

Making Space for Outreach

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Binghamton Meeting

Last fall, my small-but-robust meeting in Binghamton received an invitation to join the NYYM Outreach Practitioners Circle (OPC). I was new to town and had voiced a readiness for service, so I became our representative. The meeting supported and encouraged my participation in the OPC, but some members also voiced past frustrations with outreach initiatives. They had tried to grow, and despite great effort, current membership consisted of a handful of people who had been around for a few decades and now me, a transplant.

With trepidation about our ability to do much more than we already do, I began to participate in the OPC conference calls along with thirteen other meetings around NYYM. The group discussed some invaluable nuggets of information that can foster awareness of the meeting in the community: think about who sees the physical meeting space and how they see it; most people can tolerate a commute of up to twenty minutes; most people have to hear about a new activity multiple times before they are led to try it.

Perhaps, however, the most important lesson we've taken from the group is a new understanding of outreach itself. Rather than thinking about outreach as a results-driven enterprise—a need to grow the meeting—we've learned that the fruits of outreach can be less tangible. In Binghamton, we now work to foster readiness and openness. We think about small things that increase our relationship with the community, and ways that we can simply let people know that we're here.

So, rather than thinking about ways to reel people into the seats on Sundays, we in Binghamton have been working to raise awareness of our meeting in the community. As we settle into a new meeting place, we are mindful of what people see and how they see it. We wrote an op-ed in the local paper and plan to do more. We are thinking about other ways to engage with the community around us in ways that gently inform people of our practice. Along the way, we've grown a bit more mindful and a bit more open to new people in our community in a way that feels like healthy potential for growth.