

State of Homewood Peace & Social Justice Committee 2018 Annual Report

The committee is united in clearness to focus our Peace and Justice Testimony on ways to diminish the occasions for violence in Baltimore City, ie the major problems of racism, inequity and poverty. The members are seriously dedicated to living the peace testimony. Committee members in 2018 were Phil Furnas, Kathryn Munnell, Jody Hopkins, Louise Hopkins, Jo Brown, Barbara Bezdek, and mid-year we welcomed three new committee members, Rosetta Graham, Peter Phalen and Exsul Van Helden. Debbie Cooper has been a faithful volunteer-participant this year as well.

Some of the Main Ways We Spent our Time in 2018

We reexamined our joint committee relationship with Stony Run, in order to be more effective working together and separately. For several years the two committees have met jointly as the Baltimore Quaker Peace & Justice Committee. Over time Homewood members came to feel somewhat overwhelmed by Stony Run members business, and the logistics and discernment tasks felt more burdensome than productive of faithful witness to the peace testimony. A joint retreat was held in June, and while both committees recognize the value of joint work, we have not settled on a schedule or agenda to do so.

We continued to educate ourselves on bail and sentencing reform, and did Court-watching in conjunction with the Public Defenders-Open Society Institute research project.

◆ We continued hands-on and financial support for several peace building organizations in Baltimore. This included Unified Efforts, whose director Debbie Ramsey of Stony Run Meeting has been well supported by SR: Unified Efforts successfully became a tax exempt organization, bought its building on North Avenue, and has both a support committee and a board on which Stony Run Members serve.

◆ We supported Tubman House, shared a potluck in the new garden space, and organized donations of winter coats and funds.

◆ We supported the work of Baltimore Ceasefire in a few ways: with individual leadings in CeaseFire community events and lifting up lives lost to violence, with the themes of our weekly peace vigils, with community-oriented events that included two film showings, two post-Ceasefire retreats for the Ceasefire team (one held at Stony Run), and several Ceasefire Public Meetings. (This cooperation is now culminating in a pending agreement to establish Ceasefire's new business office at Homewood.)

We continued the "Black Lives Matter" theme of the Friday vigil; adding "Love thy Neighbor (no exceptions)" and "Baltimore Ceasefire", "No Hate" and "We Are All One People" signs as elaborating the theme. Responses continue to be overwhelmingly positive. This witness continues to spill over into the meeting's life in organic ways. On the Friday following the Tree of Life Synagogue massacre (March 2019) we stood vigil in front of Homewood with faith leaders from several churches and mosques, as congregants of Hinenu, the Baltimore Justice

Schteibel, gathered for Shabbat inside.

On Ceasefire Weekend February 2018, we cooperated with the Working Group for the Arts to screen Ava DuVernay's documentary film "13th", followed by a community discussion with J.C. Faulk of Circles of Voices. It was well-attended by Homewood Meeting community members and members of the public.

During Pride Month we held a second joint event with the Working Group for the Arts, showing a documentary on the life of Bayard Rustin, followed by discussion and potluck. This was also well-attended, albeit primarily by Quakers.

We sought and obtained the Meeting's decision to co-sponsor the Baltimore iteration of the interfaith film services, "Voices from the Holy Land", with two film showings held at the Homewood Friends Meetinghouse (one hosted by Hinenu, one by us); and four others screened at various churches in the area. These were well attended although almost entirely by non Quakers.

The committee called on Friends to join together in the March for Our Lives protests against gun violence in Baltimore and in Washington DC on March 24th. Also in March the committee led Meeting participants in a reflection to respond to the priority-setting request by Friends Committee on National Legislation.

Members attended the dedication of Harriet Tubman Grove of Wyman Park Dell, where a statue to Confederate Generals Jackson and Lee was dismantled. Members of the Tubman and Gantt family were present.

PSJ updated our due diligence regarding budget support, and recommended Homewood add Baltimore Housing Roundtable, Baltimore Ceasefire, Thread, Out for Justice, Baltimore Community Mediation Center, and Alternatives to Violence - Maryland to the causes we support financially. We determined to fund fewer projects at higher levels by being more discerning.

A working group on racial inclusion, clerked by Sarah Bur, met three times, and developed a fairly extensive set of proposals (see Appendix, below), but did not persist, for reasons that are unclear. It was named following PSJ sponsorship of a group reading select chapters together of **Fit for Freedom but not for Friendship** at the end of 2017. Some of the working group's functions have been drawn into the Welcome and Outreach Working group, clerked by Janet Abrams and under the care of Ministry and Counsel. However, there is much work to be done that falls outside the purview of the Welcome & Outreach Working Group and is related to the work of PSJ.

Spiritual State of the Committee

For the most part, meetings of the committee begin and end in worship, which is mostly silent.

The Committee remains deeply committed to issues of peace with justice. We strive to move forward as we discern our collective spiritual leadings. We grapple with how we can be useful in building the beloved community as peacefully and racially just, as a still mostly-white faith group. In our meetings and our committee undertakings, we strive to sit with and learn from the discomforts, and to lift up and appreciate the enrichments, that come from acting on this deep concern.

