

Journeys in the Spirit

inward outward upward downward

Issue 23

January 2009



Children

Turning the Tide

Nonviolence training and children

This children's work edition of "Journeys in the Spirit" comes out monthly. It offers resources and ideas to Quakers engaging with children aged 4 –12 years in a Quaker setting. It is offered with the intention of providing an opportunity for exploring, creating and learning in an atmosphere of worship in partnership on our shared journey in the spirit.

Included are sections on: **getting ready**, for those co-ordinating the programme; **gather**, meeting, centering, focusing: **engage**, beginning to think about the theme; **respond**, activities linked to the theme; **reflect**, ending appropriately; and **review**, evaluating what has happened. To offer a balanced session you should aim to do something from each section. Some of the activities are included on additional sheets. Timings or ages are not stated, as this will depend on the group and how the guidance and activities are used.

Underpinning each issue is the idea that there are four directions to our spiritual journey. **Inwards** to ourselves; **outwards** to others; **upwards** towards God, the deeper mystery; **downwards** to the world we live in.



The fifteenth in the series exploring Quakers: a people of God: being and doing

Getting ready

In our meetings for worship and private times with God, we receive an idea of how the world should be. We become clear that we should treat all things with care, respect and fairness. We shouldn't hurt or kill each other.

Yet when we look at the world, we see the opposite happening. Why is it that God tells us one thing and we humans do the other? How can we be how God wants us to be in a world that seems to disregard all that? How can we turn the tide?

Being a Quaker is about strengthening our connection with God, striving to become a better person and being able to relate on a deep level to the world and other people. It is also about being part of a divine effort to heal the world and turn it to how God would have it be. And that is about going out into the world and being a nonviolent soldier for God.

Early Quakers understood this very well. They talked of "putting on the armour of Christ" and fighting "the Lamb's War". They renounced "outward" or "carnal" weapons – physical weapons that harm and kill people, but were clear that they would use "weapons of the spirit", like love, truth and justice. Those early Quakers were very controversial in their day, and society disliked and rejected them. Many were beaten up, persecuted, imprisoned and even killed because of their beliefs and actions. Although we use different language today, some Quakers are still led to take nonviolent action for justice and peace. And this causes them to be controversial, disliked and imprisoned.

Underpinning references and information

"Respect the laws of the state but let your first loyalty be to God's purposes. If you feel impelled by strong conviction to break the law, search your conscience deeply. Ask your meeting for the prayerful support which will give you strength as a right way becomes clear."

Advices & Queries 35

Gather

Ask one or two children to be elders of the children's meeting. Explain what this involves.

Prepare the room beforehand in a way that is different from any other time - in a state that the group may not like, perhaps place a very big box or other obstacle(s) in the room, arrange chairs and cushions very untidily – maybe overturned, facing different directions. The idea is to pose a problem which is preventing you from gathering and for the group to respond to the problem.

When everyone is in ask what should be done about the room arrangement. Talk about possible changes and ask everyone to sort out the room. Once the group has arranged the room to its liking welcome everyone and congratulate them on overcoming the problem.

Place an object like a stone or stick in the centre and explain that this is a talking-object. When someone is holding it nobody else should speak. Ask everyone to use the silence to reflect on how they felt when they first came into the room and, importantly, why they felt like that, what they wanted to do when they saw the room and how they feel now. Once the group has settled into silence everyone has an opportunity to pick up the object, say their name and share their reflections, returning the object to the centre when they have finished with it. Make it clear that it is OK to pass. Settle into silence. End the session when it feels right to do so.

Engage

Expressing our feelings

After the initial gathering and talking object sharing, remain in the circle, but ask the group to stand. Ask them to remember how they said they had felt both upon entering the messy room and after arranging it for the meeting.

Then ask them to remember times when they have seen things, witnessed situations that they wanted to change. Specifically ask them to think, if they can, of situations of unfairness, injustice, cruelty, unkindness, hurt or violence. Give a few moments for this.

Ask everyone to describe in turn the feeling they are remembering. The person to the right of the one talking has to use their body or their face or both to show what the feeling might look like. This may lead to lots of laughs and making connections between the effects of justice and injustice on our emotions.

Respond

The Respond section activities are linked. They begin with an opportunity to think and choose for oneself about a personal or social concern. There are then two examples of people acting to prevent or undo an injustice and tell the world about it – one Quaker and one about Jesus.

References

Knowing what to say:

“On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say”

Matthew 10:18-19

Paying Taxes to Caesar?

Read Matthew 22:15-22



References

“My charge is that I entered a protected area without authority or permission. My claim is that I had authority – the authority of my Christian conviction that a gospel of love cannot be defended by the threatened annihilation of millions of innocent people. It can never be morally right to use these ghastly weapons at any time ...”

