

New Meetings Project: Newer Meetings Survey 2013 Findings

Overview

FGC's New Meetings Project (NMP) goals include developing a systematic, disciplined, and highly replicable model for helping Friends to nurture the creation of new, vibrant Quaker meetings and worship groups across the U.S. and Canada and developing resources to help such meetings and worship groups thrive. As such, we wanted to learn from meetings/worship groups that had been established recently. Toward that end, the NMP conducted a survey of meetings/worship groups founded from 2002 to 2013 so that we could learn from their experiences.

The survey consisted of a number of steps:

- 1) We asked FGC affiliated yearly meetings for the names and contact information of any meeting or worship group in their yearly meeting that had been formed since 2002
- 2) We posted a request for similar information on various blogs, Facebook, and via other social media.
- 3) We reviewed the lists to eliminate duplicate entries, meetings or groups that we found had been formed prior to 2002, and other such information. We ended up with a "clean" list of around 80 new worship groups or meetings.
- 4) Simultaneously we were developing an electronic survey that would be sent to the meetings. Once the list was clean and the survey was ready, we sent email invitations to all the meetings worship groups on the list, we posted announcements of the survey on FGC's website, FGC's Facebook page, and other Facebook and social media pages.
- 5) We received 35 responses to the survey. We published a summary of those survey results in May 2013.
- 6) We then designed, with the assistance of Mike Holaday of Grand Rapids Friends Meeting (LEYM), a "in-depth" interview protocol that we wanted to use in going deeper with a set number of meetings. We then invited ten meetings/worship groups to participate. XX participated.

We think the knowledge we gained from these surveys will be invaluable to people wishing to start new Quaker meetings and worship groups.

Electronic Survey

Survey Questions

Below are the questions that were asked in the electronic survey

- Name of Meeting or Worship Group
- Address of meeting or worship group (street, city, state or province)
- Primary Contact's name
- Which of these organizations do you have an official affiliation with? Check all that apply
- Name of Yearly Meeting or Group Affiliated With
- Is your meeting or worship group under the care of another meeting?
- What is the name of the group which has taken your meeting or worship group under its care?
- How far away is the nearest Friends meeting or worship group to your group?
- What year did your group start meeting?
- What were the factors leading to the formation of your group?
- Composition at start (check all that apply)
- Composition now (check all that apply)
- Ethnicities at start (check all that apply)
- Ethnicities now (check all that apply)
- Attendance at start
- Attendance now
- Current number of children and youth
- Age range of children: (check all that apply)

- Childcare provided during worship?
- Where do you gather for worship?
- Does your worship group or meeting:
- What is the primary day you meet for worship?
- What time do you meet for worship?
- Do you meet for worship on other days and times?
- Type of worship -- check all that apply
- How would you describe the frequency of your group's vocal ministry
- How would you characterize the quality of your group's worship (select all that apply)
- On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "struggling" and 5 is "thriving," how would you describe your group?
- What programs does your group offer its members and attenders? (select all that apply)
- How has your group witnessed in your local community? (select all that apply)
- Do you do outreach activities?
- Does your group identify persons to serve in the following roles? (select all that apply)
- Do you have meetings for worship for business?
- If yes, how often are they held?
- How do you handle money?
- What have you found most helpful as your group got started? (Ex: Support from others, resources (books, media), financial assistance, visiting Friends, etc.)
- What has been your group's biggest challenge?
- What else would you like us to know about your group that we haven't asked?
- May we contact your group for a follow-up interview?

Summary from the 2013 Newer Meetings Survey

While 35 surveys were returned, not all of the results total 35. That is because not every groups gave a response to every question and some questions allowed multiple responses.

At the start:

- 32 had Experienced Friends present
- 16 had New Friends
- 17 had Seekers

Currently:

- 33 have Experienced Friends present
- 23 have New Friends
- 22 have Seekers

Ethnicities at start:

- White = 31
- Black = 2
- Hispanic = 2
- Asian/Pacific Islander = 1

Ethnicities now:

- White = 32
- Black = 2
- Hispanic = 3
- Asian/Pacific Islander = 4

Affiliation

- Yearly Meeting = 19
- Unaffiliated = 16

Under the care of another Meeting

- Yes = 11
- No = 24

Located

Canada	USA	
AB	AK	NM
BC	CA	OH
NB	CO	OK (2)
ON	DC	PA (3)
SK	IN (3)	TX
	MA (2)	VA (2)
	MO	WI
	NC (2)	WV

Nearest Friends Meeting

- 0-5 miles = 14
- 6-10 = 2
- 11-20 = 2
- 20-50 miles = 6
- 51-100 miles = 5
- 100+ miles = 4

Reason for forming:

- No meeting in town (6)
- Distance to another meeting (6)
- To reach new Friends (6)
- Have a Christ-centered group (4)
- Discord (2)
- Against Iraq War (2)

Attendance at start:

- 2 - 5 = 10
- 6 - 10 = 12
- 11 - 50 = 3

Attendance now:

- 2 - 5 = 6
- 6 - 10 = 7
- 11 - 20 = 13
- 20 - 75 = 3

Where they meet:

- Commercial/non-profit space = 11
- Meetinghouse/church = 8
- A home = 7
- Various homes = 6

When they meet:

- Sunday = 25
- Other days = 10

What time they meet:

- Morning = 20
- Afternoon/early evening = 13

Type of worship:

- Unprogrammed = 28
- Semi-programmed = 4
- Programmed = 1

Vocal Ministry:

- Frequent = 7
- Little = 11
- Some = 12

Quality of worship:

- Vital = 13
- Spirit filled = 9
- Deep = 6
- Lacking = 5
- Okay = 2

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is "struggling" and 5 is "thriving," how would you describe your group

- 1 = 3
- 2 = 6
- 3 = 11
- 4 = 10
- 5 = 5

What programs offered to members and attenders:

- None = 10
- Religious education = 8
- Spiritual sharing, etc = 7
- Book/pamphlet studies = 6
- Bible studies = 3

Witness in the local community:

- Food pantries/shelters = 8
- None = 14
- Peace Vigils = 8
- Social Justice = 6
- Other = 6

Outreach Activities:

- Ads in newspapers = 4
- QuakerFinder listing = 17
- Meeting website = 17
- Facebook page = 11
- Outdoor sign = 12
- News releases = 5

Official roles:

- Clerk = 18
- Recording Clerk = 12
- Treasurer = 17
- None = 11
- Other = 5

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business:

