



## Homewood Friends Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting Report, 2017

In October 2017, our Trustees held a specially called meeting where together we answered the question: *What is Homewood Meeting for?* This is the summary statement that came out of that meeting:

*Homewood Friends Meeting is a spiritual community of children and adults who come together in worship, opening ourselves to that radically loving spirit which guides us to live justly and peaceably. In worship, we have an opportunity to be challenged and transformed and to develop inner courage. Homewood is a community in which we love and support each other and each other's spiritual practice. Witness and action for peace and justice grow out of our worship.*

We held our annual specially called meeting to assess our spiritual state on 2/24/18. After a period of worship, 45 Homewood members and attenders responded to the following queries: *What are our strengths? Where do we need work?* In small groups we answered the questions: *What are your hopes for the future of Homewood Friends? What part might you play in that?* Our children also participated in the process, exploring similar queries in first day school, reporting back to the adult meeting regarding their deliberations. We then invited all who wished to gather for a group photo to send to our legislators showing us holding a large banner "We support the Maryland Clean Energy Jobs Act."

Below is our discernment on the spiritual condition of Homewood Friends Meeting.

### Worship

The quality of worship at Homewood is spiritually refreshing. Our worship is grounded and deep. It is the center of our community life. As one person put it, "Our strength is that we come together as seekers who are searching for truth together, seekers who are willing to be vulnerable even when the truth is not immediately evident." Average attendance at worship in 2017 remained at 45-50 people.

While our beautiful and large meeting room is found to foster worship, the acoustics are terrible. This is a significant concern. (As of this writing we have made available “Super Ear” headsets, which are “working” and being used with enthusiasm.)

For the first time in many years we shared the joy of celebrating two marriages under the care of Homewood.

Adult Education has supported our worship including two 3-session Inquirers’ series and a well-attended monthly Quaker book club and monthly opportunities for Experiment with Light.

## **Children**

Our nursery for the youngest children is a very special place, nurtured by a dedicated, long-time staff member and one teenager from our Meeting. Our first day school remains small, with approximately 5-8 children participating each week. We remain pleased by the work of our first day school teacher, a young adult Friend who grew up in Baltimore Yearly Meeting. It is challenging to run such a small program. After their special meeting, our children indicated that we need to attract more children and to enliven our social media. As one Friend said, “We need to increase the size and viability of our First Day School.”

## **Business/Committee Work**

Our meetings for business are conducted monthly in a spirit of love and respect for each other. Average attendance is ~16. The same relatively small group of individuals attend each month. One person expressed the hope of a number of us by saying, “I hope for greater attendance at Meeting for Worship for Business with all members responsible for care and stewardship of the meeting.”

Our Nominating Committee continues to find it challenging to fill committees. We have attracted few new members to serve on the member-only committees. At this point we have found a way to incorporate only a few of our many new attenders into the work of the meeting. Nonetheless, committees accomplish much. “I am grateful,” said a Friend, “for the hard work of the different committees that helps enrich us as a group.”

Our House and Grounds Committee continues to lovingly maintain our very large, aging and handsome meetinghouse. Multiple groups are using the meetinghouse; it seems to be always bustling. Our Hospitality Committee supports the meeting, hosting simple lunch after worship. Our Library Committee this year has changed the graphic representations in the library to reflect greater racial diversity among those we honor.

Our work this year has been greatly supported by a long-time meeting member who was hired as our meeting administrator.

## **Work in the World**

We continue to be part of the joint Baltimore Quaker Peace & Justice Committee with Stony Run Meeting. The year started with organizing participation in the Women’s March on Washington, including a nonviolence training which preceded it. Court Watch continued with a few Friends participating in weekly observation of bail hearings. This year the witness led to a formal research project conducted by the Office of the Public Defender. In February 2017, we hosted an educational forum on bail reform and offered call-your-representatives guidance to the Meeting community.

We mourn our city’s greater than 300 murders each year. We have been participating in the Baltimore Ceasefire Weekends, in November hosting the film, “Brother Outsider,” about

Bayard Rustin. We continue our weekly vigil in front of the meetinghouse, on Fridays at 5 pm, holding signs that say, “Black Lives Matter,” “We are All One People,” and “Baltimore Cease Fire” as a representation of our peace testimony. Those passing by often seem grateful with enthusiastic honks and waves. In November, 5-8 Friends met to discuss selected chapters of “Fit for Freedom Not for Friendship” and its implications for Homewood.

Our Green Organizing Action Team (GOAT) organized a group to participate in the People’s Climate March on 4/29/17 in Washington, DC. GOAT also facilitated Homewood’s joining the Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake’s One Water Partnership, completing a congregation self-assessment and showing two environmental films.

## **Community**

Friends continue to experience a strong sense of community at Homewood. Comments reflecting that include: “I find Homewood to be a caring community. Caring is our strength.” “The meeting for me is a safe place with people I know. I feel a warmth and an openness.” “I am a relative newcomer. I feel incredibly welcomed.”

It is heartwarming to see a large number of young adults who are coming to Meeting for Worship. We have over 40 young adults who have indicated interest in being part of a young adult friends group and they are periodically hosting gatherings. We look forward to inviting them into deeper participation in the life of the Meeting.

Hopes for the future of Homewood centered on both outreach and inclusion. It is clear this is where we need work. Many expressed the need to foster fellowship and community, to provide opportunities for getting to know each other better. Another concern raised was that we need to find ways to better communicate with newcomers what Quakerism is all about, and ways to “make institutional knowledge more transparent.”

We aspire to be a more diverse community reflecting the city of Baltimore where we reside. Insights we have gleaned this year is that we need to avoid the “attraction-repulsion dynamic” (embracing what is new or different and then retreating with the first bump in that road) and letting go of self-consciousness and fear of failure—to allow ourselves to make mistakes, make amends and forgive.

As of this writing, we have formed two new working groups on outreach and inclusion that will be executing some of these ideas.

## **Conclusion**

Our Meeting for Worship remains the center of our community life. Worship is grounded; vocal ministry is rich. We keep coming back for more. Recently, we have been more active in the world, and we hope that continues. We experience our community as a loving place. Our hopes for the future include—more children, greater diversity within our worship community, more opportunities for connection with each other and more effective ways of communicating our faith to newcomers.