

Outreach as a Quaker Practice

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Two years ago, when several of our members felt led to think about nurturing outreach in our meeting, our first impulse was to create advertisements for our meeting and to upgrade our website. In retrospect, we realize now that, while we were not wrong in this impulse, we were seeing outreach primarily as a campaign, a series of activities, and a number of tasks to get done.

As we delved into resources for outreach and became involved with NYYM's Outreach Practitioners' Circle, our thinking evolved and we began to approach outreach, not as discrete and separate activities, but as an outlook that, to be effective, must enliven all aspects of our meeting's life. We are realizing that, like “listening,” or “simplicity,” or “integrity,” outreach is deeply rooted in the Quaker way and, to bear fruit, needs to be seen as an ongoing Quaker practice.

Like other meetings, we are finding that it is useful to have a committee or working group that helps the meeting focus on outreach and gather resources to do effective outreach. But Quaker outreach is much too diverse and multi-faceted to be the sole concern of one committee or working group. It encompasses serving our communities through social action, fostering religious education for both adults and young children, nurturing greater understanding of our own faith and tradition, communicating our Quaker witness more clearly, and becoming more welcoming to diversity and difference.

Effective outreach, we are learning, has many facets. *Inreach* provides nurture for our members and attenders so that they can speak authentically and clearly about their own faith. *Invitation and visibility* help seekers to find us and to learn how the Quaker way might speak to their condition. And *Welcoming* is how we embrace and include seekers and visitors, involving everything from our words to how our meetinghouse conveys welcome and inclusion.

Accordingly, our thoughts about how to pursue outreach now include a wide range of ongoing activities, which we expect and hope will become an integral part of our way of operating, in effect, a *practice*. We are working toward having each standing committee develop a sense of how its work can be part of outreach, maintaining our building in a way that speaks welcome, reviewing our welcoming procedures and practicing

seeing ourselves as others see us. We have begun to discuss with intention what we want our meeting to be known for in our community and practice among ourselves how to express our faith personally when we are asked “So why are *you* a Quaker?” Outreach is both more encompassing and enriching than we originally envisioned. There are many opportunities ahead, and we have much to do and to learn about sharing the Light, reaching diverse seekers, increasing our visibility and welcoming and including newcomers. We are encouraged in our new understanding that outreach is not a collection of one-time activities. Rather, it must be understood as a Quaker *practice*, grounded in Quaker history, the message of Quakerism and at the heart of the query “What can YOU say?”