

Homewood Friends Meeting

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report - 2019

Meetings for worship at Homewood remain the center of our life as a spiritual community. They are deeply grounded in silent worship that is enriched by spirit-led vocal ministry. Our opening statement, read at the beginning of each meeting, serves to remind Friends and to acquaint newcomers regarding what the Quaker worship experience is about. "In worship we enter into stillness of body and mind in order to feel that radically loving spirit within us and among us, to give ourselves over to it and to discern what it would have us do." At business meetings this year we read a quote from Britain Faith and Practice that reminds us that, "we act as a community, whose members love and trust each other." Our business meetings, which are grounded and centered, are attended by 15-19 persons each month.

Attendance at meeting for worship has continued to grow slowly this past year, with about 50 present for worship on any given First Day. A simple lunch following worship is a vitally important opportunity for fostering fellowship afterwards. In 2019, we were delighted to welcome five new friends into membership at Homewood: Jo Brown, Bruce Morgan, Peter Sheehan, David Sydlík, and Russell Trimmer. Given that our average number of new members per year has been less than one, this surge in new membership is celebrated! Sadly, Bruce Morgan, one of our newest members passed away in June. Bruce had been minimally connected with his family for years; we were glad to be able to host his far-flung family to celebrate Bruce's life in a well-attended memorial meeting for worship. His family was greatly comforted to know that in his final years Bruce was a beloved member of Homewood. We also held a memorial celebrating the life of Richard Kelly (son of Thomas Kelly) who was an attender at Homewood during his last few years. We were delighted to celebrate the marriage of Maya Muñoz and Russell Trimmer in a ceremony that incorporated traditional elements of a Jewish wedding with our Quaker traditions.

Young adult friends now constitute a significant and growing percentage of our attendance at meeting. They host a well-attended monthly pot-luck. At the rise of meeting young adult friends always are among the first to greet new young adult attenders. We celebrate the many young adults coming to Homewood who are finding sustenance in our worship and community.

The Religious Education Committee offered an engaging children's curriculum focusing on Old Testament stories (Spring) and Quaker Testimonies (Fall). The First Day School program during 2019 included two plays—a Christmas Nativity and the story of Joseph and the Multi-colored Coat. The children modified the Nativity play and collectively wrote the Joseph play to reflect current themes of interest such as immigration, gender identity, and women's rights. We sponsored trips to Gunpowder Friends Meeting, Catoctin Quaker Camp and the Friends Burial Ground in Baltimore, and took on four service projects through which the children prepared lunches for people served by the Assistance Center of Towson Churches, made care kits for people experiencing homelessness, and picked up trash and recycling materials in nearby Wyman Dell Park. We had two fine young adults serve as teachers in 2019, Rory Kennison (Spring) and Maddie Doll (Fall). An average of six children of various ages attended each First Day out of the 13 children who regularly or occasionally attended Meeting with their parent(s). We also had two pre-school children who were cared for in the nursery by Chris Stadler and his assistant Henry Kennison, a Young Friend.

Homewood continues to be active in and supportive of Baltimore Yearly Meeting. A number of Homewood Friends serve on BYM committees (Nominating, Camp Property, Baltimore STRIDE, Faith and Practice, Peace and Social Concerns) or affiliated organizations such as the Miles White Beneficial Society and the Friends House Board. In the summer of 2019, at least six children participated in the BYM camping program, the largest contingent that we have had in a number of years. Homewood Friends also participate actively in Chesapeake Quarterly Meeting.

In the past year Homewood offered various opportunities to deepen our faith. In Spring of 2019, we held a spiritual deepening program using Taber's "Four Doors to Meeting for Worship". Our monthly Quaker Book Club continued with a small group of regular participants, sharing about texts regarding aspects of Quaker faith. Once a month before meeting for worship, Homewood offers the opportunity to participate in a guided meditation, Experiment with Light, which is thought to evoke the worship experience of early Friends. In Fall 2019 we started a weekly mid-week meeting for worship including once per month Experiment with Light. Four Homewood persons are participating in the Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) Spiritual Formation program. Hymn singing, also offered once a month before worship, is thoroughly enjoyed by a small group that participates.