Quaker Faith & Practice 24.27

Mark 11:15-18

Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And He began to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN." The chief priests and the scribes heard this, and began seeking how to destroy Him; for they were afraid of Him, for the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.

1. What would you do? See Sheet 23.A.

Tell the group that you are going to give them a situation that they might find themselves in. Say that you are going to ask them to think about what they would do. Emphasise that there is no right or wrong answer, but it's important to know that we all have choices. You are going to suggest 4 different responses to the situation and ask them to go to the one they think is closest to what they think or feel.

If anyone feels they'd respond in a way not covered by the four options, they stand in the middle.

Choose a scenario from the list on *Sheet 23.A* and read it out. Each person goes to 1,2,3,4 or the middle. Ask each person why they chose that place. Then ask someone else why they chose that one and so on. Encourage discussion. Reflect back on key points you have heard in discussion. Don't make a judgment yourself. Choose a different scenario and do it again.



2. What would you like to do? Planning your own action.

See *Sheet 23.B*. This could be used as follow-on from the 'What would you do?' exercise, perhaps when you next meet – there may not be time to do both in one session.

3. Monica and Paul – stopping bombs.

See *Sheets 23.C & D*. In advance of the story set out the room with a range of lovely art and craft materials. Let everybody walk around a bit looking at what is available for later. Make sure everyone is comfortable and then read the true story on the sheets. When the story is finished, give three matchsticks or tokens to each person. Explain that the matchsticks represent three opportunities for everyone to speak. When someone wishes to speak about their responses to the story, they throw a matchstick into the centre. When their third matchstick has been thrown in they have no more opportunities to speak. Nobody has to speak if they don't want to.

4. Jesus and the Money Changers.

See *Sheets 23.E & F* and quotation in sidebar.

This is a story about saying, 'this is wrong'. Jesus is angry and acts on it. He also knows that other people will see what he has done – he is sending a message about the kingdom of heaven on earth. It's tough, risky and OK. The acting out of this story offers a way to get inside and explore the issues of what happens when someone, any of us, says no to an injustice and yes to a nonviolent way of acting.



Reflect

Yes we can

Bring everybody back together into a still circle. Be still for a little while. Ask if anyone would like to say something they have liked about the meeting or that they found hard. Listen and then say, 'we are all small but we can all help, in little or big ways, to

make our world better and we don't have to hurt other people to do that. Everybody then stands up in a circle facing inwards, puts their right hand on the shoulder of the person next to them and gives them a pat on the back for whatever they have done in the meeting. If you are able to, make and give each person a yes we can label or badge

Review

The review can happen at the time or later – it maybe by yourself or with others. Some useful questions for the use of volunteers to look back over and learn from the session include:

Have children been able to participate in their own way? What went well and why? Has each child been able to reflect, even a little, on something about her or his ability to act to change the world whilst being nonviolent and strong? What is there to learn from this session? What might you do differently another time?

Topical activity

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the son of peace to you.

This is a poem with roots in Celtic culture. It states and invites connection to the depth and power of creation – of love, power, beauty and truth. In January we stand at the beginning of a new year and half way through winter. It is a moment when we wish one another well for the coming year.

Use the poem as a way to offer greetings and share in the bigger blessings of the world we are in – sea, air, earth, stars and the potential for peace. Read the poem out loud – give out copies. Begin a conversation about each line – I wonder what that means; I wonder what that feels like to you.

Have A4 sheets of white or black card, a wide variety of coloured tissue or craft paper, scissors and glue sticks. Build a picture using torn or cut strips of paper to represent the different parts of the poem stuck in layers across the card – maybe start with the waves at the bottom? Finished cards can be given as greetings.

Links to other organisations and resources

www.quaker.org.uk/cyp and click on Ideas Store

www.quaker.org.uk/cyp - the Quaker Life Resources Room can be found via this link - phone and email for resources on the contact details below.

www.turning-the-tide.org/ for the Yearly Meeting nonviolence training programme

www.quaker.org.uk/qpsw for lots about Quaker peace work and nonviolence

This issue was written by Steve Whiting of Quaker Peace and Social Witness and edited by Chris Nickolay who also wrote the additional activity. Jamie Farrell took the 'Angels' photo' Sheet 23.B

The next children's issue of *Journeys in the Spirit*, issue 24, is a second issue on Quaker work in South Asia, available February 2nd 2009. The final issue of this series, number 25, will be on Belonging and Joining, available March 2nd 2009.

Ways for all ages to connect with each other around the theme of being Quaker and acting nonviolently include:

The Jesus and the money changers activity; planning an action identified by the children.

and remember.....



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