

*Report to New York Yearly Meeting  
Spring Sessions, April 1, 2017  
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I'm led to begin this report with a verse from the chapter in Isaiah that guides our Sessions theme this year:

**The wolf shall live with the lamb,  
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,  
and a little child shall lead them.**

*Isaiah 11:6, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*

The verse offers that the young will lead us. Not *can*, but *shall*. That seems like a good place to begin a report on the work of supporting our children and youth in New York Yearly Meeting. Possibility and hope. These are things I feel in my work every day. And I'd also like to suggest that this verse about new ways of being in relationship. The lion and the lamb are both led by the little child. We're asked to stretch our belief and our trust in that image. As we struggle in our nation to relate to "the other" and under the weight of political polarization, as Friends seek peace and justice in a world aching for succor, how are we sustained by the relationships in our meetings? How are we authentically taking care of one another, and offering spiritual companionship to each other when we travel in the world between First Days? How do our relationships reach across age and experience? In my work, I am seeking new ways to connect and sustain us whether we are the child, the youth, a parent, or another adult led to serve children and youth programs in a meeting community.

During the time since my last report to the body at Fall Sessions in November, my work has been to be in relationship and nurture relationships in several ways. I've been on ten visits to monthly meetings, six of those to our Partner Project meetings. Friends in Montclair Meeting and Wilton Meeting are gathering for Listening Sessions, an opportunity to process together the themes lifted up in the YM survey about meeting life, including experiences of welcome and inclusion. We're identifying growing edges and hopes as a meeting community, and together creating next steps in relationship to one another, to deepen in Spirit, and to grow as multi-age community. I am deeply grateful to Friends in the Partner Meetings for their candor in this sharing, and their care of one another. I'm very hopeful about moving forward, and what we're learning with each other. This is a touchpoint of possibility and hope, and the Yearly Meeting will be seeking applications for two more meetings to join the Partner Project before Summer Sessions.

I seem always to be re-learning the lesson that as Friends our spiritual journeys are about *process* and not a "product," and this is true for the Partner Project as well. Our work is about being present to where we are and how we are in relationship with each other in this moment, and with that knowing, seeing where we want to go next and moving toward it together.

I've had the joy of leading First Day programs for children and youth at both Partner Meetings and on other monthly meeting visits. Looking back I realize that on three occasions, the lesson was connected to hospitality and community. These are the questions we're asking in the Partner Project: How do we welcome one another? Do we know each other's gifts? Do we know how to participate? How are my gifts included as part of the whole? The activity we're doing with children in the Partner Meetings, which is serving as their Listening Session, lifts up these questions, and they are for all of us.

Since the fall, Yearly Meeting Friends have also gathered in two quarters for three Quaker Family Meetups, and two more are planned for the spring. These are simple occasions for families in a quarter or region to gather to be in relationship with one another. The children play, and the adults have worship sharing and

fellowship together. The thread that has run through all three events has been a desire to better know and support one another. One participant said, “We need a cooperative!” So we’re seeking mutual assistance, another way to be in relationship, through events that gather us across distances and different meeting communities.

Reading the state of the meeting reports, I’ve been moved by the descriptions of what’s happening in meetings, whether it’s a thriving First Day program, the pleasure of attending to children when they are there, or a yearning for more children and families.

One young Friend from Albany Meeting, named Aldo Kinchy Meltz, said some important things in their state of the meeting report, and I have his permission to share this excerpt:

*There is something different every week at First Day School.*

*We learn what Quakers do. We learn about famous Quakers.*

*We wish First Day School was bigger.*

*We get to talk to the adults about things. **They listen to us.***

*Sitting in silence can be kind of long and boring, the adults are sitting and listening for God. We are sitting and waiting.*

*We would like to learn more games that Quakers do.*

*The people of Albany Meeting are kind.*

Aldo lifts up big ideas for us to attend to, for all ages: There’s something new every week when we gather. We balance knowing our history with the “doing” of today. We talk and are in relationship. “**They listen to us.**” Sitting in silence may not meet everyone’s needs. Let’s value play, and kindness. Wishing there were more of us.

I’ve shared with Nurture CC a longer report on the CYFS work, and I’m glad to share that with others. Here are some things I’m carrying hopes for, that exist are in the spaces between the visits and projects and emails and programs:

- Building bridges between generations and between stages of youth. How do we support the child moving from child care to First Day programs? the teen moving from FDS to youth programs? the youth moving into young adulthood?
- Gathering and supporting a community of practice among Friends called to youth ministry. There is always more wisdom in the circle of people gathered. Sharing information and experiences and apprenticing ourselves to one another. Another way of being in relationship. We made a wonderful start on this work in the Farmington-Scipio Region, at the Youth Institute there in March. The planning group for children and youth programs at these Sessions was another example — Friends with deep experience in YM youth programs and others for whom this was their first time doing something like this; joining hands, sharing institutional memory and thinking in new ways together.
- How to better communicate with and gathering older youth. This one has a specific intention: Emily Provance and I are planning an online listening circle in the near future, focused on hearing from youth and young adults about how better communicate with them. Please watch for that and help us gather with these groups; we will be glad to share what we learn beyond how it supports our staff service to them.

My friend Robin Mohr talks about being “the Quakers the world needs us to be.” Clearly, this is true now more than ever. I would challenge us to consider how it is the relationships between us that sustain us and help us to grow, particularly for our children and youth, and their families.