- Yes = 25
- No = 10

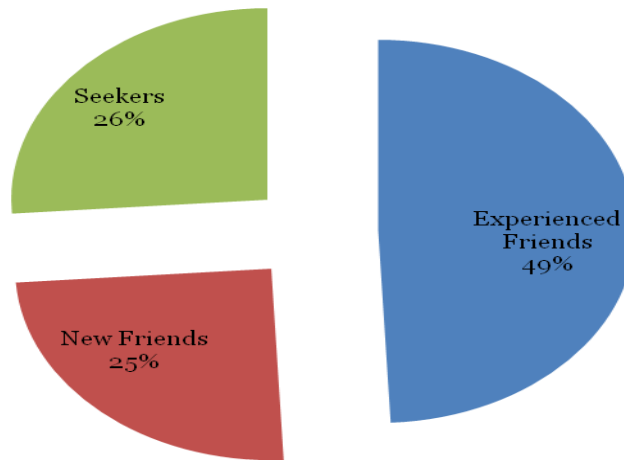
Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business meets:

- Monthly = 12
- Every 2-3 months = 4
- As needed = 3

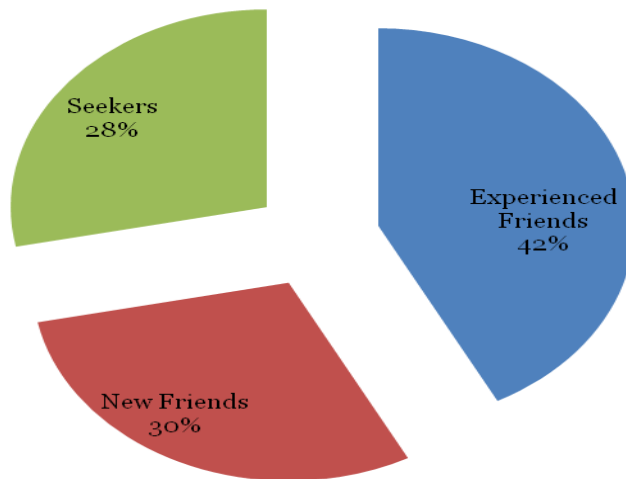
Group Finances:

- Donations/contributions = 23
- No finances = 11
- Treasurer's report = 17
- Annual budget = 8

