

Starting, Re-starting, or Revitalizing A First Day School: Get Ready, Get Set, Teach!

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Get Ready!

To start or revitalize a First Day School, you will need to combine Advancement and Outreach with some practical tips on teaching and curriculum planning. This can be done. This can be fun! Read on!

1. **Pray about your leading to restart or rekindle a First Day School;** keep praying. Reflect on who you are as a meeting community. Don't try to be all things to all people.
2. **Find Friends who feel moved to explore the possibilities.** Confront your weariness and try to think freshly. Quaker grandparents are often a powerful force at this point.
3. **Connect with an outside support person** like your Yearly Meeting Religious Education Coordinator, a F/friend in a monthly meeting with an active First Day School or a New Meetings Project mentoring team member. This person can act as coach and cheerleader.
4. **Look at your space.** Clean or paint rooms. Clear out anything that is dirty, musty, or broken. If you rent space, how can you transform the space you have to make it welcoming and suitable for a First Day School class? Put a quilt or blanket on the floor to make a soft, clean area on which to gather. Put the blanket, sit-upons, a small box of basic art supplies, masonite boards to color on and some books into a large plastic bin to store and transport your materials. If you have a couple of interested families and no space on First Day, try a family supper in a home on Saturday evening with a story and project and perhaps a little worship sharing to get started. (If you get this far, start looking for new space immediately.)

5. **Check out resources on the FGC website.** [The Quaker Meetings Toolbox](#) and [Quaker Meetings Power Tools](#) have a variety of materials on sharing the treasure of our faith. The November 2005 issue of New York Yearly Meeting's (NYYM) newsletter, Spark, offers more very useful guidance <http://www.nyym.org/spark/2005.11.shtml#adv> Is your sign visible? Name tags and a guest book are a must. So is a Greeter. Consider a website or add First Day School material if you have a website already. Really try to see your monthly meeting with the eyes of a newcomer.

6. **Appreciate what you have to offer.** Friends explicitly explore and teach centering and prayer and this sets us apart! Parents are also looking for a community of like-minded parents with whom to raise their children. Celebrate the Quaker Cultural Alternative—non-violence, non-materialism, right sharing of resources, equality, earthcare, etc.

Publicize the gifts of your extended Quaker family, your quarterly meeting, yearly meeting, and Friends General Conference. When a new family walks through the doors of even a small meetinghouse, they enter the wider world of Friends with opportunities for retreats, camps, annual Sessions and the Junior Gathering and the High School Program at FGC Gathering.

7. **Look again for children who may be connected to your meeting.** Have you assumed that they are no longer interested? When you plan service projects, film nights, or vigils, you may rekindle their interest. Try some multigenerational projects or events even if you have just a couple of children. Invite them to bring friends.

If Sunday morning sports and other activities seem to make First Day School impossible, explore other days and times. Amesbury Monthly Meeting in Amesbury, Massachusetts held a Middle School Passages Class for young teens and their mentors on Thursday evenings. Saturday early evening seems to be the least scheduled time of the week. Traditional classes may not fit this time slot, but try a Family First Day School.

8. **Find ways to infuse the Quaker perspective into popular culture.** One meeting in New York Yearly Meeting began a Peace Prize at a local high school. Host a "Simple Gifts" Christmas Craft Party so that children can make simple Christmas presents and learn the joy of giving without great expense. Allen's Neck and Dartmouth at Smith Neck Monthly Meetings in Dartmouth, Massachusetts hosted "Conversations on Peace" during the Iraq War and many non-Friends gathered to share in these.

9. **Prepare yourself to share the treasure of Quakerism.** Try to begin putting into words why your monthly meeting has been so important to you. Practice an "elevator

speech” about what Quakerism is, so you are ready when the moment presents itself. Think of yourself as a Quaker Ambassador. If you are really bold, share these at a 2nd Hour.

