

# Adult Religious Education in Evanston (IL) Friends Meeting

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by Roger Hansen

## ***Quote and Queries for Reflection and Worship Sharing\****

*"For it is my understanding as a sociologist of religion that it is common worship that creates the beloved community for which many U[nitarian] U[niversalists] yearn. Furthermore, shared values and principles don't necessarily motivate people to do anything; whereas a vital experience of common worship can send a congregation out into the world with a determination to see that those values and principles are put into practice. Of course I know that in many congregations today . . . worship can be a form of sanctuary, therapy, even cocooning, which draws people away from the world rather than motivating them to change the world: it surely all depends on what kind of worship."*

-- Robert Bellah, addressing the Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly, June 27, 1998, and archived at [uua.org](http://uua.org).

*For what kind of worship does your spirit long?*

*What does this kind of worship require of you?*

*How have you experienced connections between corporate worship and beloved community? Between worship and service in the world?*

*Does any word, phrase or image from the Bellah quote particularly speak to your condition at this time? Explain.*

Central to Evanston Meeting's approach to adult religious education has been finding a variety of ways to nurture new attenders and longtime members. As a meeting toward the larger end of the Quaker spectrum (around 60 to 70 worshipping on an average Sunday) it is important to find a variety of ways of entering and growing in the life of the meeting community.

Two programs have been key in encouraging the religious education of Evanston Friends. First is the Inquirers' Group, which is similar to some meetings' Quakerism 101 classes. (Quakerism 101 is an adult curriculum published by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.) Evanston's groups have met for six sessions on a weekday evening. Meeting in homes has enhanced the warmth of the atmosphere. The content of the sessions has arisen from our experience, with occasional use of materials from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting program. Different presenters lead each session, drawing on the particular interests and passions of meeting members, while the host/organizer provides continuity. This format enables the presenters to get to know newcomers a little better, and sometimes longtime members attend to refresh their education in Quakerism and to get to know new attenders.

The Second Hour is a second key program for religious education. The program is offered two Sundays a month, with the other two Sundays usually devoted to meeting for business and the presentation of someone's spiritual journey. The format usually involves either worship sharing in response to queries on a topic, or a talk by a designated speaker followed by an ample discussion period. We try to balance Second Hours devoted to internal spiritual experience with those devoted to outward testimonies and social concerns. Some notable hours in recent times have been worship sharing on spirituality and nature, a speaker on "The Gospel of Thomas: the Quaker Gospel?" and panels of meeting members/attenders on aging and on being a teenager. Each year opportunity is usually provided for worship sharing on our experiences of meeting for worship.

Other opportunities to meet and deepen the life of the community are the spiritual support program where members are divided into small groups to get to "know each other in that which is eternal," an annual silent retreat, and Friendship dinner groups. While not considered a part of the religious education program, they help in a variety of ways, both intentional and incidental, to nurture our experience as Friends. For us as Quakers our experience of one another, and what we learn from the multiplicity of ways we interact, are at the heart of our religious education.

**Roger Hansen** is a member of Evanston Friends Meeting. He moved this spring to Milwaukee, where he participates in Adult Religious Education and the Spiritual Nurture Program of Milwaukee Friends Meeting.

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