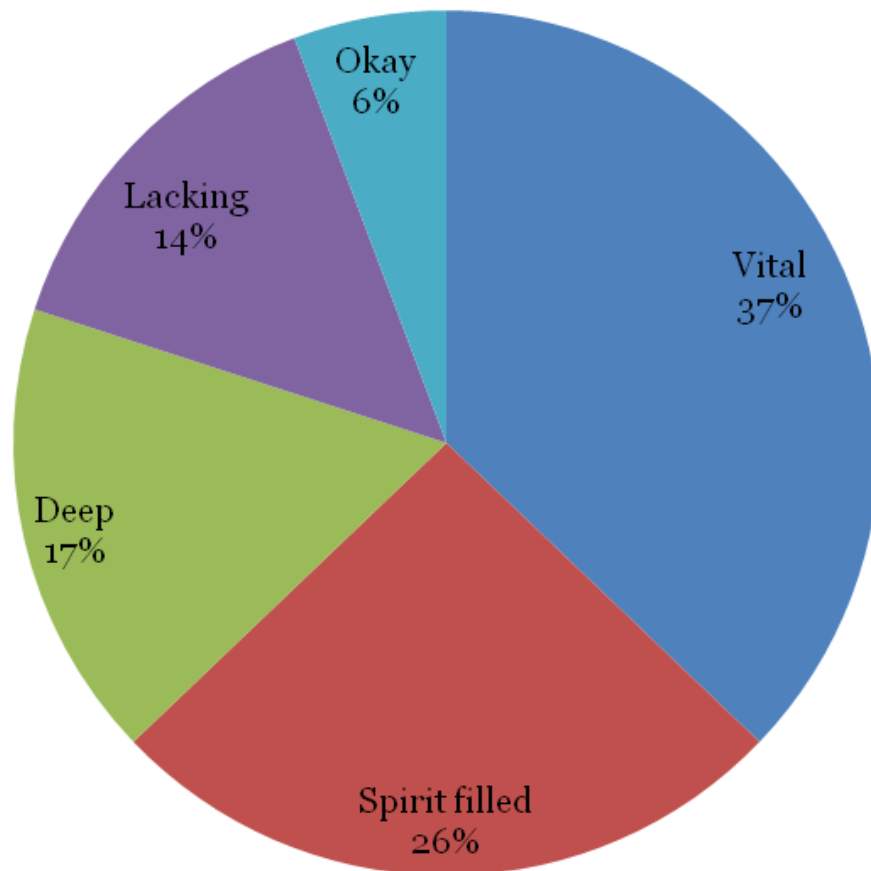
At Start



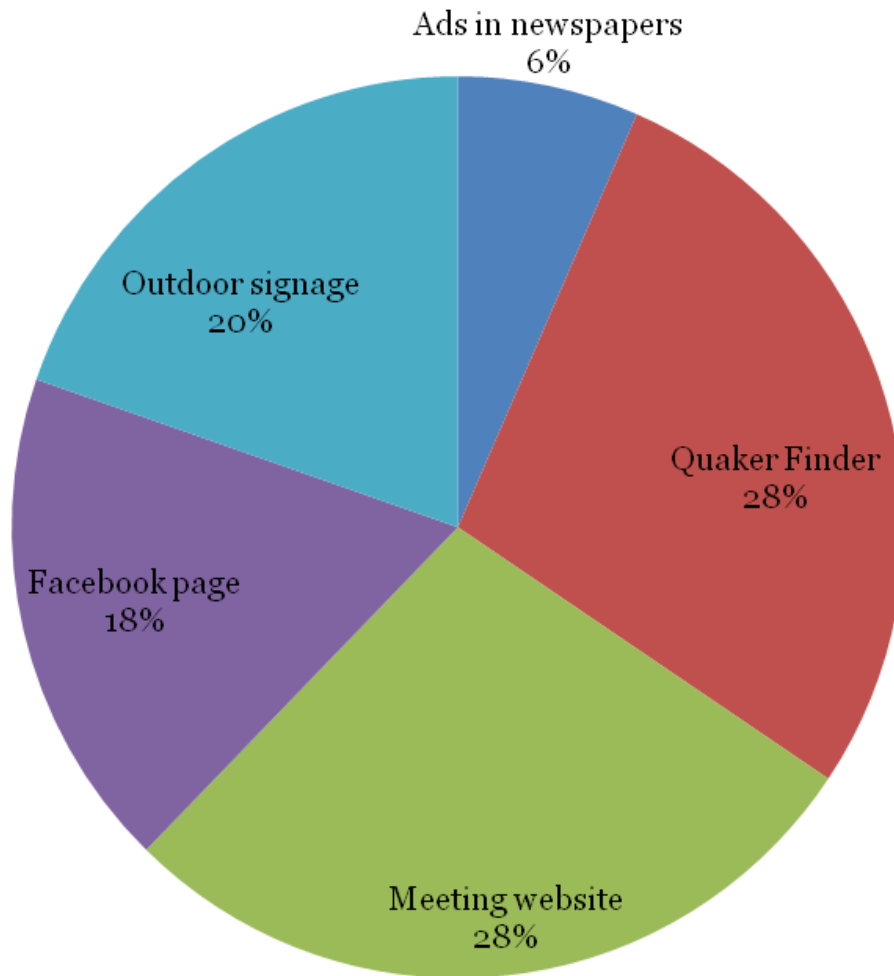
Now



Quality of Worship



Outreach Activities



What newer groups found most helpful as they started

The following are representative comments made by respondents to the survey.

- A committed group of people who are creative and long to see the work succeed
- Becoming a spiritual community
- Books on Quaker process and history
- Coming under the care of another Friends meeting
- Conducting outreach activities (i.e. Quakerism 101, website, news releases, etc)
- Connections to and support from wider Friends groups (neighboring monthly meetings, yearly meeting, FGC).
- Consistency of attendance by a core group of people
- Fellowship and meals together
- Finding quiet and peaceful places in which to worship
- Media resources
- Not having the usual meeting obligations of building and finances
- Participation and experience gained from AFSC Eyes Wide Open project
- QuakerBooks of FGC
- Resources for newcomers
- Seasoned Friends living in the area who attend and share their wisdom
- Support from FGC's New Meetings Project
- Visiting Friends

Newer Groups Biggest Challenges

The following are representative comments made by respondents to the survey.

- Acquainting new attendees with Quaker process in both worship and business.
- Attracting families with children
- Attracting/retaining attenders
- Conflict between attendees
- Convincing people that Quakers are not a cult but a religion
- Disagreements over God's purpose for the group
- Facilitating the communication and exposure of new attendees to a larger group of seasoned Quakers.
- Finances
- Finding a good and stable location to meet
- Finding/connecting with those who would like to join us
- Getting to know each other better.
- Having no experienced or seasoned Friend near to us
- Insularity
- Keeping Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business a Spirit-Led experience in the manner of Friends – helping new Friends understand the process
- Knowing to when or if to associate with a larger Friends group (i.e. yearly meeting affiliation)
- Lack of consistent interest and attendance
- Lack of Quaker materials and an umbrella organization or at least a full time designated consultant person to advise and assist meetings with their First Day School programs.
- Lack of support by other Friends (i.e. yearly meeting, nearby monthly meetings)

- Rigidity and resistance to new ideas from the entrenched leadership of the parent Quaker Meeting
- Sharing the workload of starting a new group
- Small number of members/attenders
- Tendency for some new attendees to try to change the meetings Quaker practices so they resemble what the attendees had experienced with other religious group.
- Too few young adult members

What else did newer groups want the New Meetings Project to know about their groups that we did not ask.

The following are representative comments made by respondents to the survey.

- As an outreach tool, we are very activist. We have many peace/social justice events
- Community is a hard calling
- Our strength is that there is a sense of Spiritual community
- The group looks much different than it did at the beginning
- We always have food and fellowship after Worship and find we've become a very nurturing community
- We are hoping to develop an outreach program, probably Quaker Quest, in the future, to attract younger people and newcomers to Friends' ways.
- We have varying spiritual backgrounds and spiritual paths.
- We hope to develop an adult education program
- We're hopeful!
- We're quite young and still growing so honestly things are good
- I don't believe I heard a question about what is valued most, what holds us together. I believe the answer to that is the deep worship we experience; the opportunities to learn about Spirit, in whatever form, from one another; the love we feel for one another having spent such intimate time together in small group settings over years; the radical hospitality that allows us to welcome newcomers and parts of ourselves that we may regularly leave at the door in other places; the fluidity with which we adapt to meet

individual and shared needs; and our commitment to participation as one is led with no expectations for minimum requirements which may be accompanied by feeling of obligation and resentment.

Newer Meetings Survey In-depth Interviews

Protocol

The following protocol was developed for conducting the in-depth interviews. Two Friends conducted each interview. One Friend served as the interviewer and the other served as the recorder. We told respondents that each interview should last no longer than 40 minutes if with a group or 20 minutes if with an individual. Interviewers were urged to keep the interviewee(s) “on task” in order to ensure that all questions get asked in the time allotted.

The interviews stuck primarily to the interview questions below. The interviewers were allowed to ask “expanding” questions (ex: “Can you tell me more about ...?”) but not ask additional questions in new subject areas.

We asked the recorder to, as much as possible, record verbatim answers to the questions. Electronic recording of the interviews was allowed, so long as the interviewee(s) agreed. Interviewers were invited to include any impressions they had at the end of the written interview. Transcripts of the interview were sent to brentbil@fgcquaker.org within three days of the interview.

The Interview Script

“Thank you for taking my call. The New Meetings Project asked you to speak with us today because your group has been identified as one from whom we might learn some things about starting a new Quaker meeting or worship group. Our research project focuses on learning positive practices and avoiding pitfalls in starting new groups. This study is not about evaluating your group’s techniques or experiences. What we learn will be used to develop resources that support the seeding and nurturing of new Quaker groups.

“This interview will take 40 minutes (group)/20 minutes (individual). We can go a bit longer if you desire, but I will do my best to keep us to that time limit.”

Before you ask the questions, please get the names and roles (clerk, attendee, etc) of the person(s) being interviewed.

- 1) Please tell me how your group got started.
 - a. If needed, probe for more information by asking questions about:
 - i. Reasons for starting
 - ii. Who was involved in starting (a group; an individual)
 - iii. What were the key tasks in starting and who did them

- iv. Timeline to present
- 2) What challenges did you face in starting the group?
- 3) What do know now that you wish you would have known prior to starting the group?
- 4) If the New Meetings Project would have existed when you started, what sort of support and/or resources would have been helpful?
 - a. People?
 - b. Books, pamphlets, media?
 - c. Types of advice (technical, spiritual, etc?)
- 5) What is one thing you think the New Meetings Project should know about new groups that are just starting?
- 6) What one resource would be of most use to you now at this point in your development as a meeting or worship group? This could be something that FGC already has available, or something that we could develop in the future.