Our Green Organizing Action Team (GOAT) was remarkably active last year including the following:

- Engaged Homewood in advocacy around the successful passage of the Maryland Clean Energy Jobs Act which mandates 50% clean energy by 2030 and 100% clean energy by 2040.
- Supported successful passage of the styrofoam ban in Maryland.
- Organized a group to attend and support the young people's Strike for the Climate in downtown Baltimore.
- Installed a large, gorgeous bird and butterfly friendly garden and two rainwater cisterns with the support of a \$5000 grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust; and hosted a celebration of the garden with our partners (Blue Water Baltimore, the Patterson Park Audubon Center and Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake).
- Committed to plans for installing additional solar panels on our meeting house in 2020.
- Offered various educational opportunities related to the environment.

For many, worship and engagement at Homewood includes concerns for peace and social justice.

- Friday evening vigils in front of the meetinghouse have continued and serve to witness to the community our belief that "Black Lives Matter" and "We Are All One People". The response by those driving by is often enthusiastic and thankful.
- Our Peace and Social Justice Committee sponsored a showing of a film from the series Voices from the Holy Land and a presentation from Combatants for Peace (Israeli and Palestinian ex-combatants who are working to end the occupation of Palestine).
- Co-sponsored commemorations of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- Hosted Friends from the Northampton, Massachusetts Friends Meeting who are traveling under a concern about the International Nuclear Weapons Ban, and who led a workshop at Homewood in June for regional anti-nuclear activists.
- Once per month, a meeting is held to hold in the Light persons affected by violence in Baltimore.

In February 2019, we hosted a specially called meeting of Chesapeake Quarterly Meeting where a historic decision was made – to form what has come to be called Quaker Voice of Maryland. We are

thrilled to see the progress this group has made in the last year toward advancing Quaker advocacy in Maryland. We learned with dismay that the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) Friend of a Friend program is devolving. We held a listening session with Jacob Flowers, Regional Director of the AFSC South Region, to discuss possibilities for future collaboration in Baltimore.

Our Outreach Team sponsored two sessions of Friendly Eights potlucks, fostered Homewood participation in the Gay Pride Day and put up a welcoming poster in our front box. Homewood's Working Group for the Arts sponsored several art exhibits and coffee houses, which attracted individuals from the wider community to visit Homewood.

We still have plenty of room to grow and enrich our Meeting. In last year's report we indicated that we continue to envision our Meeting community as more racially and ethnically diverse. We made very limited progress in this regard. Our Outreach Team planned a discussion series of Ibram Kendi's book *How to Be an Anti-Racist* for early 2020. Following the reading of this book, our Ministry and Counsel Committee will identify way forward to establish a Homewood Change Group (a Meeting team supported by BYM's Growing Diverse Leadership Committee and Working Group on Racism to help lower barriers to the inclusion of more people of color among us). We continue to seek greater light, discernment, unity, resolve, and action about understanding and growing diversity. Another goal for 2020 is to find ways to be inclusive for persons with different abilities and to address the significant problem we have regarding hearing verbal ministry in our giant meeting room. It is also our hope to incorporate our many new attenders at Homewood into the fabric of our community life and business.

Our building will be one hundred years old in 2021. Maintenance of a building of this size and age is a major undertaking; we are so grateful to Friends on our House and Grounds Committee who work diligently to keep the building functional and beautiful. Our Meeting House has become a major form of outreach and community engagement with over 15 groups routinely renting our building at nominal cost, including ballet and tango dancing, two Buddhist groups, a Jewish congregation, a Baptist congregation, a midnight Alcoholics Anonymous group, etc. We are planning to use our upcoming hundredth anniversary as an opportunity to re-envision our Meeting House and make it more reflective of our spiritual life together and of our hopes for the future.

In the past year, Homewood Friends Meeting has been a vibrant faith community characterized by deep worship, communication of our beliefs to others, and active witness about environmental and social concerns. The continued increase in the number of attenders, particularly many young adults, is truly exciting. As we continue our intentional efforts to deepen our faith and broaden our community, we hope to engage more members and attenders in the multi-faceted, spiritual work of sustaining, supporting, and growing Homewood Friends Meeting and our work in the world.