Major Challenges

It remains a major challenge to find time to meet as the whole committee. In an effort to address this, we decided to change our meeting time, to meet on second Sundays at 1 pm, immediately following the meeting to hold in the Light persons touched by deadly violence in Baltimore.

The committee clerk has sometimes felt overburdened with administrative responsibilities of clerking (scheduling, correspondence and engagement within the committee and with other committees/Friends/enquirers, AFSC, Stony Run; vigil administration); and has asked the committee to prepare to select another clerk. However members of the Peace Committee have felt she has provided good stewardship of the committee despite the clerk's sense.

Instability in the government at the national level, as well as the levels of violence locally and in public discourse, is an ongoing concern to the committee as we discern our work.

Vigil participation by the meeting community continues to be erratic, and stewarded by just a handful of Friends. We have been considering changing the day, time or frequency of vigils.

Major Strengths of the Committee

Facing turmoil in government, at the local, national and international levels, has energized committee members to work to advance the Peace Testimony and to find ways to increase Friends' capacity to engage in peace building locally.

Hopes and Plans for the Future

We hope to see increased participation in the vigil, and in collaboration with Baltimore CeaseFire, not just from committee members but more broadly from among Homewood members and attenders.

We are enthusiastic that CeaseFire may find office space here in our Meeting House in 2019, and the closer working relationship that will facilitate.

Appendix:
2018 Working Group on Racial Inclusion:

Sarah Bur, Barbara Bezdek, Jo Brown, Debbie Kennison, Kathleen Wilson, and Rosetta Graham.

We agreed on these general principles:

“What you do for me, without me, you do to me.” — Burundian proverb

We were clear that there are two interrelated components to the work: addressing internal cultural elements of privilege, racism and bias within our Meeting; and reaching out to accompany and learn from community members of color who are engaged in work consistent with our testimonies as Quakers.

We seek a shared vision which may lead us to develop an inclusive beloved faith community. This pursuit is vital spiritual work from which all can benefit.

We agreed that the Meeting’s diversity does not reflect the diversity of the wider neighborhoods where we are situated, with the result that we are incomplete in our collective search for Truth and Light.

Each of us deserves to experience Beloved Community in our meeting.

Still today, Friends of color experience daily the weight of racism.

Our belief in the “light” in every person charges us to undo racism and privilege both within ourselves and within our faith community.

To advance toward inclusive beloved community will require us to embrace wider and more varied cultural norms, to identify and dismantle privilege, and to engage in anti-racism work within and beyond the Religious Society of Friends.

We aim for Homewood Friends to be a community richly reflective of the city of Baltimore, and to draw on all the Truth that the Spirit brings when it moves freely within and between us all.

Toward a plan to undo unconscious racism in our Meeting:

Become an intentionally inclusive learning community. We propose that the Meeting collectively commit to put racial justice at the center of our spiritual commitments, to make changes to our structures and practices as we learn.

Specifically Homewood Friends Meeting can:

Provide and participate in annual learning sessions for Friends and staff, to learn models for discussing racism, unconscious bias, and privilege.

Provide and participate in trainings to learn effective ways to identify, and lovingly interrupt, instances of racism, examples of unconscious bias, and assumptions of privilege.

Create and nurture ongoing support circles for Friends committed to this work

Be regularly in touch with Quakers doing this work: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Undoing Racism Work Group; Friends General Conference and its Ministry on Racism Support Specialist; and ministryonracismsupportspecialist@fgcquaker.org

Develop and share a library of social-justice resources. Work with children, youth and adults to learn about racism and to address it in their own lives.

Examine and revise our Quaker practices and structures, discerning that which is essential to Quaker faith, and paring away those artifacts of unseen bias and racial preference that we may find there.

Support Friends and inquirers of color. We propose that the Meeting commit to finding practices that actively support Friends and inquirers of color so they may feel welcome, safe, and fully-engaged as members and leaders of our faith community.

Develop and implement a clear process to respond early – and humbly, firmly, and lovingly -- to racist behavior.

Support Friends of color by providing opportunities to gather together.

Support Friends of color in the development of Meeting participation and leadership, including support committees, travel committees, and such other supports as enable full participation.

Connect with communities of color through shared goals. We should do this seeking to learn how Friends can be supportive, and can collaborate more effectively with our neighbors.

Seek out effective and spiritually-grounded ways to accompany those local communities most impacted by oppression.

Learn ways to develop meaningful relationships with people of color in the communities in which we reside and work.

Know that real love is a motivator for change: anticipating that our inevitable mistakes may become the source of our greatest learning.

Hold ourselves accountable to our work plan.

Assess annually our progress in undoing racism and dismantling privilege among Baltimore Friends.

Devote a portion of the state-of-the-meeting reports to reflect on our meeting's efforts to understand and address racism, privilege, and supremacy systems.