

# *Suggestions for Organizing and Facilitating Quaker Adult Religious Education Programs*

It can be of considerable benefit to carefully consider how one plans and announces different classes or forums within the life of the meeting. Often, the leaders will pick the date, time, and location of a class and then announce the details to the meeting. It can be useful and appropriate to have certain conventions for when these types of activities usually take place, such as monthly forums after meeting for worship, or bi-weekly Friday evenings after potluck. This regularity can encourage more consistent participation within the meeting.

Some leaders, though, have found that it can be important and helpful to approach scheduling adult education in a very different way. The leader can announce a forum or class to be offered to the meeting and request that anyone interested come together for a few minutes after announcements in order to find a date, time, and location. This can draw out individuals who are interested in adult religious education, but who have been unable to attend events for some reason. This can be especially important as a tool for reaching newcomers to meeting as it signals welcome and inclusion to all attenders.

The different realities of small meetings versus large meetings also need to be considered. In a large meeting, it is possible to simply offer programs that the adult religious education committee has discerned may fit the needs of the meeting. It is likely then that interested persons will come forward when the class is announced. The adult religious education committee can try to offer a range of different programs to fit the different needs of members and attenders.

In a small meeting, there are often not enough people interested in or drawn to “early Friends” or “Bible study” or “Quakerism 101” for an individual to offer a class devoted to one such topic. It may be necessary instead for participants to agree together on a theme or course of study. Sometimes it is helpful to create a rotation of different topics. Each person can share their interests with the meeting in a rotation so that the diversity of interests can become an opportunity for others to sample and stretch towards new experiences.

Finally, it is necessary for facilitators to consider what kinds of experiences they imagine for the group during the class or forum. They also need to consider how they hope to encourage and support such experiences. For example, does the facilitator imagine a more intellectual discussion of ideas or a deeper, more personal sharing of spiritual experiences? It is not that one is better than the other, but that individuals will likely become confused and frustrated if different assumptions exist among the group. The facilitator can communicate his or her intentions for the group by being explicit about the guidelines that frame the group interaction. Before beginning an ongoing course of study, it may be helpful for all participants to formulate or agree on a common vision and covenant together how they will interact in the study.

The Religious Education Committee of Friends General Conference provides two different sets of guidelines that can support small groups in creating and maintaining a safe and supportive environment for either discussion or deeper spiritual sharing. (These are entitled *Suggested Guidelines for Discussion Groups* and *Suggested Guidelines for Worship Sharing*.) We invite facilitators to

use these sets of guidelines by sharing them with groups that they are facilitating and reviewing them with the group before participating in discussions or Spirit-led worship sharing.

## **An Additional Aid for Facilitators and/or Group Participants**

We offer these questions as an optional resource for facilitators and/or group participants. They may be used to help focus facilitators in planning a course and/or as a tool for group discussion or sharing in the opening session.

- What do you do or say within the meeting community that signals welcome and inclusion? How have you been welcomed and included? Where are the opportunities in this particular group for greater welcome, inclusion and connection?
- What does safety in an adult group look and feel like? What might you do to help create or maintain a sense of safety? What are some healthy ways to respond should situations arise that clearly compromise or threaten the group's safety?
- As you consider gathering with other adults within the meeting community, for what does your heart long? What are you hungry for?

