

Cultivate Connections

Many people can point to *individuals* from their past that greatly impacted their journey and spiritual development. Often it is because someone really saw them, and met them where they were. Even small connections can bring us closer to a faith tradition. We never know when something we say or do will touch someone. It may be time to stop thinking about how we can get YAF to connect to the meeting, but more *how the meeting is a place where we are all connected.*

Queries

- Do we provide ongoing opportunities for connections, education, and ways to get to know people as they come to our meetings, wherever they may be on their journeys?
- Do we provide space for existing members and attenders to know each other more deeply?
- Other than coffee time after meeting, how do we get to know the youth and families of our meeting?

Next Steps

- Develop structures that encourage relationship and spiritual communion. (for example: mentors, fellowship, regular worship sharing, religious ed., retreats)
- Cultivate a tradition of inviting newcomers to dinner/tea.
- Invite people *individually* to events, by phone or snail mail. It is far more effective to reach out to individuals, than a blanket “all are welcome.” Tell them why we want *them* there.

Have Faith

We are at a moment of opportunity.

With an open mind and heart, we can take a close, loving, look at our meetings and examine which of our current forms and practices serve Spirit, and which hinder.

If we are genuinely interested in having people of all ages in our meetings, we can weave a net of support, education, welcome and connections that will encourage more people to be a part of the Quaker way. *It takes courage to listen hard. It takes all of us seeing ourselves as agents of Spirit, and part of the larger vision we are always living into.*

Please continue this conversation. If you are interested in a pdf of this pamphlet, a more expansive version, and other resources please visit www.nnym.org.



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The Courageous Work of Weaving Vital, Multi-Age Faith Communities



Circumstances for faith groups are different now than even 40 years ago. Our core communities are decentralized from our towns and churches. The options of how to spend time are infinite, face-to-face time precious and scarce. People seem to be over scheduled, and hesitant to commit, even if it is something they SAY they want or need. Media travels quickly and incessantly, without allowing time to absorb, register and reflect. Some of us are legitimately forgetting how to actually BE together in person, connecting, communicating, communing, let alone in that which is eternal. And yet, that *connection* is what people are longing for.

With all the other noise of life, why would someone come to, and stay in, our meeting?

This is not a how-to manual. This pamphlet lifts up 4 central strands that weave together a fabric to support newcomers, and most importantly, *those who are already here.* Each strand has an explanation, a set of queries, and some next steps to get started. The strands are interdependent, and are often tied together. Changes can be daunting, and *this is a starting point* for the conversation of how we attract, and continue relationships with, young adult friends (YAF) and families.

Know Thyself

By being who we are we attract people who stay. But first, we have to *know* who we are as individuals and as a meeting. It's hard to resist the temptation to change to everyone's needs. We can be welcoming to people, and accept each person's spiritual journey, without changing our core identities. If they identify with our meetings, they will stay. If not, bless them on their journey. Not everyone will be a Quaker. Not every YAF will bring energy and sustain your meeting. Not every YAF will want to be on committees. That's OK.

Queries

- Who are we? What do we *do*? What makes our worship unique? Where is the life in our meeting?
- Are there structures that are draining the available resources in the meeting? Can things be laid down if they no longer serve? (Expect resistance)
- Do we believe that YAF=Energy=New life? How does that impact the way the Meeting interacts with new attenders?

Next steps

- Focus our nominating process on *individual gifts* vs. committee needs, and the vital work we do.
- Create opportunities to know each other better. Interest groups, retreats, art nights, dinners...
- Use our website, and social media, to share **who we are and what we do.**
- Create a pamphlet for newcomers with a statement about who we are, and a schedule of regularly occurring events.



Be Accessible

People feel new for a VERY long time. **How can we make it easy to join in?**

Multiple barriers hinder how people access what our Meetings have to offer:

- Childcare
- Lack of time
- Money
- Fear of making commitments
- Lack of information

Queries

- How can newcomers, and seasoned members, easily participate in the life of our meeting?
- Do we have child care standard at *every* function? Can families choose to attend last minute?
- Do events happen at times other than Sunday mornings to make it easier for families, students, (and other exhausted people) to attend?

Next Steps

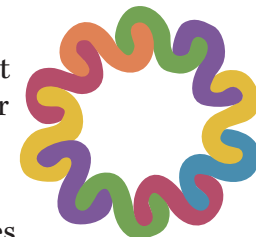
- Host events that are “pay as led,” and low pressure. Make sure the process is easy, does not require asking for financial aid and is equally available to all.
- Make sure our website and media presence is current, informational and appealing.
- Schedule regularly occurring events, for different lengths of times, on different days of the week.

Reimagine Involvement

When a new YAF or a family shows up, it's natural to want to get them involved in the work of the meeting quickly. Even if we are tired and need support, *we are whole and vital.* It is important to be patient, get to know *them*, and their gifts, before even starting to think about how they fit into our committee structure.

Queries

- What does “being involved” mean to me? Our meeting?
- What can *we* do to help use individual gifts in the life of the meeting?
- Can we let go of things that no one wants to do? (easier said than done)
- Can someone who is at a transient stage in their lives be involved in meaningful ways?



Next Steps

- Keep things simple. If it requires too much from the organizers it cannot be *sustained*, and participants will select out.
- Organize events that anyone of any age/ability can do: Work days, hospitality, community service, vigils...
- Schedule regularly occurring meeting events so they are predictable. If someone can't make one, they know when there will be another.
- Provide easy options about how to participate in meeting life, regardless of age. Don't have a dish to contribute? *How about helping with set up and clean up?* Can only come to half of an event? *Can you take photos with your cell phone and email us the pictures?*