

Homewood Friends Meeting
Spiritual State of the Meeting Report
2023

Creating the Report

Every year, Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) asks all monthly meetings to submit a report on the meeting's spiritual state. These reports are later shared in BYM committee meetings and publications. To guide the annual process, the BYM Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee constructs queries in addition to encouraging meetings to develop their own. This year, the Homewood Friends Ministry and Counsel Committee (M&C) initially sent out to the Meeting the BYM queries with few changes, but upon some dissatisfaction from Friends, revised them to create a more spiritually based and resonant set of queries. As in many years, we had a specially called meeting that uses worship-sharing to give our community a voice. On March 10, 2024, as a part of Sunday Meeting for Worship, we held a group worship sharing that considered four queries. (Due to time constraints, Query 5 was not considered.) Love and appreciation enveloped the room as members and attenders addressed the queries, and their responses were recorded by one M&C member and two other seasoned Friends. The voices in this report are the words of those who spoke.

- 1. How do Meeting for Worship and Meeting for Business help you and Homewood Meeting stay faithful to the Light? In addition to Meeting for Worship, are there other ways that Homewood has helped you progress on your spiritual journey this year? What else would you like to see?***

Homewood Meeting provides both comfort and challenge. Meeting is a balm. We care for each other in the face of illness and death. We quickly go deep in our worship. Our connections with other Friends and our committee work are conducted with great spirit and caring for each other. Yet we are strong enough as a community to also experience contentious meetings for business, recognizing that faithfulness to the Light is a

challenge. Through disunity, the truth and the Light can reveal themselves. Worship is a safe place for the Light to instruct. It is not always a warm Light. Sometimes the Light is terribly harsh and helps us look at difficult things.

Specific appreciation was expressed for Spiritual Formation, the delicious simple lunches, the fellowship and caring embedded in committee work, and Thursday evenings' Experiment with Light. The regular structure of First Day worship guides our weeks.

At least two Friends expressed desire for occasions of prolonged silence, maybe a spiritual retreat.

2. The whole world seems at war now. How do we individually and as a meeting practice the Quaker peace testimony?

Friends identified some individual and collective efforts to live the Quaker peace testimony. Individual efforts included handing out fliers to and speaking with people about the Ukraine war and supporting the United Nations Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Some Friends participated in the recent Peace Pilgrimage in support of a ceasefire in Palestine. This experience led one speaker to share that she had some of the deepest conversations in years.

Our Peace Committee had set up a meeting about U.S. policy in Israel and Palestine with Sen. Van Hollen for the upcoming week. One Friend noted that she was deeply moved by the work of the Holding in the Light group naming the persons who have died each week by homicide in Baltimore City. Remembering and focusing on the value of every person's life is important to her.

But in the acknowledgement that we don't do enough, there is a longing to do more. Friends can consider joining our Peace and Social Justice Committee, and we can re-acquaint ourselves with the Peace Testimony as we try to address wars, violence, famine, and poisonous political discourse. One Friend noted that the Peace Testimony is a big ask and violent oppression has many forms. We have begun the conversation

about what organizations we support financially. Our support of US arms sales is a blind spot in American culture. She offered these questions: How do we support people in Baltimore who are suffering from violence? How do we change the culture of guns in our city? How do we move from protest to delivering aid to changing state policy? How do we make manufacturers accountable? These are the assignments. Love is not the answer, love is the assignment.*

*Attribution unknown

3. Does Homewood feel welcoming to you? What specifically makes you feel welcome? Are there things that you feel would make Homewood more welcoming? How does Homewood embrace differences in race, age, gender affiliation, and other characteristics?

For every person who walks through the doors of Homewood Friends Meeting for the first time, there is risk. Acknowledging and receiving the vulnerability of newcomers is critical to our community, particularly when the newcomers feel marginalized or vilified by the outside world. Speakers were grateful to Homewood for providing a safe and accepting space. Intentional efforts by Young Adult Friends, Ministry and Counsel, and the Outreach Team to welcome newcomers has made attenders feel welcomed and part of an intergenerational community without feeling proselytized. One attender noted that, as she moves through life as a trans woman, there are those who look at her with scorn and disgust. And then she came here and people looked to her not just as human...but they saw the Light of God in her. It galvanizes her to walk through her life in the same way. Like many other churches, Homewood is wrestling with being welcoming. Homewood proves that there are things we can do, but it is imperative to look to the future and consider trying new approaches, a “recalibration” of outreach. We can’t do that unless we wrap our arms around each other.

4. *How is Homewood working to be an anti-racist and justice-seeking community? What more could we be doing?*

Despite outreach efforts in the past several years, Homewood Friends Meeting is still predominantly white. The topic of racism remains problematic at Homewood. Some people may be unaware of the halting steps we have taken to address white supremacy in our Meeting and in our community. Our Meeting's new Dismantling Racism Working Group has many young, energetic, and thoughtful people. The work is approached with many questions: How do we honor the past when we acknowledge that Quakerism in the United States is historically white and has frequently failed to recognize and combat its own and the larger society's racism? What is the genuine and honest honoring of the past so that we can move forward? It was suggested that we work on how to talk to people who have very different points of view about racism. We acknowledge the "white" traditions that Friends in the United States inherited from 17th century Britain. Being aware of those traditions and their roots can help us work more intentionally to incorporate the perspectives of people of color into our interracial community building.

One of the considerations is to create a list of activities that people might choose to do in 2024. That way there is a lot of flexibility for people to organize themselves. Things are moving even if not quickly enough. Ultimately, having more people of color in Quaker spaces will make these spaces safer.

5. *If you have attended Meeting for Business, how has that experience been? In what way do you think our Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business could improve?*

Not discussed due to lack of time.

Looking Back and Forward

At the beginning of 2023 as Ministry and Counsel looked ahead, a focal point was on encouraging growth in attendance within our Meeting. The Ministry and Counsel Committee envisioned an arc of Adult Religious Education classes, which would provide opportunities to nurture spiritual growth, to encourage the exchange of different perspectives, and to seek ways to actively promote anti-racism in a city with a diverse population.

Homewood has begun to fulfill some of these visions. The arc of Adult Religious Education classes is still a work in progress, but a monthly Bible Study group is enthusiastically attended by many Young Adult Friends as well as older Friends. We have provided a Spiritual Formation Program, in which many Friends are joyfully participating. A significant milestone was our integration of a new sound system, which transformed our meetings for worship: We could hear each other's messages! As we hear more voices, it seems that more people are led to speak. Our newly configured Dismantling Racism Change Group has begun to offer activities that ignite reflection and discussion. Along with Stony Run Meeting and the Lillie Carroll Jackson Museum, in May Homewood sponsored an event in which Charles L. Chavis, Jr., PhD, Director of African and African American Studies at George Mason University, discussed his book *The Silent Shore*, which examined racial violence on the Eastern Shore.

These activities provide a good foundation for 2024. We hope that our growing membership will fuel more spiritual energy within our community to nurture ourselves, our city, and our dear earth. The outer world knocks at the door of our collective Spirit. We seek a clear compass to address social justice and peace issues. We still yearn for a meaningful intersection with our struggling and complex city and seek ways forward. Announcing names of Baltimore homicide victims each week reminds us of lives lost. All this, but at the same time we must continue to nurture our love and care for each other, which is - as voices in our report express - the seed of all other things.