together last week and they were pretty much stormed. YAs get together and have a potluck once a month. Great idea to have them do announcements. About 5 years ago a BYM and PYM YAFs came to FMA at same time, and really seeded group for YAFs.

Melinda: “Friendly 8” dinners often multigenerational/multiage, welcomed into intimate conversations and dinners in each other’s homes. Making YAFs with babies feel welcome in the space – changing table, high chairs, etc.

Nia: Introductions every week; orientation to the space and what the meeting is; announce every week about how to get on the list serve, etc. Meeting has fair amount of YAFs, in downtown Boston – often will go out for lunch after meeting. Anyone who is new, they offer to come along for this lunch outing. Adult RE planners do a good job to include YAFs and newer folks, get them sharing in context of something like panel discussion. Retreats – shift to mini-retreats in the city (from weekend-long outside the city) not as long commitment, low cost, and in town – less transportation. Seems to make folks more able to come.

Karen: Thinking about YM and how to find right way “into the structure.” Their YM (not sure if this was NYM or Iowa?) has “readers” who sit at clerks table and read reports – look to include YFs or YAFs in that role as reader; high profile but low intensity job. Don’t want to overwhelm with committee work – but feel welcomed and involved, and *visible*. Aware that there are two experiences – welcoming those new to Quakerism, and how to welcome children who have grown up in the meeting into the “adult life” of the meeting. When her kids were younger, would be invited to MFB to report on any “Quaker activities” – reporting on attending a Quaker camp, FGC Gathering, community service, etc. Made them feel valued and part of the meeting community. They own the Quakerism, not just “kids at the meeting.” Turning YFs into adult Friends in the meeting. Youth program at FGC Gathering can be formative for young Friends!

Sara: Coming to this conversation looking for some answers, right now have some college-age students, seeking ideas for what would work well to welcome them. Lots of questions; have people tried mentoring? Concern that one of the students is of African origin and he’s experiencing racial profiling.

Having gone once around our “circle,” Beth acknowledged that we had several YM staff people on the call whose work is to support the YAF community – *What would they share from this perspective? How can Friends do a better job of this?*

Gabi: Cautioned Friends about language or assumptions: don’t refer to younger people, including college-age students, as “kids.” Not all YAs are brimming with energy, and not all leaders; don’t all bring the same gifts. There are stereotypes that YAFs are transient, searching. Not all young adults want to be swarmed after meeting – Gabi longs for a time that no matter what your age you are so enthusiastically greeted. When she took her position as NYYM YAF Field Secretary four years ago, she became very aware of young adults feeling being tokenized. Be careful about assumptions.

Beth: One thread in the stories being shared is the importance of being reached out to personally – do you need a ride, invitation to dinner. In between the hustle and bustle of life, really making space for relationships to grow.

Liz: Question about committee membership – have two YAFs playing a major role in the meeting committee/leadership structure, and the meeting waited awhile before asking them. Made a difference to us to have their input into the meeting and what’s going on in the meeting. Better understanding of young adults – infuses the nominating process (one YAF is the clerk of the nominating committee). Julie Fager became friends with a newcomer – created supportive connection between a newcomer and “birthright” Friend. Let YAFs know there are resources for them – funds to travel to something like World Gathering, and asking them to come back and report on it. Treat a YAF who’s a newcomer the same way you would treat any newcomer. Plug for Friendly 6s (or 8s) dinners – meeting gets divided into groups of 6 or 8 and have dinners every month together.

Marsha: There are diverse needs – YAFs could be in so many different places in their own lives and their spiritual journeys.

Sara? Karen?: In a small meeting and small city where transportation can be good, getting to meeting can be an issue. What about having a different time for students on a college campus to worship? Has anyone tried, and what worked?

Beth: Middlebury Meeting (VT) had very successful worship group on campus of Middlebury College. WG met on campus 3xs/month and then fourth week went to Middlebury Meeting and attended MFB. What Beth is hearing in her outreach work is that rather than trying to get people to come to the meeting, bring meeting to them on campus.

Elizabeth: Serving breakfast is outreach; visitors come for that and some stay for worship (experience at Swarthmore College and Swarthmore Meeting -- no breakfast on college’s meal plan!)

Beth: Food is such a natural, elemental connection point for nurturing.

Liz: Had a professor at Beloit College who helped us start meeting on campus, and also get to a monthly meeting in area; difficult for her son to get to meeting during his college experience.

Aaron: Worcester is small city, but has 11 different colleges and universities; there’s a difference between YA newcomers and YAFs moving to a new area and finding a meeting. At Worcester Meeting, does better with the latter. Different strategies for welcoming these two different seekers.

