The belief that there is that of God in everyone is the cornerstone of both Quaker practice and our educational goals here at Friends’ Central. We believe that everyone has worth and dignity; every member of the community brings special traits to the whole; and in our eyes as well as God’s, no one person is better than another. Just walking through our buildings, it is clear how much we value uniqueness and creativity. But our sense of community is equally important. We learn, play and worship in a group, and we expect that our shared time will build unity and strengthen knowledge. The balance is crucial—and in order to instill it in young children, we rely on the discipline and practice of daily reflection.

Once a week, each division gathers for Meeting for Worship, a time for spiritual, intellectual, and self-reflection. At the Lower School, we also have set aside a special period each day called “Devotions,” which draws on the habits of reflection developed in Meeting for Worship, but allows us to gather regularly in our classrooms and talk about our experiences.

Devotions is different in each classroom but for all of us, it is central to the work of building community, developing a safe place for children to share, and helping them to explore their own and each others’ ideas, emotions, and spiritual understandings.

The term “Devotions” does not come from Quaker practice specifically. In other Christian faith group devotions is a daily focusing on the Bible or on some aspect of spiritual life. It is often viewed as spiritual preparation for the day. Many of us use our Devotions time as just such a focusing and preparing.

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"Devotions" continued

Others use the period to talk about larger issues of friendship or kindness or how to remain flexible. Recently, the Lower School faculty gathered together to talk about how each of us use Devotions. The discussion was rich and varied, and it seemed clear that the majority of faculty saw the practice of Devotions as an important, even central aspect of their classroom life.

Here is a sampling of our responses, ranging from teachers in nursery to fourth grade:

"Devotions is a way to bring the classroom together as a community. We discuss plans for the day or week, upcoming projects, pose queries, learn to listen to each other, and learn to contribute. It gets the day off on the right foot, no matter what kind of day we had the day before."

"Devotions is time put aside for reflection on the broader and deeper issues that underlie instruction and our lives as a community."

"It is a special time set aside each morning to help us get "centered" for the day ahead. We have silence, reflect on how we can be the best person, friend, student, citizen. It is a time to teach Quakerism, values, people, etc. Sometimes we use the time as a 'carry over' from a discussion, problem, etc. from the day before."

"I present a topic and then pass a talking stone for the children to use to speak their thoughts. We have covered Old Testament Bible stories, the meaning of holiday traditions, [secular and religious], African proverbs and folktale, bullying, Quaker history and Testimonies, the death of a pet, or the meaning of a current event."

"Devotions is that special time of the day when we provide time to stop and think, either quietly or collectively. It is also a way to help unite us and start our day with a sense of unity."

Although the way we each guide Devotions ranges widely, we all consider it a powerful daily practice that helps reinforce the importance of listening, of considering different perspectives, of taking time to reflect, to be thankful, or simply quiet. The message that if there is a problem, we will take the time to consider it as a group is a powerful message indeed to take into adulthood. This kind of problem solving begins here at Friends’ Central in the very earliest grades.

We share an interest in and dedication to helping children develop balance, perspective, confidence, the ability to determine right from wrong, a sense of place in the world, a deeper sense of wholeness, and comfort both articulating their own viewpoints and listening respectfully. Fundamental building blocks toward the development of these qualities are the activities and conversations taking place in different classrooms in the Lower School where the days begin with a simple morning exercise called “Devotions.”