10. Find Families.

- a. Highlight a concern or ministry that is already spiritually alive among you. Create an event around this leading that lends itself to inviting the public. Then, invite the public! Write a press release for the newspaper and post signs, etc. Film Nights at Quaker meeting work well especially around a theme like racial justice and cultural sensitivity. These events are socially comfortable occasions for “seldom seen” Friends to return and get back into circulation, too. Festive events are not just superficial fun. Positive social experiences bond us as a group and really act as a kind of glue creating a closeness and a trust. This is a crucial foundation for our shared spiritual journey.
- b. Encourage Friends who seem to have a gift for inviting people to meeting. The advancement and outreach literature says that about 1 in 10 people will fall into this category. Listen to their stories of how their conversations unfolded that led to a new attender at meeting and learn. All of these people are very comfortable telling others that they are Quakers. Take opportunities to let gently slip that you are a Friend. It could be as simple as your away message on your computer when you are at the FGC Gathering or annual sessions. Friends in Stillwater (OK) Monthly Meeting carry business cards telling about their meeting that they can share with interested persons.
- c. Friends of Friends. Have a “Bring a Friend to Meeting Day” so newcomers won’t feel so prominently on display.
- d. Collaborate with a local college. Contact the Chaplain’s Office. Make sure incoming students know about your meeting from orientation on. Have a brunch for them; food is always much appreciated by students. You may attract young faculty families, too.
- e. Get out and do something as a meeting that serves the wider community. Clean up a cemetery or participate in a Walk for Hunger. Make a banner for your meeting or wear tee shirts displaying your meeting’s name.
- f. Vacation Bible (VBS) or First Day School. This isn’t just for summer anymore! Dartmouth at Smith Neck Monthly Meeting in Massachusetts has offered VBS during April vacation. Of course, it doesn’t have to focus on just “The Bible.” You

could offer a week of short sessions on conflict resolution for children. William Kreidler's work is perfect for this. See especially *Teaching Conflict Resolution Through Children's Literature*. It is out of print but very worth tracking down on used book websites.

- g. Get people into the meetinghouse. Host an Alternative Gift Fair <http://www.altgifts.org/>, Local Foods Dinner, or special town event like a coffeehouse for area teens.
- h. Help families find you. Make a colorful banner around a Quaker theme—peace, earthcare, simplicity, equality, justice, joy in the spirit—and hang it where passersby will see it. Large pieces of children's art generate excitement and shout, "There are children having creative fun in here!"
- i. Participate in a local parade. Winthrop Center Friends Church in Maine dressed up as Peace Christmas Cards in their town's Christmas parade.
- j. If a new family attends out of the blue, find out how they heard about you. Young families often use www.QuakerFinder.org.

Get Set!

The Magic Tote Bag— (resources you will need when you are waiting for your first family)

This is a joyfully selected group of books and materials that I love and would find useful with children of all different ages. It's not exhaustive! If you make your own "magic tote bag" use only things you love and are very comfortable working with. As this is designed to be a first lesson for visitors, be mindful of strong theological statements that might not be resonant with your meeting as a whole. Be sure to test-read every story you select for your Magic Tote Bag. You might even want to jot how long it takes to read the story on a sticky note in the front cover. As you near Christmastime, you might want to add *Silent Night: The Song and Its Story* by Margaret Hodges and Tim Ladwig.

Fill your tote bag with:

- *Sparkling Still: A Quaker Curriculum for First Day School or Home Use for Children Ages 3-8*. Philadelphia: QuakerPress of FGC. 2013.
- Copies of mandalas to color. (See Kids' Seasonal Mandalas, below.)
- Copies of "Practicing Prayer: Holding People In The Light" (this is located at the end of this document).
- Copies of labyrinths to trace with a finger
- Crayons
- Light switch plates. (17¢ at Home Depot--decorate for Earthcare lesson)
- Markers. (Crayola makes Multicultural Markers that are great. Check their website and The Crayola Store.)
- White paper
- Beach ball. Great for ice-breaker introductions. Pass the ball around and say something about yourself—favorite flavor of ice cream, etc. Use with Earthcare lesson adding a hope for the world as you pass the ball.

- A good selection of books. A sample collection is listed below. Many of these books can be purchased from [QuakerBooks of FGC](#).

Some lesson ideas and age suggestions are listed along with the bibliographic information. Books listed as “All” could work well for multigenerational worship as well as a mix of ages of children. Many of the books can stretch.

When you read, be sure to show the pictures all the while you are reading. Much of the message is in the illustrations and that will help younger children “hold on” if the lesson is a little bit challenging for them.

Brick, Lynne, Barbara Henderson, and Donna Sweeney. *Doctor Seuss for First Day Schools*. Philadelphia: RE Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. 1989. All ages.

Cohen, Alan, M.A. *Setting the Seen: Creative Visualization for Healing*. Somerset, NJ: Alan Cohen Publications. 1982. These are good for ages 9 and up. Buy used from Amazon. See also: *Tuning In: Mindfulness in Teaching and Learning*. Irene McHenry and Richard Brady, Editors. Philadelphia: Friends Council on Education. 2009. Ages 9+

Dr. Seuss. *The Sneetches and Other Stories*. New York: Random House. 1989. I especially like “Green Pants” about being afraid of things/people with which we are unfamiliar and the “Sneetches” about simplicity and being good enough just as we are. All ages.