Recording the Interview

Please record the name of the group, the date of the interview, and the names and roles of the interviewee(s).

Record the answers to the questions.

Then consult with interviewer and see if you can reach consensus on the following two questions:

- 1) What was the best quote that came out of the interview?
- 2) What was the best story that came out of the interview?

Newer Meetings Interview Narratives

Friends participating as interviewers or recorders included Brent Bill, Deborah Fisch, Connie McPeak Green, Mike Holaday, and Merry Stanford.

Interview – Circleville Worship Group, Circleville, Ohio

Interviewee: Brad Cotton, Convener, Circleville Worship Group

Interviewer: Mike Holaday

Recorder: Merry Stanford

Interview date: June 25, 2013

Please tell me how your group got started.

Brad was raised a Quaker, growing up just north of Philadelphia. His parents are Wendon and Marie Cotton, who now convene the Sydney, Ohio Worship Group which is part of Broadmead Meeting (LEYM.) Brad stopped attending Quaker meeting at 18 and then he and his wife became active in a Nazarene church that had lots of kids.

While attending church in September 2004, a video of tanks rolling across the Iraqi desert was shown and President Bush was compared a modern day Joshua, going into Iraq to bring the Christian message. Immediately afterward, Brad put an ad in the paper to see if anyone was interested in Quaker meeting. One person expressed interest and they we started meeting. They now have a regular attendance of four to six regular, faithful people, sometimes as many as ten.

What challenges did you face in starting the group?

One challenge was keeping the group going. They've been a very public worship group in spite of being small. They are active in the community, hosting the AFSC's "Eyes Wide Open" exhibit four times on county courthouse steps. From 2005- through 2010, starting in 2005, they sponsored weekly "Honk for Peace" vigils. They've sponsored forums on health care reform, which is a personal passion of Brad's (as an ER physician). They have put white crosses on the courthouse steps to demonstrate the number of Ohioans who die each year as result of no health insurance. They keep their protests in tone with Quaker testimonies. Some of their attendees have come to meeting after seeing the activism at the courthouse.

They have good quality of quiet worship lasting about half an hour. They have discussion time afterward. The hard parts include outreach, letting people know we are here, that we are an alternative faith community, and retaining folks who attend.

Where are you meeting now?

"We are probably the only Quaker group who can say we meet in the waiting room of a hair salon!"

What do you know now that you wish you would have known prior to starting the group?

What a challenge it would be. There was a three-month period where Brad was the sole attendee and ready to give up. But then another person began attending and the group continued. It has grown from there. The new person now does their website www.circlevillefriendsworshipgroup.org.

If the New Meetings Project would have existed when you started, what sort of support and/or resources would have been helpful?

Knowing that there was such a thing as the NMP would have been helpful. When Circleville Friends started, they used Quakerfinder website and got in touch with North Columbus Meeting and Mathilda Navias from Lake Erie Yearly Meeting (Mathilda was clerk of Advancement and Outreach at the time.) Mathilda came and visited and helped get the group under the care of North Columbus and then under Athens. Except for Mathilda's work, they have felt a lack of support from the wider Quaker community.

It sounds like the kind of support you needed most was support in the way of visits, one-on-one contact, and moral support, rather than materials?

"Yes."

Would those other kinds of things have been useful also? Books, pamphlets, advice ...?

Books, pamphlets, etc. might be helpful to other new groups. Their groups have the economic means to obtain such materials.

What about the state tax system regarding charitable organizations. Would advice in that regard be useful?

The group does not have formal 501 (c)(3) tax status. They may want to pursue it if they grow. Such advice might be helpful in the future.

So at some time you might like help with how to progress from a worship group to a meeting?

The group might be interested with assistance in this area. The Athens meeting has been helpful in this area. Feeling a lack of support applied up until the group came under the care of Athens Friends Meeting. They wish that arrangement had been set up earlier.

What is one thing you think the New Meetings Project should know about new groups that are just starting?

Support a new group right away. Though they are an active public testimony meeting and “stick with what Quakers actually are,” there was a tendency with some of their attenders that spoke often, to be more like a discussion group. They put together some guidelines in a brochure.

What one resource would be of most use to you now at this point in your development as a meeting or worship group? This could be something that FGC already has available, or something that we could develop in the future.

Quaker Quest is a good idea. They talked about trying to do Quaker Quest but don't feel they have the critical mass to make it work.

If there was some sort of kit, tried and true best practices for attracting new attenders, would that be helpful?

The pamphlet, *If You Are the Only Friend in Town*, was helpful. They will take another look at it.

Post interview: Best quote: We thought the best quote was Brad's response to Question 3. – “What a challenge it would be.”

Interview – Evergreen Worship Group, Philadelphia, PA

Interviewees: Susan Lee Barton, Gayle Davidson, Lola Georg, Hollister Knowlton, Laura Melly, Carolyn Schodt, Edward Sargent

Interviewer: Brent Bill

Recorder: Deborah Fisch

Interview date: June 18, 2013

How did the group get started?

The beginning core group was Marcelle Martin, Carolyn Schodt and Hollister Knowlton. Hollister lost her job in 2003 and needed to sell her house. Marcelle, who roomed in the house wanted to stay and she found Laura to buy the house. Laura asked if they might meet for worship outside their own meeting. At that time most if not all went to Chestnut Hill Meeting and were longing for a closer knit community that they were getting at meeting where they knew each other's spiritual journeys and could share them and worship together regularly. They started meeting every morning in the fall of 2004.

The group grew via word of mouth and personal invitation. At first they only worshipped together. They had great joy but were anti – too organized. This was meant to complement their own meeting not to be instead of it. They were looking for intimate spiritual relationships, sharing burdens, joys, intersecting with each other in daily lives, not just First Day.

They started studying together when Elaine Pagel was coming into town, so they read *The Gospel of Thomas* together and that led to many other books, pamphlets etc. They also started sharing their spiritual journeys with each other. About this time some people started attending who weren't Quaker.

In 2006 or 2007 they started a group that met in the evenings. A few did both This started because two members got jobs and still wanted to meeting, but they could only meet in summer unless the evening group started too. At one point they met two nights a week, but that got cut back to one time a week, which is still the practice.

