

The Youth Ministries Committee

Report to Central Committee

October 2006

The Youth Ministries Committee (YMC) has had a busy first year. Last fall, Central Committee acted on the recommendations of the Youth Ministries Discernment Committee (YMDC) and launched the YMC with program recommendations and a number of concerns, but no specific committee charge. Our energy was initially focused on two equally important tasks:

- Developing a committee that was responsive to the concern for balance—of age, sexual orientation, gender, race, rural/urban, etc while maintaining a functional size and
- Clarifying the initial scope of our work.

The first step occurred last year at Central Committee when many who were interested in the work of this fledgling committee met together with those members of the YMDC who wanted to continue the work, and representatives of the nominating committee. In that gathering, we discussed our desire to be open to Friends feeling led to serve on the committee while also wanting to address a concern for representing diversity on as many criteria as possible. We also noted the importance of maintaining a concern for youth (in terms of programs and membership) in all of the committees of FGC and thus urged people already serving on another committee to consider carefully whether membership in the YMC was indeed their best way of carrying the work forward. For some it was and for others they have remained on or joined other committees within the FGC structure, still maintaining a concern for youth ministry in all its forms. Many people remain very interested in the work of the YMC and wish to be engaged or informed in some way.

Potential members discerned their leadings, a committee was formed and a 2 day a week staff member (Emily Stewart) was hired. Even before our first meeting, we shared the desire that the committee have co-clerks, one to be a young adult (i.e. under 35) or Young Friend and the other to be an older adult (i.e. Over 35) Friend or that the Assistant Clerk be a younger Friend. This speaks to our recognized need that our process for functioning as a group should reflect our vision of supporting and encouraging ministry for, of, about, and with youth. We have acted on this desire and find that it does inform and enrich our work together.

We held our first committee meeting on a snowy weekend in February, and began to envision what our work would be and how we would function as a group. Building on priorities developed by the YMDC, as well as attending to the moving of Spirit among us, the committee identified three major areas of work that we feel led to carry forth at this time:

1. Traveling in the Ministry
2. Conferences
3. Outreach and Communications

We even instituted what are becoming traditions (if one can have traditions after two meetings!) including spending time in retreat in order to create a spiritual base for our work together; creating opportunities (fun and serious) for deepening our knowledge of each other; and spending Saturday evenings in fellowship with members of the meetings where we have worked, learning about their activities and concerns related to youth ministries and sharing our vision of the work.

These areas of focus have provided a fertile substrate upon which we have begun to fashion our activities and intentions during this year and for the coming year. The YMC recognizes that all FGC committees and members are doing pieces of youth focused work, and we welcome opportunities to collaborate with other committees. Recognizing that we cannot undertake all at once, we further refined our priorities at our June meeting. These include:

1. Join the Traveling Ministries Program in the planning of the TMP consultation for November 2006.

2. Develop a website for younger Friends.
3. Have a presence at the 2007 Gathering (including possibly leading a workshop on intergenerational community and lifting up concerns of the committee; bringing in more youth art into the various music and art galleries and supporting efforts to have younger Friends as plenary speakers.)
4. Work with the Committee for Ministry on Racism on the March 2008 conference (including framing content about exploring other transformative spiritual experiences for YF/YAF as well as helping to plan the conference).
5. Gather more information about the best format, timing, and content for a YMC sponsored youth worker retreat.
6. Distribute surveys to Young Friends, Young Adult Friends and monthly meetings to find out how meetings are supporting their young people.

At the 2006 Gathering of Friends, we were pleased to talk with Friends who had a potential interest in our work and to introduce the committee to others who were learning of it for the first time. Members of our committee presented the work of the YMC to the High School and Young Adult Friends Meetings for worship with a concern for business, and distributed Frisbees, T-shirts and mini bumper stickers with our slogan: “Quaker Youth: Speak Thy Truth”. Two members of the committee, with the support of a Friend from outside the committee, led an intergenerational interest group at the Gathering.

As we engage in conversation—face to face and virtual—we continue to hear of the many concerns and ideas regarding the focus and scope of action of the YMC. We have many ideas and know of many important efforts underway already at the monthly meeting, yearly meeting, and regional level, but also feel clear not to take on more than we can do. As a young committee, we have much still to learn about ourselves, our functioning as a group, and the best way to interact in the existing FGC committee structure.

One way we are responding to this challenge is through information gathering and sharing via the website www.Quakeryouth.org which contains a wealth of information, provides space for exploring faith through discussion boards, and has a calendar where Friends can post opportunities for worship, conferences and fellowship. Friends can also put their photographs of Quaker events online for everyone to share. Since it was launched in July, there have been more than 3,698 visits to the site, and over 32,043 pages viewed. This means that people who visit the site look at a lot of the pages. We are expecting that the website will provide a home for informational “white papers” about intergenerational community building and best practices. Both at the Gathering, and also on the website, we have been looking to better understand both the needs and the best practices of our Society as we relate to our Young Friends and Young Adult Friends.

Another way we are gathering this information is through a survey for Young Friends and Young Adult Friends which are both posted on the website, and a survey for monthly meetings to fill out about how they support their young people. The survey for monthly meetings went out in the FGC fall mailing to over 800 monthly meetings. The mailing also included a list of Queries for meetings asking them to look at how they are supporting their youth, a YM brochure, a flyer for the website, Young Quakes materials, and suggested books for younger Friends from the bookstore.

The committee is blessed with ample enthusiasm and passion for the recognition of the many gifts our youth bring to our Society and for the dedication of the members of our committee who are engaged in a number of endeavors relevant to the committee’s mandate in their personal lives. We are learning how to harness that energy and focus it in ways that make it more accessible to others. We recognize that there are many directions for our work and know that we can only focus on one direction at a time. We feel the blessings of the Spirit as we move toward realizing our goal of a more whole and balanced community of Friends in which we all benefit from the recognition that gifts are not necessarily distributed with attention to age or other outward demographic characteristics. Our goal is to enhance our ability to listen and learn from the voices and leadings of all Friends.

Co-Clerks: Maia Carter Hallward & Jean-Marie Barch