Growing Our Meetings Notes, May 2, 2020, Swatara Virtual Plenary

CQ presences: David Leonard, Serita, Lynne, Deb wood, (Paul Indorf), Susan Waterhouse, Pam Cerchio

Goal is to have speakers give us some concrete ideas for improving membership development. About 100 Friends signed up, mostly from Caln, but elsewhere too.

1. Welcome (from QuakerSpeak video)

\* The first impression: As a new person coming in just a couple of years ago and not really knowing what to expect, I was welcomed so warmly and with such ease, felt at home immediately (“poster child for welcoming). Welcoming and hospitality and fellowship is a committee of everyone. Placing the meeting’s pamphlet about what to expect and what is happening on the benches helps newcomers.

\* The first conversation: Tell the visitor your name! Make aware of meeting’s pamphlet/website, learn how they came to attend, they are always welcome. Be friendly, welcoming, but not overpowering, don’t invite to serve on a committee! Don’t assume, ask questions (What brought you here? Or what do know about Quakers?)

\* the message: (Quakers of Nantucket is a good book, tells story about a visiting Quaker minister, John Richardson, who gave a sermon not about righteousness and punishment, but about being against hatred, greed and envy, words of Jesus. He converted the Nantucket Island to become a Quaker stronghold). Quote from William Penn about True silence is the rest of the mind....nourishment. Don’t hesitate to talk about God, Jesus - don’t be so bland that newcomers don’t know anything even after they read it.

Showed Providence Meeting’s message on website, Sandy Springs website (Do you wish you had time set apart for quietness? ...), Third Haven website -( we openly invite you to come and worship with us. We believe god is present in every person....).

2. Facts on Growth

Churches are shrinking, what should we do about it (study published by Coorpeative Congreational studies partnership, hosted by Hartford seminary)

800-900 congregations participated, most Christian. Studies changes form 200-2005. Evangelicals and other Christian are growing (40% of them). Mainline and Catholic/orthodox (21 % are growing. Non Christian groups - 30% of them are growing (includes Islam and Judaism)

Growing congregations: newer suburbs, often multiracial, often newer churches. Younger membership (40% are under 35). Significant proportion of men involved, They were either really conservative or really liberal. Clear about their mission, people involved thought it was joyful, inspirational , thought-provoking (want to feel good when they go), youth participation in worship, recruitment plan with members engaged.

Simple Church by Eric Geiger and Thom Rainer (growing vs non growing churches)

Autopsy of a Deceased Church (we only want people as clones

Visitor follow up don by multiple methods, provide support groups for different things for members and non members, Digital presence.

Resources for this: PYM (Membership Development granting group, outreach thread, bibliography on addressing racism, threshing session on membership

NYYM - resource on digital communication, outreach working group,

NEYM-workshops on outreach and in reach

BYM - advancement and outreach handbook link (Britain YM

FGC - Growing our meetings toolkit (I reach, outreach and integrating newcomers), Becoming a welcoming friend, ministry on racism. Supporting outreach is one of FGC’s priorities.

Caln Qter is starting a zoom series on membership development for 2020-2021. Look at what is working, what isn’t working, develop set of best practices. Next May, hope to bring back How

Sharing from the Chat

Be careful not to assume someone has never been to Quaker meeting, don’t lump everyone into a category (AYF for example). Someone felt welcomed when they were given a copy of Faith and Practice.

Breakout groups (9) What does your meeting currently do to greet and retain newcomers? What are obstacles to better results

#8 Sadsbury, Harrisburg, warthmore, north branch firends (Wilkes Barre, Karen Reichardt (media), Lancaster, multinomah (Portland Oreg), Schuylkill meeting, Charlottesville/Morningside (NYC)

JOel facilitator;

Good at greeting, friendly greeting. A meeting without a physical presence on the street is hard to find, so they don’t get folks unless they already know about Friends (Morningside). If near a university, people who come may be very transient. Hard when you feel like the youngest member. Meting that feels most like home is not the geographically closest. Hard to be lumped into Young adult friends category when she is in 40s. Most of her engagement is via AFSC

Challenge is to engage young adults; nothing for them to grab onto. Age range is skewed to much older. Meetings tend to pounce on them.

Meetings have shrunk, people dying, moving away to retirement communities. There were lots of children when she was a child.

* One meeting does Greeting, pamphlet, refreshments, time during meeting when we greet people, introductions, sign in book, try to to pounce on people. Important to continue to greet folks as they continue to come.

Very small meetings, can be intimidating to walk into a small group who are long term attenders. They do have a website.