When the group grew and then became two groups they needed a way to communicate and feel connected to each other. They started a list serve which has been an important tool. Now it is also an outreach tool. It helps link the two groups and gives a way for people to share their needs and interests with the whole group. It is also a way for people to know they belong because they are added to the group.

What have been challenges for the group?

In the very beginning there were so few people attending that just one person kept the meeting and there were times when they changed locations that people would go to the wrong place. So a challenge besides beginning small was also communication.

Since there is no real membership process, how do people know when they are considered full members? At some point they evolved into being interfaith and not strictly Quaker, though their practices are based on Quaker practice. There has been some internal wonderings about who gets to invite whom into the group. The group was originally all women and at some point they made a decision to welcome men into the group.

Two people in the group said that Evergreens was the most important community in their life.

It has been important to keep the groups relatively small.

One Friend who attended for the first time in 2/2012 questioned whether she could even attend this evening without her spouse, who was definitely a member of the group. She shared that it feels cliquish to an outsider and hard to feel welcome. She shared this as an experience, not as a criticism. She felt grateful to be there and cited Psalm 123. She said that there is something about attending week after week. She was just put on the list serve last month. Another Friend agreed with her sharing

Another person, not of Quaker background, shared that at times she is confused by Quaker lingo.

If a person isn't on the Internet they may not know what is happening when and where they acknowledged.

A newer member of the group related how tenderly the group looked after her last year after she was seriously injured in a mugging. Because of the close intimacy F/friends feel for each other it may be hard for newcomers to feel a part of the group, especially if they aren't outgoing. Not clear how and when you become a "member" of the group.

What kind of support or resources would be helpful from a group like FGC and the New Meeting Project?

There are a wide variety of needs among the attenders. Some love to study texts, others more interested in prayer and Spirit. A list of nifty things to read and different kinds of activities and spiritual practices would be helpful.

Wisdom was in the group when it started so for them in came internally, but otherwise wisdom would be a must.

Times when we were recognized as a group because a member had a leading, and that person got recognition and then publicly thanked Evergreen Worship Group.

Times when they were needing to rethink identity and then an outside facilitator would help.

How do you deal with finances and money?

Now they have a business meeting once or twice a year depending on the needs of the group. They have a sock in which they place money until a need arises. They use it for witness, and give to members in need. Sometimes they meet to decide how to move forward.

Advice for others thinking of starting a worship group?

Have a clear intention and an open house.

The group has done spiritual formation groups in the past. They aren't right now, but one group from when they did do it is still meeting regularly.

Appoint "shepherds" each month to do the pastoral care and programming for the group. It can and should switch around so no one becomes dependent on three or four members. Shepherds look for new people. They serve for a month at a time.

Consider the importance of personal invitations

Make sure your worship is grounded in the Spirit and deep. Worship is essential for a good worship group.

Offer hospitality for traveling Friends when they are around.... It's an Opportunity to gather and we always learn from each other.

Include a time for sharing at the end of worship. Evergreen does about 1/2 hour of worship, 1/2 hour of sharing followed by fellowship and supper.

Good worship draws people in and keeps them coming back.

Don't be worried if you grow some years and shrink others. This seems a normal ebb and flow. If numbers decrease listen to learn what is going on in the meeting and people's lives. Blow on the embers, but take care not to blow them out.

Have a group directory and update it every six months.

Consider choosing or appointing prayer partners for a season or spiritual partners and then the next season mix it up so the same people aren't always together.

They currently have 8 to 16 attend the Tuesday evening group and one to eight attend each morning.

Interview – Fancy Gap Friends Meeting, Fancy Gap, Virginia

Interviewee: Ken Bradstock

Interviewer: Merry Stanford

Recorder: Mike Holaday

Interview date: July 17, 2013

Ken Bradstock is the clerk of Fancy Gap Friends Meeting, which has about 12 members. Five or six typically attend meetings, which are held bi-weekly in people's homes, always with a meal. Fancy Gap Friends draws from a fairly wide area, Ken and his wife Dottie traveling the farthest, about 40 miles. He notes that they pass several Friends churches on the way.

What drew you to this meeting?

Their generosity was attractive, especially the absence of materialism—they have no physical plant, no salaries. The group works through things, “obviously imperfectly,” but in a Quaker way. The tolerance and the love are very palpable. There are conflicts, things to work out, but there's a willingness to do that. Having a pastor is somewhat foreign for traditional Friends, but this group finds it gives them someone to talk to when they really need someone to help with something that hurts the soul.

Please tell me how your group got started.

It was started as a Bible study group, by Tony Lowe and his wife Judy. When Ken came, Fancy Gap was struggling in various ways. It had hit a low ebb. The meeting has waxed and waned over the years in terms of membership. There were times when Tony and Judy thought they might have to lay it down.

Are you aware of any challenges that were faced in starting the group?

No.

If the New Meetings Project would have existed when you started, what sort of support and/or resources would have been helpful?

We would have leaned heavily on a project like yours -- not just the people but the advice, the collective wisdom.

[Merry Stanford describes the mentoring teams concept.] Would such a group have been helpful to you? If so, in what ways?

A mentoring team would have been helpful, certainly. It would evolve according to the needs of the group and what people seem to need and respond to.

[Recorder's comment: I believe Ken Bradstock, a soft-spoken man and one not given to rhetorical flourishes, was especially emphatic here. He was emphasizing his perception that the field advisory groups should be flexible in their work with nascent meetings and that it won't be possible to anticipate, and prepare materials to support, all the ways they can be of service beforehand. See his comments on the next question below for more on this theme.]

[Merry invites him to check out the New Meetings Toolbox—he is enthusiastic about this.]

What is one thing you think the New Meetings Project should know about new groups that are just starting?

The people working with new groups should understand that they need to throw out the mold and work with groups in creative ways. Fancy Gap meets biweekly; the meeting is a touchstone.. Every meeting that starts should be allowed to develop in any productive way, rather than have any preconceived idea of how to work with them. Keep the Quaker principles, of course, but recognize that we [i.e. the Society] need to grow in many ways if we're going to continue to exist.

What one resource would be of most use to you now at this point in your development as a meeting or worship group? This could be something that FGC already has available, or something that we could develop in the future.

We would not need materials to help us attract more people—that would be out of character for us. The attraction has to come from inside, from the Spirit.

At Fancy Gap, they have a lot of people from other churches, who participate in their projects. We don't expect them to join, necessarily. They could use materials that would help them do more of that kind of outreach and networking in the community. Not for the purpose of recruiting new members, but to have greater community impact.