Gabi: Hearing from YAFs in her YM work that many of them are not grounded in their understanding of Quakerism. Seems to be a trend that may or may not have gotten a firm foundation in Quakerism; are still seekers, still newcomers – show up at new meeting, kind of a new person. Maybe not ever have sat through an entire MFW while growing up.

Beth: Mentoring – first year college student wrote to ask for membership in first year at Wellesley MM, after little experience with the community or with Friends. How to nurture and care for her on this journey? The Membership and Community Life Committee, on which I serve, was torn. We didn't want to be discouraging on the one hand, but she really didn't know what she was getting into on the other. We decided to linger in the "membership moment" and make the most of it. We asked her if she would like a spiritual friend and found someone to be her mentor. It gave her a chance to walk with Friends, go to a business meeting, get to know the community, and feel if this really was her path. She was welcomed into membership a little less than a year later.

Nia: They do something at NEYM Sessions – could work at a MM – "Buddies." Send out email to YAFs attending, to ask if they would like an older Friend to be assigned to them and have lunch a couple of times at Sessions. Also ask YAFs what they're looking for – vocational, humor, someone you can share with -- match them and create mentoring. Can be very casual – grow beyond the circle of who they usually hang out with at Sessions.

Gabi: At NYYM Sessions a "Business meeting 101" session that was not just for YAFs; had someone come and talk about the process of a MFB and what to expect. Buddy up with older adult to go into business sessions. Sometimes things happen and it's not clear what's going on if you haven't experienced it. Gabi has gone to meetings to act "as a translator" to explain acronyms, process – been well received to have an explanation: what's good practice? Good order? Can be elusive if you're new to it.

Elizabeth: PYM's YAF community tried to start a mentorship program, but was laid down because too few working on it and burned out. But cross-generational mentoring is happening through spiritual nurturing program. It's serving the purpose of being multigenerational: people 22 to 72, people coming together in spiritual friendship groups and larger groups – about 30 people participating. About ½ of them are YAFs. Have learned a lot about what not to do, and how to be intentional. A lot of changes in PYM, growing in new ways as a YM structure, and the YAF community is part of that.

Gabi: Re: the nominating committee issue, there's a way of approaching people of any age, that is more intentional and about knowing them. We're not great in our culture about lifting up *gifts* to one another. There's grace in noticing someone's gifts and naming those gifts as part of the nomination process. It helps to know why you've been asked to serve – feel like you've been seen for the gifts God has given you, easier to say "yes."

Karen: Iowa YM – people made room for her excitement despite being new. Heard speaker about youth program FCNL doing – needed to be willing to change how they did they work and would think intentionally about setting aside own agenda and welcoming their agenda. Not always easy to remember in the moment.

Liz: Serves on FCNL field committee, they are good at creating programs – new Visitors Program where YAFs being trained and representing FCNL for 8 months. Application deadline of April 1st. Also Young Adult Lobby Weekend. Friends need to do more of

that kind of thing – some YAFs have tremendous energy for traveling and doing some of that kind of work. *[Further information from Liz Yeats: There are 2 new FCNL programs. The one which I named is FCNL Visiting Friends, a program in which several YAFs are taking part. But it is by invitation only and involves Friends visiting meetings to tell their story of how their work for FCNL comes out of their lives as Friends. The one I meant was the FCNL Advocacy Corps, open to young adults 19-30 who make a time commitment to FCNL for 25-35 hours a month for a year, working in their locations advocating for FCNL issues. Application deadline 4/1/2015. More information at http://fcnl.org/about/jobs/advocacy_corps/ or by emailing kaeley@fcnl.org.]*

Sara: need to think about how to support YAFs financially if difficult to pursue that kind of opportunity.

Beth: NEYM did “pay as led” system for their annual sessions – “pay what you can, we want you to come” – NEYM came out ahead financially. Beautiful community response to allow as many people to come as want to attend.

Karen: Iowa YM has never had a set price – has never known for there to be monetary issues at end of sessions.

Sara: What’s the QREC group doing next?

These three CCs have run their course, but there are ideas for more! Steering group members shared more information about QREC and plans going forward.

Ended our time with a period of grateful worship.

Themes that seemed to emerge in this Conversation Circle:

- *There are two different experiences we’re lifting up: being a YA seeker and newcomer to Quakerism, and being a YAF in a meeting community (which may or may not be one they grew up in).*
- *Authentic welcome, that extends beyond greeting after worship and is mutual.*
- *People can feel new for a long time, and sometimes need “translation” of Quaker language and process.*
- *Mentoring between YAs and older members of the spiritual community.*
- *Tenderness with the process of finding way into the life of a meeting, and seeking to discover gifts in the nomination process.*
- *Not making assumptions about energy, engagement, experience or interest in leadership because someone is a Young Adult.*