

Sharing Faith Across the Generations: A First Day School Project that Enriches the Entire Meeting

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As First Day School teachers, one of the richest resources for us is the accumulated faith experience of seasoned Friends. Their stories of God's comfort, guidance, and leadings make compelling listening. Helping our children to grow up to be committed, passionate Quakers requires finding concrete ways for intergenerational faith-sharing to occur.

Creating a "Gifts of Faith" booklet is one way to encourage this sharing. This idea was originally suggested to me by Ellen McCambley, of Wellesley Meeting. She and her brothers and sisters were gathering prayers and words of spiritual support that had upheld them to give as a gift to all of the children in their family. They were creating a booklet of these treasured words.

A First Day School can prepare a Gifts of Faith booklet as a meeting-wide project. Ask the adult Friends for the two or three prayers, passages of Scripture, or lines from hymns or poems that they call to mind when they need spiritual support. There are many inspirational books but here the focus is to share words drawn from real lives of faith and action that the children know.

I think of it as giving the children a look at the underside of our tapestry of faith. Here, we see the knots and connections that produce the beautiful pattern on the other side. Now, we can begin to understand the dynamic relationship between the inner life of faith and the outer life of action and witness.

We are trying this at Wellesley Meeting. We first thought to structure the entries in the book around the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace, Where there is hatred, let me sow love." Many of the occasions for prayer and need of support are listed in this beautiful prayer: comfort, guidance, hope, love, joy, reassurance in times of doubt, forgiveness or the grace to forgive, and so on. However, Friends quickly went beyond any neat organizational system. Some offered special words for the beginning and ending of the day. Others shared prayers for use before meals and cherished lines of verse tucked away in their wallets.

Almost surely, Friends will not only speak of times they called their special words to mind but also times the words surfaced in their awareness unbidden. Memorized special words can come forth as the perfect response to the need of the moment. When the need is deep and the words are perfectly suited to sustain, guide, or heal, the sense of grace and divine presence is palpable. I hope Gifts of

Faith can create an opening for Friends to speak about not only the words and thoughts of faith, but the feelings of their faith as well.

When you put the booklet together, leave blank spaces for additional entries. Have families make each book unique by adding words of spiritual support from grandparents, parents, and other F/friends. The book will be a powerful gift for the children of the meeting. At Wellesley, several adults have requested booklets, so you may want to prepare extras at your meeting. I think Friends hunger to know more about each other as people of faith. This is one way that an active First Day School can deepen and enrich its monthly meeting.

Grandad's Prayers of the Earth, by Douglas Wood with illustrations by P. J. Lynch (Candlewick Press, 1999), is one way to introduce this project. In this story, a grandfather lovingly guides his grandson on seeing prayers and looking for Spirit in all of nature. At the end, he talks about the prayers of people. The grandfather adds, ". . . we pray because we are here—not to change the world, but to change ourselves. Because it is when we change ourselves . . . that the world is changed." It is a lovely introduction to prayer and can illustrate the treasure seasoned Friends possess.

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