“When people ask me, “How can we grow our meeting?” I tell them, sell your meetinghouse! Forget the meetinghouse! It becomes an object of desire in itself. Grow spiritually, not in numbers... The camaraderie, the companionship, the energy, the passion, that's what leads Dottie and me to drive 80 miles twice a month. And we have a meal every Sunday; that's important. People share around a table. ... It's less structure, less institutionalized. It gives me more opportunities to experience the movement of the Spirit. “

* * * * *

What was the best quote that came out of the interview?

- What if material were developed that would help us do that kind of outreach, that kind of networking in the community, not to recruit new members but to help us have a bigger impact?
- When people ask me, “How can we grow our meeting?” I tell them, sell your meetinghouse! Forget the meetinghouse! It becomes an object of desire in itself. Grow spiritually, not in numbers.

What was the best story that came out of the interview?

“I think the people working with new groups should understand, throw out the mold, work with us in creative ways. We [Fancy Gap] meet biweekly; the meeting is for us a touchstone. It gives us a place to go back to, to get fresh encouragement. I would hope that every meeting that started would be allowed to develop in any productive way, rather than have any preconceived idea of how to work with them. It’s very similar to the work I do as a clinical chaplain. I don’t go into a patients’ room with an idea of what I’m going to do, a theological message to deliver—I have to follow the patient’s lead, throw out my theology if I need to. If I do that, some good stuff can happen, some healing. Not throwing away Quaker principles, of course, or our tradition, which is very important to us, but recognizing that we [i.e. the Society] need to grown in many ways if we’re going to continue to exist. “

Interview – Freedom Friends Church, Salem, OR

Interviewee: Alivia Biko, the pastor and co-founder of the meeting

Interviewer: Mike Holaday

Recorder: Brent Bill

Interview date: September 12, 2013

Please tell me how your group got started.

Peggy Parsons and Alivia Biko were both from Northwest Yearly Meeting. Peggy was a recorded minister. Both were members at Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, OR. Alivia came to faith late in life. Alivia experienced same-sex attraction since childhood and was trying to become straight because she believed her faith required this of her. She found the emphasis on gays being celibate (but not stressed nearly equally for heterosexuals) at Reedwood was a double standard. She had worshipped with some churches in Seattle who were open and affirming and found that being a person of faith who is gay was possible and good. She had the sense of God being present equally in these congregations as ones that did not allow gays to openly participate in worship or the church community.

She and Peggy began traveling in ministry for a number a years and doing anti-violence work for Scott's Mills Friends Church and they travelled mostly in the Northwest, but also in other parts of the U.S..

In 2002, after having a leading, they began talking about having a settled, as opposed to traveling, ministry. They were part of the Multwood Group, a gathering of Friends women in the Pacific Northwest who meet regularly. They asked for a clearness committee to help to determine how to start a meeting in best order. Friends from Northwest, North Pacific, and Pacific yearly meetings were on the clearness committee. The clerk of the committee was a Benedictine Sister.

In 2003, Peggy and Alivia felt led to birth an open, affirming, welcoming and embracing meeting. They wanted to offer a place that would welcome all people with gifts of ministry regardless of their sexual orientation or presentation. They told their clearness committee that they wanted to make setting up such a congregation as undivisive on Northwest Yearly Meeting as possible, since they were not called to be confrontational or divisive. They talked with the clerks of both Northwest and North Pacific yearly meeting. In those conversations it was clear that they would not fit in either yearly meeting: North Pacific because that yearly meeting had no pastoral meetings and Northwest yearly meeting because it did not allow LGBT welcoming meetings.

Their elders at Reedwood Friends considered their call, affirmed it, blessed the work and released them to do it. But they couldn't take the new group under their care because of the stance of the yearly meeting. Peggy turned in her recording to Reedwood Friends and

Northwest Yearly Meeting. They continued to have their memberships held by Reedwood Friends until such a time as they could transfer them to the new meeting.

They held their first meeting for worship in March 2004 in Alivia's living room in Salem. There were four Friends in attendance. Within six months they needed more space. They then rented space at the Salem YMCA. That meant that they carried in materials, their library, and set up there every Sunday. They did this for a full year.

In that first year they established a website. The website was the main way people found them. They averaged 15 people attending. They then moved to full time rented space. They met in a large room in what had been a small house. They were there for 2 years.

After two years in that location they needed to look again for bigger space. They located space at 2425 13th St SE, Salem and have been there 8 years. They looked at moving again, but economically found it better to stay.

Alivia noted that being unencumbered (not having their own building to tend to and other stuff) made it easy for their congregation to be flexible and nimble.

Alivia was founding clerk and served as clerk for many years. She has been the part-time pastor for two years. Peggy was founding pastor. The group decides as a whole – as is Quaker practice.

What practical challenges did you face in starting the group?

Their congregation has a lot of people with mental health problems. This impacts decision-making and how to involve everyone at appropriate levels. It's the right thing to do but it's hard work. They also have a high turnover of attenders.

A big practical challenge is how to bridge the gap between long-time attenders and those who are more transient and form them into a functioning community.

What do you know now that you wish you would have known prior to starting the group?

They wish they would have known how much work this would be. A small congregation cannot rely on a part-time pastor with another full-time job to do everything. Everyone must step up and do their part.

They also had a member commit suicide a few years ago. They wish they'd known what a huge impact this would have on this young meeting. They did find that those who were committed became more committed. But those who were less committed became scared off. Preparing the community to deal with, and move through, such a watershed moment was important.

If the New Meetings Project would have existed when you started, what sort of support and/or resources would have been helpful?

They could have really used someone who is experienced with meeting finances to help teach how to do that well. They needed help in how to do the basics of how to budget, raise funds, set up a checking account, and so on. Northwest Yearly Meeting could have helped with that, had Freedom Friends been able to remain in the yearly meeting. However, as an independent meeting, they had to learn (and are still learning) all this stuff.

They also could have used information for their members on how to order their own financial lives – especially those who have mental or health issues. Many of them are low income and are not good at using their resources wisely and well.

Other practical assistance that would have been helpful were in the areas of

- Incorporation
- Tax issues
- Insurance issues.
- How to share space with someone else (i.e., having a counselor on the property – was there liability to the congregation?)
- Employees – pastor as contractor or employee and tax/payroll issues around that

What is one thing you think the New Meetings Project should know about new groups that are just starting?

The NMP needs to know how important the Convergent Friends movement and its ideas are to those who are looking to develop their ministry.