Hastings, Selina. *The Children’s Illustrated Bible*. New York: Dorling Kindersley. 2003. ISBN: 0-7566-0261-0. (This Bible is printed in two formats, the larger, 8 x 10 inches is more useful.)

Hatkoff, Isabella, Craig Hatkoff, and Dr. Paula Kahumbu. *Owen and Mzee: The True Story of a Remarkable Friendship*. New York: Scholastic Press. 2006. Truly all ages. Theme: friendship, love changes lives.

Kids’ Seasonal Mandalas. New York: Sterling Publishing Co. 2005. Theme: centering. Good to use with even Young Friends. More intricate mandalas can be found in [Coloring All Mandalas: For Insight, Healing, and Self-Expression](#), by Susanne F. Fincher. Boston: Shambhala. 2000. All ages.

Kushner, Lawrence and Karen Kushner. *Because Nothing Looks Like God*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing. 2000. Good message for all ages. If you have a wide span of ages, begin with a mandala and while they are still coloring read the story. Even Middle

School and Young Friends will find deep thoughts in this. Follow up with an art response or writing response for teens on “A Time I Was God’s Hands, Feet, Voice, etc.”
Theme: God, faithfulness.

MacBeth, Sybil. *Praying In Color: Kids’ Edition*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press. 2009.
Theme: prayer, the inner experience. Get out the paper and markers; this is great! All ages.

MacLean, Kerry Lee. *Peaceful Piggy Meditation*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Co, 2004. Preschool and elementary boys and girls and even Middle School and High School girls will like this. See the “Mind In A Jar” Activity at the end. Theme: inner peace.

Menzel, Peter. *Material World: A Global Family Portrait*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books. 1994. Best for 5-years-old and up but the pictures can work with younger children if you pose questions to open the experience to them. You can have the 5+ class draw a picture of their favorite things or a picture of what is in their room. Themes: simplicity, equality/sharing.

Millman, Dan. *Secret of the Peaceful Warrior*. Tiburon, CA: J.J. Kramer, Inc. 1991. This book will speak to children from ages 7 and up, especially boys and boys who have been at all bullied. I’ve used it very successfully with 7 year- olds, 9 and 10 year-olds and even middle School kids will be able to get a lot out of this book.

Paterson, Katherine. *The Light of the World: The Life of Jesus for Children*. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books. 2008. All ages.

RE Committee of FGC. *Opening Doors to Quaker Worship*. Philadelphia: Friends General Conference. 1994. **A must-have resource**. Reissued as a downloadable book in 2013 by QuakerBooks of FGC. An invaluable guide for welcoming children and newcomers into Quaker worship. Includes many concrete activities.

Smith, Cyncie. *The Joyful Shepherd*. Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers. 2001. Fabulous for Pre-K. Theme: God cares for us. Out of print, buy from a used book website.

Snyder, Mary. *Opening Doors to Quaker Religious Education*. Philadelphia: Friends General Conference. 1999. **A must-have resource**.

Walsh, Melanie. *10 Things I Can Do To Help My World*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. 2008. Perfect for 3-7, but can stretch. Follow up with decorating light switch covers to save electricity at home. Self-adhesive decals sold at office stores work beautifully for

“Save Water” signs for bathrooms and kitchens at home. Make some extras for the meetinghouse.

Weatherford, Carole Boston. *Freedom On The Menu: The Greensboro Sit-Ins*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers. 2005. Another book that spans elementary and middle school. Try role-playing or write up a skit and present it to your meeting. You could make up a giant menu and highlight the witness and justice work of your meeting and show what is on the Equality and Justice Menu at your meeting. You could have Friends come in and visit and talk about what they do to promote justice in the world as a follow-up.

Williams, Karen Lynn and Khadra Mohammed. *Four Feet, Two Sandals*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers. 2007. A book about learning to share in a refugee camp. Two girls fall in love with the same pair of flip-flops in a pile of donated clothing. Refugees are often the by-product of a war or displaced by a natural disaster. In 2007, when the book was written there were 20 million refugees, mostly children. Cut out flip-flop-shaped paper and have the children write a way that they share on each one. Hang some in the room; send some home. Ages 4-10.

Wood, Douglas. *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press. Better for slightly older children—8 and up. This book would be great for Intergenerational Worship if youngest kids aren't too young. The message, “we don't pray to change the world, we pray to change ourselves and when we change, the world changes” is wonderful to raise up and reinforce.

Teach!

A Family Arrives--Joyfully Embracing Day One!

Smile! You have a treasure to share!