* **Multinomah** is very large - 60 on Sundays at 10am, and a smaller one or two. Newcomer gathering twice a year. Friend in the library after meeting (other meetings have a person who can answer questions). Told story of someone who wanted a half sheet.
* Need clarity, consistency - how often should we engage with people - need to be confident that we can be useful to people (wants people to know that q is of service to them, and they like to be of service). What does it mean to be a newcomer?
* Obstacles = children don’t want to get engaged.
* #1 Sharing - lots of greeting, weekly potlucks, worshipping by zoom and come together after worship for more informal sharing. Another is also having informal time after group. Google groups.
* #2 - Leaving Faith and Practice on the benches, handouts about the meeting, sharing about how Quaker worship happens. Some meetings have a membership development coordinate, greeters at the door (outreach committees), having a school is a form of outreach. Visitor info form. Friendly 8 groups on themes. Obstacles - staying in touch with new attenders, being more proactive, concern for meeting members aging out. Quarters can play a role with smaller meetings, box with literature, website for 3 Quarters (S. Jersey).
* #3 - nametags, hospitality, ushers.... Goodie bag with pamphlets etc for each newcomer, introduce at rise of meeting (have everyone introduce themselves makes it more comfortable), greeters make sure newcomers are greeted after meeting, monthly newcomer dinner (not many newcomers come). Follow up phone calls if sign book, monthly hospitality. Participate in annual festival. Or have own events with stuff for kids. Problems - people drop out after a few years. Would like to do more outreach, but what? Space issues affecting hospitality, greeting
* #4 - greeters (intentional vs volunteer in the moment), information bag for newcomers, (ideas from above too), use of email to let folks know about things, newsletter - one meeting has a weekly newsletter, potluck breakfasts as well as lunches, need to worry less about privacy and ask more questions fo folks. Be inclusive, not intrusive. Obstacle - we tend to talk to those we know versus new folks.
* #5 - Question “What do you know about Quakers? Could be phrased differently - be welcoming first. How quickly do you ask people to wear nametags? Make one for them right away? Avoid jargon. Friendly presence at the end of meeting for questions. How do we connect to the unchurched?
* Book - unchurched next door
* #6 - Geographic challenges, physical limitations (unbolted benches so could rearrange meetinghouse. Keep in mind that not everyone is an extrovert. Keep it light. Outreach committees (friendly presence at end of meeting). Offer options to plug in - book group, bible study or whatever). Rethink Sunday mornings for families (competing with sports). Be careful not to be “in” group - using jargon like first day school. Be careful not to gather in comfortable new groups. Rarely do meetings say they are welcoming to LGBTQ
* #7 - All PYM, - specific committee to work on welcoming and outreach. Nametags can be problematic or useful. Specific greeters/welcomes. People working on digital presence (websites). Other ways to reach out (festival, attending as Quaker presence at community event). Luncheons potlucks. Barrier - aging population of the meeting, may make it unattractive to younger folks. Can be off putting to talk about history of families in meeting with newer folks.
* #9 - (SErita was in here ) - many things already shared. Could we update the “PYM OutreachIdea book” form the 1980s. Great talk about how talking about “birthright”, Use of “goodie bags”. Newcomers sessions facilitated by a member of the meeting. Set up with families and their children(if they wish) - they can ask questions, have invites to family. Children share at the end of meeting what they have done. Youth committee (middle and HS -
* REgional food pantry out of meeting house, Family Promise
* On website have a “plan your visit” to that people know what will happen and someone will greet them.
* Plan is to send the chat to us, session is also being recorded.
* Panel, on Outrecach

Joel Barker, Oregon (multinomah meeting) on digital outreach. Had a conversation with Emily Provance. Need to look at needs. Challenge is that he is new (4 years). and west coast. He works in marketing for technology companies (considered reprehensible, but they are trying to explain the essence of something so it can be found). Found Quakerism after Trump got elected. He is communications Director for democrats in his county. He found Quakerism a non judge mental place. Came from main line Protestant. Digital outreach is how people find information today. Needs to be connection between the item and what we want the message to be in our digital outreach.(content strategy) Inspired by Parker Palmer who turns Quakerism out into secular practices. Authenticity and desire need to match up. Not easy to make a website that you believe in. Authentic desires may vary based on all kinds of pieces - age, race, gender identity, class etc. What are you and what is someone is looking for? He hears an urgency to grow our meetings; ask instead what do you have to offer someone? We have a method for seeking... Of course, let them know where the building is. (He plans to write a letter about ). Lots of tools - look at yourself from the outside - go to Google maps and search for Quaker and city and see what comes up. Be in conversation with each other, as individual Quakers. He went on Medium.com and shared how he prepared to come to this, and it used the word Quaker.

Mark Myers, Reaching the Unchurched

Unchurched are folks who are mostly Christian, but not involved with any church currently. We have a mass migration of folks who were involved with churches and are not now.