Alivia says that not being encumbered by a building is an especially good thing. That way a new group can meet people where they need to be met – to do direct ministry without being tied down by maintaining a building or other major assets.

New groups need to look at stewardship, as well. What do they need to do the work they're called to do?

What one resource would be of most use to you now at this point in your development as a meeting or worship group?

They could use stewardship and technical information (see list above).

Another thing that would be helpful would be to find a way to get materials on loan, for low cost or on credit – Bibles, hymnals, etc. This is especially important for new small groups who cannot afford to pay lump sums for such materials.

Two things that stood out for Mike and Brent

One was that Freedom Friends has an annual birthday party on their establishment date. They gather, celebrate, and recount the group's history. This helps with the feeling of sharing a common story and deepening community.

Two, the suicide as a watershed moment for them was very powerful. The message wasn't so much that a new meeting could or should prepare for something like that, but that it shouldn't fear the unknown, since even a catastrophe like a suicide can strengthen a meeting. In fact, "the hidden uses of adversity" was a prominent theme of the entire conversation, from the ideological friction they've suffered from the start that has helped them sharpen their sense of their

uniqueness to the patience needed to come to agreement on decisions of all kinds owing to the nature of their congregants. They sound like strong people.

Interview – Georgetown Friends Worship Group, Georgetown, TX

Interviewees: Gayle Twiname, Clerk; Robin Mueller, Recording Clerk

Interviewer: Mike Holaday

Recorder: Connie McPeak Green

Interview date: June 10, 2013

How did the group get started?

Gayle had been a member of Austin (TX) Meeting but had stopped going in part because it was a long, difficult drive to meeting and the meeting's political action focus which required being present during the week as well as on Firstday. The Austin Meeting was focused on legislation, death penalty repeal and prison reform.

Gayle and her partner, Peggy, met a birthright Friend from Pennsylvania in her community and they talked about starting a meeting. They "bantered" and also met Rosemary, who expressed an interest as well. "It kind of fell into place" without publicity, at first. The four of them put a free notice in the local paper and the Sun City Texas magazine. There were 10 people at the first meeting held at the Sun City Senior Center in November 2010. They started a website and got listed on Quaker Finder. After a year, the religion and spirituality columnist from the local paper sought them out and did an extensive feature article about them. They offered a Quakerism 101 course which quite a few people participated in. This was as a Friendly Forum. Robin, who had been an attender at Santa Fe Meeting and also lived in the community, joined in August of 2010.

After a time they decided that their location in the Sun City Retirement community center was possibly keeping others away who did not live there. They searched (and found) a more accessible place to meet.

Challenges

They believe one of their greatest challenges in starting was finding that place to meet. One member uses a wheelchair for mobility so accessibility was an immediate concern. They eventually found a meeting place in a business called Friendly Computers. The owner had Quaker relatives and they all felt the location was auspicious. It is centrally located and has a meeting space big enough for about 20 people.

Another challenge was the amount of energy and time demanded of one person in the beginning. Gayle carried the major burden of getting the meeting going for the first almost two years. They now have a recording clerk, treasurer and a new care and concern committee. They also have a Facebook page.

What they wish they would have known prior to beginning

They would have liked to know more about Friends organization and how they fit in...meeting, worship group, etc. They are happy with not being an official meeting at present. They would have liked to have known more about Texas tax laws. Also they wished they had known how much work it would be to start the meeting. In the beginning they ran on excitement but almost three years in it is feeling frustrating and difficult. They wonder why they aren't growing. They have lost a few of the early attenders, and they sometimes wonder if the losses are signal they're doing something wrong. They may have three people one week and nine the next. It is odd how much this has changed in such a short time! People still come and go but we find a couple who come and stay. They are more assured now that it takes a "right" fit and that they may not be "right" for everyone!

What support would have been helpful?

The most helpful thing would have been people. Resource people to ask questions of and get reassurance and a sense of perspective from. They could have used guidance on technical, spiritual and practical questions: tax law, size issues, worship group versus meeting, Quaker process of all kinds, etc. It would have been helpful to have someone explore the benefits and risks to being a meeting. They were able to research and find plenty of printed and online materials but to have them all in one place as with the tool box would have been very helpful.

Most important to them would have been people support.

What one thing would you tell anyone starting a new meeting?

You need help! The NMP is on the right track with its tool box and people support.

What one resource would be most helpful now?

They would still like to have a resource person to provide support and guidance by phone or email at least. People in well-established meetings may not remember what it is like to be a new meeting. They would like guidance in handling political relationships with meetings in the area. The Austin Meeting's clerk and wife came to visit and were very welcoming and encouraged them to come to quarterly and yearly meetings but they have been unable to find information about the quarterly meeting.

They also would like suggestions for publicity and reaching out. They would like to focus on the area north of Georgetown (which lies about 30 miles north of Austin). For the meeting to grow they need to reach out. They would welcome whatever we can do to start new meetings and dispel misconceptions.

Is there anything else we should have asked?

They would like to know how they can keep the members they do have. There has been some attrition. . They see themselves as a caring respectful community. They would welcome some

information on the dynamics of a new meeting. They also wonder if the fact that they have only one male attender is a deterrent to having more men.

Interviewers' notes:

No particular quote or story stands out for either of us. Gayle and Robin both seemed very sincere, engaged, articulate and capable—two really *solid* people—but it didn't sound as though they've experienced much in the way of drama or deep insight on this journey. Mostly what they've done is to keep plugging. But we were both struck by their emphasis on how helpful a "people" contact would have been. In spite of the fact that both of them have been practicing Quakers for some time, and the third woman who was initially involved was a birthright Quaker, they had many questions, especially about practical matters, and many periods of self-doubt as they wondered if they were "doing this right." There's a real difference between being a Friend and starting a Friends meeting. We were also struck by the fact that in starting their meeting they were not so much seeking Quakerism itself as a new home for the Quakerism they had. They each individually felt that they had grown different enough from the Austin Friends, as a natural consequence of growing older and the changes life brings, that they no longer fit in at that meeting, and had stopped attending for some time. It was as though the inconvenience of traveling the physical distance to Austin Meeting was compounded by their perception of a growing distance from that meeting along other lines (spiritual orientation, preference for activist approaches to social issues, maybe age itself on some level, etc.). The result was they just fell away from Quakerism, until they found each other and set out to create a new meeting together. So their changing identity as Quakers is at the heart of it. We had the feeling that if someone had been available to talk to them about issues that have to do with the identity of a meeting, that would have been as helpful as someone who could coach them in the process issues.

