

The Many Faces of Outreach at Wilton Monthly Meeting

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Wilton Meeting

Wilton Friends are finding that outreach has many forms and that it is best accomplished as a shared activity across our meeting. A Long Range Planning Process, combined with the work of an active Advancement and Outreach Committee has brought us through some major changes to a heightened focus on outreach. Here a few major ports on our outreach journey.

Planning! As part of a long-range-planning (LRP) process, Wilton Monthly Meeting conducted a survey to determine what is most important to our meeting members and attenders.

Outreach, or growing our small meeting, came up as the top priority. But we were not clear on how to proceed. Initially, we did some simple things such as updating signage and media information about religious services, sponsoring tables at local events, and creating visibility through Peace and Service activities, and working with area libraries to sponsor informational programs.

Repurposing and refurbishing for a more welcoming, family-friendly space. For years the Connecticut Friends School (CFS) and Helen Gander Friends Nursery School, both under the care of WMM, had been a major source of outreach to the community. So the merger of the nursery school into CFS and the laying down of the K-8 portion of CFS in 2015 required re-thinking our long-range approach to outreach and opened the door for repurposing and remodeling our space.

A grant from the Hastings estate allowed us to remodel Hastings Hall to accommodate a thriving CFS Preschool, thus freeing up space in our meetinghouse, which was looking a bit tired after many years of double duty for the meeting and the preschool. Called meetings arranged by the LRP Committee resulted in agreement to refurbish our meetinghouse now that CFS was in its new space in Hastings Hall.

Melinda Wenner Bradley, Children and Youth Field Secretary for NYYM, offered several ideas to strengthen our First Day School program and make our meeting space more family-friendly. A new floor, paint and general cleanup enhanced our meetinghouse just in time to hold a fabulous wedding of one of our members. The attractive space should bring in more rentals, another form of outreach. All the work brought out many volunteers and strengthened our sense of community.

Web and social media presence. At the same time, under the guidance of the meeting's active Advancement and Outreach Committee, we decided to use the Quaker Cloud website template, hosted by FGC, to build a badly needed new website. We initially transferred and updated information from our old website and used ideas from other meetings, including the addition of a Google calendar that is kept up-to-date. Now event descriptions and our calendar are frequently updated making visitors to our site aware of a vital, active Quaker meeting in their area.

Participation in two very helpful NYYM programs have moved us further along. The Meeting Partner Project helped us establish a Facebook presence. Ideas from the Outreach Practitioners' Circle inspired us to improve our new website even further by adding a Seekers/Newcomers page to help visitors better understand what to expect when they visit our meeting. We have been inspired by our efforts to date and are eager to move forward with more actions. We are hosting WMM 75th anniversary events, AVP workshops, FCNL programs, World Quaker Day celebrations and participating in community events. At each of these activities we aim to inspire, empower, and highlight ongoing contributions Quakers make in our society.