Shared data from Pew foundation. They do study every 7 years (2007, 2014, and will in 2021). Census is not allowed to ask any questions about religion. Large jump in unaffiliated between 2007-14. Mainline Protestants have dropped the most, but all have dropped except Non-Christian faiths. (Categories wee evangelical Protestant, catholic, mainline Protestant, non Christian and unaffiliated). Unaffiliated Went from 16% to 23%

There is a period of time when they are seekers.

Unaffiliated are atheis - now ( for all US)7%, nothing in particular is 15.8% (some of which are religion not important, 6.9% religion is important). Spectrum of possible seekers from deist - atheist. What are the opportunities for Quakers. Switchers are people looking for new experiences, split between evangelicals and non’s. Who are these people, where are they, are we good for them (could we offer them something satisfying? Are they good for us?

(Idea of a personal elevator speech about Quakerism - )

Alex Miller (Downingtown Meeting) - How to integrate and retain newcomers? Pamphlet called Quaker Excitement. We need to have something to integrate the newcomers into - different strokes, for different folks. Need to be friendly, happy place. (His kids always sang as we leave this friendly place, love gives light to every face....). Idea of opening Program - long tradition of this, prior to worship. Preparation for worship (a visitor saw this as semi programmed). Alex really was drawn by the hymn singing (how bad could they be if they sing hymns).

Story of friends visiting the US, never heard of Quakers, “in our 30 days of visiting in US, this was most spiritual experience). Quaker myths:

Quakerism is osmosis, can be absorbed - this is absurd...

Integration will take 6 months - he finds that even 10 years later, he is still learning. He says people are integrated when they can answer what canst thou say and they can nurture others. Not a 6 mo process

Outreach - is the domain of seasoned friends. In my 30 years, I have yet to hear any new visitors ask about Barclay’s apology. New friends who can best convey from their own experience what is exciting and why they keep coming back.

Integration - start with hospitality and social concerns? Need to be in small groups to form bonds and learn about Quakerism, worship sharing, mini Quakerism class.

Continuing Revelation is life itself - always there, will excite me and give me purpose

Light within - holds power and wisdom of universe, in everyone, makes all worthy, can’t be tampered with

Ministry is a duty,

Walk cheerfully upon the earth!

Upper Dublin Meeting/Byberry. Susan Vorwerk

Optimizing Your Meeting’s Physical Presence in the Community

Back in the 1990s there was a graph that showed PYM would disappear by 2097...

We need to do something now before we do perish. Pictures of signs outside the meetings - including rainbows in honor of pandemic (Together we are Stronger). Icarus story includes also that you shouldn’t fly too low, wings will get caught up in the waves and you will perish. (She quotes SEth Godin, Tribe, TED talk). Social media makes it easy to find tribe (1/2 the solution for outreach). Outreach is tricky. Need to develop our tribe. We don’t need to reach everyone, but those who are seeking someone like us. Need good connections with existing members - they will promote their gifts outside, make connections to us.

They have a new website, with material relating the pandemic. Sign on door explaining about worshiping virtually. Zoom worship on website with email address to get link. Direct marketing could be used if there is a route near by and they could use it to send out postcard. Unplug and recharge is a monthly potluck lunch - mentioned widely in social media. Has been successful. This is worship and light supper of soup , bread and great conversation. (Byberry doesn’t have running water, bathrooms).

Upper Dublin Series of programs celebrating the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment - have banners with one the same and bottom introducing the topic. Probably will be by zoom. Press releases.

PYM Membership support fund - Ken park

Fund approved in 1997 - after the study mentioned by Susan. For five years, 50% of any bequest under a certain amount was added to the fund. 2010 - approved priorities - making ourselves known has been difficult.

It was slowed by PYM financial crisis, 1/2 of staff laid off including lots of Quarterly Coordinators. Coordinators who are left now are paid by their quarters. Had to change organizational structure, focus on racism.

Between 1997-2012 - not much used. Last meeting cancelled because they had no grant requests! Requests have been wavering.

How to apply - Go to PYM website. 2 types of forms, one for requests of $1000 or below (short form and quick decision). $5000 and below - more info required, wait for the granting group quarterly meeting. Questions go to Nick Gutowski, director of grant making. Granting G.P. reviews the application and recommendations about best practices are made. “Shepherd is appointed from granting group as consultant. Encourage use of FGC booklet “You are Welcome Here”

Fund is not for continuing project. Is for new project. Paid a lot of money for QuakerQuest, signs, speaker (Dan Gottleib), South Jersey Quakers website.

Mackenzie Morgan is web designer for South Jersey site.

Other topics will include the FGC toolbox and how to use it.

We will get the slides and survey sent to us.

One asked why he was the only person of color here - lots of reactions. They will add this to the series. This is hard work.

How to be an Antiracist (book)