Interview – Three Valleys Worship Group, Montrose, CO

Interviewees (names and their spellings are best guesses): Mary Lou Anderson, Lisa Aured, acting co-clerk, Kathy Johnson, Jennifer Purdy, Richard Purdy, Tara Wick, recording clerk and convener of first day school committee

This is most of the regular attenders in the group. Several active group members were not present but were mentioned during the interview, including co-clerk Terry Middleton Humphrey and co-founder Bill Yett.

Interviewer: Mike Holaday

Interview date: August 11, 2013

Please tell us how your group got started.

There used to be a meeting in Delta that folded. Last August Kathy Johnson was contacted by Bill Yett. Bill had moved to Delta shortly after the Delta group's its demise and was aware of its existence. It was about four years before I started looking around for area Friends. He found Kathy through Quaker Finder. They had their first meeting in October, with four from the old Delta meeting and nine others who were interested.

Do you happen to know why the Delta meeting folded?

Travel was an issue. There were people coming in from more than an hour away in every direction. That's hard on families. And in the winter, if you have to cross a high mountain pass, it can be dangerous. Montrose doesn't have that geographic spread. They get visitors occasionally from an hour, hour and a half away, but most attendees live closer than that. Also, there was a lack of experienced Friends.

What were some of the key tasks you did to get started?

They put ads in the Montrose, Delta and Ouray papers, also on Channel 10's local announcements. They put up a notice in the library and reserved a room there. Lisa Aured took the lead in doing much of this.

They had their first meeting in October (2012) in the library—13 “eager” people. They couldn't continue to meet there and so had to find a new place. The Episcopal Church in town was looking for people to use some of its space, because they had had an internal dispute over social justice issues that resulted in a number of their congregants breaking away. So they have been meeting in the Episcopal Church, along with a small United Church of Christ congregation and the Boys and Girls Club. We're three like-minded groups in this very conservative community.

What were some of the challenges you faced getting started?

Small numbers were a challenge for them. They do have three seasoned Friends in the group but it's hard to get continuity from week to week with a small group.

Bill Yett adds vision and a sense of direction for them. He kept pushing when they were first getting started. Another person who has been instrumental in the group, Shannon Harbke, spends the warm months in Alaska, so she's not here half the year. Attendance does drop off during the summer as many of them are travelling or enjoying other pursuits.

They have also attracted others who are here part of the time but not full time residents, like Ricardo Perez, originally from El Salvador. He works with the Shepherder's Project, which tries to help migrants brought into the West illegally by ranchers who hire them to watch their sheep up in the high mountain pastures, get them set up with gear up there, then don't pay them. Because the migrants are illegal they can't complain to authorities. Ricardo has connections with AFSC, which is how he heard about the Three Valleys group. He calls them "Quackers" and they love it.

Resources are another issue because they're small. Renting space is an example. They're solving that by collaborating with the UCC and Boys and Girls Club.

What do you know now that you wished you had known earlier, when you started the group?

Things have clicked pretty well for them. They've had some challenges in terms of needy people who've attended at times, but have handled them. They have resourceful people and are all willing to contribute.

If the New Meetings Project had existed when you were getting started, what sort of support or resources would have been helpful?

They had a visit from Brent Bill early on and that really helped, especially with people contact. He told us about Quaker Cloud, too.

They could have used help with questions about finances, how to handle finances, and other practical considerations. They could have used help with publicity. *When You're the Only Quaker in Town* has been a great help. Make sure new meetings are aware of all the printed material.

Clerking without understanding what a clerk is has been an issue for Lisa. She said she was very fortunate that the meeting funded her to go to Intermountain Yearly Meeting annual sessions in Abiquiu, New Mexico and also to the FGC Gathering in Greeley, where she attended Arthur Larrabee's clerking workshop. That was a great help.

What is one thing you think the NMP should know about new groups that are just getting started?

Understand how *risky* it feels. “You’re putting yourself out there. You feel vulnerable. You share intimately with other people. Support is *very* meaningful, because you feel on your own. You need to be reminded that there is a wider Quaker community and you’re part of it.”

What one resource would be of most use to you now at this point in your development as a worship group?

Technical support on First Day School—best practices, nuts and bolts, what to know about liability, training, background checks, record-keeping, all that sort of thing. We have five kids, then there are 6-8 more in the UCC congregation.

Advice on things like insurance. What should we have, what’s available, what do groups do? Should we be a non-profit or not?

Also, how to be an organization among other organizations. How to work with other religious communities. They have a shared-space relationship with the Episcopalians, UCC and Boys and Girls Club, and they do things differently than they do—that leads to issues. The other groups don’t quite understand Quaker process – “we have a model of making decisions that’s very powerful, but how do you explain it? How do you explain our ways to others?”

Salient quote:

(Tara Wick) “Understand how *risky* it feels. You’re putting yourself out there. You feel vulnerable. You share intimately with other people. Support is *very* meaningful, because you feel on your own. You need to be reminded that there is a wider Quaker community and you’re part of it.”

Salient story:

“We have a shared-space relationship with the Episcopalians, UCC and Boys and Girls Club, and we do things differently than they do—that leads to issues. The UCC congregation is headed up by a judge; he’s very goal-oriented and directive. He wants to take votes all the time; he can’t understand our (sense of the meeting) approach. We end these group meetings with silence and one time the vicar of the Episcopalians said, “I hope all your prayers are answered.” We had to explain we weren’t exactly praying, it was waiting worship, more like listening. One of the UCC people asked, “Listening for what?” They’re not sure what to make of us. We have a model of making decisions that’s very powerful, but how do you explain it? How do you explain our ways to others?”

Interviewer's impressions:

Three Valleys WG illustrates several interesting and characteristic issues of new meetings composed of small numbers spread over large distances, but what seems most valuable to me about studying their experience is their close relationship with the local Episcopalian Church, UCC and Boys and Girls Club. As four like-minded groups in a broader community that generally does not share their outlook, they have made common cause around the practical problem of space. Will they seek, and find, other grounds for collaboration, such as social action in the community? There are substantive differences between Quaker ways and those of the rest of the world, and these have already come to the attention of their partner groups. How will this contrast affect the ability of newer Friends in Three Valleys WG to learn Quaker practices, which are so much a part of what it means to be a Quaker? How will the other groups respond to these practices over time? How will the merged First Day School model work out over time? Can the NMP play a role in helping Three Valleys negotiate these and similar issues? *Should* it?