Meet and Greet and make name tags at the meeting door

- Have the Greeter locate the First Day School teacher. (Be clear ahead of time who is responsible for First Day School on any given Sunday should children arrive. Haphazard muddling doesn't look safe and welcoming. A new family might feel they are an imposition.)
- Visit First Day School Rooms with parents—give parents an RE program statement and a child safety brochure, if you have them. (Help them quickly decide if Quaker Meeting is for them.) Invite the parents to attend First Day School if they wish.
- Explain that children are in meeting for worship for 15 minutes and then go to First Day School (or whatever your practice is).
- Explain what the pick-up procedure is. Perhaps parents will come to get the children or perhaps the First Day School class will go in at the rise of meeting to show what they did. (You might want to teach the adults a body prayer or song together. I would recommend the second option for a brand new class.)
- Ask about **allergies** to food. If children have allergies, parents will be very careful and often bring the appropriate snack for the kids or the whole class. They will be relieved and impressed that you asked. You've just made it up and over one hurdle!
- Offer clean, quiet toys if the children are of nursery age and will be in meeting for worship.
- Assure parents that Friends are mellow about children's voices. (They may well be anxious if their children are not used to sitting still.)

[You can fill out registration forms on a subsequent week.]

First Day School Class

Opening (Every gathering, no matter how small, has an opening.)

- Introduce yourself, ask them a little about themselves—how they are today, if they’ve ever been to a Quaker meeting, and some kind of “ice-breaker.” For example, have each person offer one word to describe him or herself. Naming favorite flavors of ice cream is another great ice breaker.
- Observe! How do the children get along? Do you need to adjust the seating to gently decrease the poking and teasing? Does anyone have a different learning style? Can you tell how the morning went before they arrived?

Centering Activity—Mandala coloring, Tibetan prayer bowl, body prayer, etc.

Lesson, Snack, Activity (If the children didn’t eat enough breakfast, you can serve snacks during the opening.)

- Try to leave some part of the children’s work in the room to “welcome” them back if they return. Hang up one of their drawings or even a color copy of the cover of the book you read together. Set the stage for welcoming them back and reviewing what you did this week.
- Try to send something home with them—something the children created or a Parents’ Page describing a body prayer, etc. that they can do at home.
- Warmly say “good-bye” and tell them you hope they come another Sunday.

Closing and Clean-Up

- Write-up reflections and notes from the morning on a lesson record form (a sample is located on the last page of this document).

After First Day School

- ***Be sure that parents sign your guest book.***
- Have someone “shepherd” them at coffee hour. Don’t smother them, but certainly don’t leave them adrift in your social room. Many, many Friends tell me they feel awkward about coffee hour. See if anyone lives near them or can offer suggestions about whatever they are interested in—summer camps, pediatricians, piano teachers, public schools, etc.

- Offer them a recent meeting newsletter or other literature about your monthly meeting or about Quakerism in general.
- Invite them to any upcoming event.
- Remember, when anyone walks through the door of even a very small meetinghouse, he or she enters your Yearly Meeting Quaker Neighborhood filled with opportunities for Friendship and growth.

Follow-up

- Send a hand-written note of welcome on Monday, or as early as possible, with some personal expression of how much your meeting has meant to you.
 - Include an invitation to a special event in the near future.
 - Include any information that they asked for that would be helpful for them—a contact, a piece of important local information, etc.
- Hold them in the Light in your prayer time.
- Debrief with the other members of your Advancement and Outreach/Religious Education team. How did you each think “Day #1” went? Did anything arise that you feel you could do better, more smoothly, more joyfully, or more effectively next time?
- Begin to organize a possible First Day School lesson for next week. Now you know something about what they love to do, what speaks to them, and what might be a good next step on their Quaker journey.
- Don’t be discouraged if they don’t return the next week. Stay ready, learn any lessons from the week they did visit, and keep praying. They may yet return or another family may find their way to your meeting!

Practicing Prayer: Holding Someone in the Light

The First Day School is exploring the experience of holding someone in the Light. Above is the picture or name of a Friend facing a health problem or at a hard time in life. Please hang this up at home to remind you and your family to hold this Friend in the Light.

- Be still and quiet
- Think about your person and imagine wrapping them up in love.
- Now imagine wrapping them up in healing.
- Think about the Light within you connecting with the Light within him or her and bringing comfort and company.

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Lesson Record

First Day School

Teachers:

Date:

Number of Children Present:

Theme/Overall Goal:

Program Outline:

(use reverse for more comments)

Books/Resources Used:

(specific references and suggestions for our collection)

Overall Comment:

Questions or Supplies needed:

This document was downloaded from the website of Friends General Conference. Explore the many resources and opportunities we offer for Quakers, Quaker meetings, and all interested individuals. Go to www.fgcquaker.org.



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