Collaborating to Support Quaker Religious Education

Dear Friends,

I am writing to introduce an effort I am shepherding in support of First Day School. A group of Quaker religious educators is gathering this January to explore how several Yearly Meetings can collaborate more closely on supporting the religious education programs in our member Meetings.

Some aspects of religious education programs are clearly local work (e.g., events, youth gatherings and camping programs), but others can be more efficiently done through collaboration among Yearly Meetings, including:

- Creating and updating curricula.
- Providing guidance on best practices for FDS administration.
- Creating training for teachers.
- Publishing one unified web site with curriculum lists and reviews.
- Creating a robust, on line Community of Practice where religious educators can toss around nascent ideas and give each other quick, informal support and feedback.

After we meet in January, we will bring back to our Yearly Meetings our best thinking about how we can collaborate in our desire to support our Friends who lead religious education programs in Quaker Meetings.

Please join us in praying that the Spirit will guide us and that we will listen faithfully to what our next steps should be.

Yours in service,
Kathleen Karhnak-Glasby

The need

We need to change the structure of how we work if we want to meet Meetings' needs for First Day School support. Many Yearly Meetings are struggling fiscally right now, with support for First Day School often suffering as a result. Simultaneously, fewer families have an adult not involved in paid work, and therefore the pool of "volunteer labor" has shrunk compared with a few decades ago.

Through my conversations with Friends in several Yearly Meetings, I have also seen that many of us are working on projects that are either redundant with one another or could be strengthened by bringing more hands and more perspectives to the work.

For example, several Yearly Meetings are struggling to keep their web sites up to date and relevant enough to attract attention and be useful to their First Day School teachers. By pooling our resources on this, several Yearly Meetings could maintain one web site jointly, perhaps with different participants responsible for maintaining different portions of the site.

Who's involved?

Contributors to date include Yearly Meetings participating in the January get-together:

- Baltimore YM
- Lake Erie YM
- Philadelphia YM
- South Central YM

The **Clarence and Lilly Pickett Endowment for Quaker Leadership** is providing funding for the meeting.

Friends General Conference is providing technical support for how to structure the meeting and for advice on remote collaboration, and will send participants to the meeting.

My Meeting, **Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting** (Philadelphia YM), is providing ongoing spiritual support and accountability for this ministry.

Where this might lead

There is a wide range of possibilities. We may simply decide to work collaboratively on a few projects over the next one to three years. More comprehensively, we may decide to share resources in ongoing ways, such as establishing a consortium with long-term priorities and joint funding for those priorities. Additional phases and projects will develop from those involved in the collaboration.

About me

I believe that a strong religious education program can support a vibrant, growing Religious Society of Friends. I have taught First Day School, led children's programs at Friends General Conference annual gathering and at my Yearly Meeting, and served on committees on the Monthly and Yearly Meeting levels.

I am grateful for this chance to bring together my administrative skills with my passion for religious education in order to seek ways to support religious education more efficiently and thoroughly, and in a way that can give us all more satisfying and useful tools for faith development among Quakers.

If you are interested in receiving further updates about this project, let me know at karhnak@gmail.com.