

**Homewood Friends Meeting**  
**Spiritual State of the Meeting Report**  
**2024**

**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. Unlike last year (when we were collectively led to revise a more spiritually based and resonant set of queries), Friends this year embraced the suggested BYM queries. As in many years, the Homewood Friends Meeting Ministry and Counsel Committee (M&C) had a specially called meeting that uses worship-sharing to give our community a voice. On February 23, 2025, as a part of Sunday Meeting for Worship, we held a group worship sharing that considered the four queries, and the attendees' responses were recorded by three seasoned Friends. The voices in this report are the words of those who spoke. It should be noted that these voices do not necessarily reflect the experiences and perspectives of all who have participated in Homewood Friends Meeting during the past year, but generally speaking Ministry and Counsel found that what was said at the worship sharing resonated with their reflections in 2024. (See asterisk below.)

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**How does the Spirit prosper among us?**

In considering this query, voices were unified and grateful. Messages emphasized vulnerability and trust, as one can see by the language choices. A Friend noted that a prospering Spirit creates ripples. In our worship, a grounding silence is the beginning, as it provides an anchor. Trust emerges: people share their vulnerability and their most treasured parts of themselves. The ripples of the Spirit spread to caring not just for one another but for communities beyond Homewood Friends Meeting. The Spirit lingers and provides balm to those visiting the meetinghouse during the week.

**In what ways are we tenderly eldering and educating adults and children in the manner of Friends to deepen our vocal ministry?**

Most answers addressed the ways in which Quakers in general and Homewood in particular have provided a home, both to the young and to the old. One Friend, who grew up as a member of a meeting outside of Philadelphia, recalled that First Day School studied “God’s world,” rather than religion itself. It provided her with an expansive sense of wonder that remained within her as an adult. Another Friend expressed gratitude that Homewood has given her and her children, who were born into the Meeting, a place that they can always return to. A newcomer expressed hope that Homewood would provide socialization and caring for orphans and elders.

Only one Friend addressed the last part of the query: “to deepen our vocal ministry.” He noted that, while many felt safe in voicing messages in meeting for worship, they did not always deliver *ministry*. This Friend suggested that we work towards cultivating a discernment process for what is and is not vocal ministry. This has been an ongoing discussion at Homewood over the year.

**How do we maintain the spirit of openness and humility as we proclaim our testimonies and live them?**

People spoke to different parts of this query. Regarding the “spirit of openness and humility,” one Friend noted her vulnerability (humility) and has enjoyed the spirit of openness at Homewood, which she sees as a safe place to take off the figurative mask. Another speaker noted a similar dichotomy when he said that there are people at Homewood who appear to be put together but need help for that external image to become an internal reality.

Others spoke with regard to proclaiming our testimonies with humility. One Friend comes from generations of Quakers, and her touchstone has been “Let your life speak.” But she has recently experienced an insight: Quaker decision-making is a privilege. It is a privilege to move at our own speed when the slowness conflicts with the wider world

and we don't adjust ourselves to the emergent needs of others. Another Friend drew on the wisdom of American journalist Krista Tippett: Keep doing what you are doing. Don't withdraw - but also know how to "take off your shoes" in someone else's house. We can figuratively take off our verbal shoes and leave them at the door. Forget about our opinions and just listen. This process of humility and openness allows people with divergent views to cool down and converse about contentious matters. The world, a gentle Friend summarized, is one big group of people, and we are here to take care of each other and to explain things to each other.

### **As we work for peace, are we nourished by peace and justice within and among ourselves?**

The answers to this query had different layers. An attender expressed how Homewood has nourished her: It is a little bit like yoga or mindfulness meditation...over the years you get amazing benefits. She is growing her faith in people and faith in God. Another Friend noted that, in his work as a filmmaker, he has tried over the years to bring people together. He articulated through his work that we are different but have many things in common.

But deeper involvement in the Homewood community reveals complexities and hurts. A longtime Homewood member who is on Ministry and Counsel noted that we have had some conflicts this year, some more overt than others, and they are trying to learn how to embrace and resolve conflicts without hiding them, and they seek to be fair and equitable. It's a huge challenge, especially for Quakers, many of whom at Homewood have been conflict-averse. We hope to improve our ability to work through conflicts in the coming years.

### **Looking Back and Forward**

The past year has seen many of the aspirations of 2023 come to fruition. Attendance at Homewood has grown and continues to do so, as people seek solace from today's increasingly unforgiving climate. Many groups have coalesced, attesting to our

Meeting's energy and growing vitality. These activities include the Bible Study group, the Quaker Pamphlet Reading group, the Outreach Team, affinity groups such as the LGBTQ group and Dismantling Racism group, and the Quakerspeak Video Discussion gathering. In addition, we have a simple meeting for worship in the Library on the last Sunday of each month, in which participants worship without the distraction of technology. Both Spiritual Formation and Experiment with Light continue. We continue to collect bags of food for Viva House once a month. We also have co-sponsored activities with our resident Jewish community Hinenu, and these events have enriched spiritual growth and togetherness in both our communities.

But blessings bring their own challenges. So many new people have been attending meeting that we are stretched to get to know everyone and to provide foundational instruction for sustained Quaker understanding and practices. Both the Spiritual Nurture Working Group (nascent last year but producing an abundance of activities this year) and our small but persevering Outreach Group have worked hard to provide the necessary welcoming and informative care. These efforts are vital to inviting Meeting membership with its commitments. We need, as always, more people on committees. We need to encourage better understanding of vocal ministry. What should be considered ministry? How do we teach what ministry is and how to participate in meeting for worship? Perhaps Quaker Foundations can offer a class focusing on vocal ministry. We need to step into the light and growth that can emerge out of the heat of conflict, both within our community and beyond. There is Light if people slow down and look for it.

**Describe specific ways your meeting works to become an anti-racist and justice-seeking community.**

The Dismantling Racism Working Group holds monthly meetings and quarterly BIPOC Friends dinners.

\*At business meeting, Friends made helpful suggestions for the Ministry and Counsel Committee to follow when creating future SSOM reports.

- M&C needs to move beyond what was said on a single day; they are the skilled discerners regarding experiences with people and their spiritual leadings at the Meeting.
- M&C should consider changing the process of the SSOM so it's not just one data point in time.
- How do we capture more of the Meeting's spiritual treasures throughout the year?
- During their meetings, M&C should try to harvest themes that have emerged recently.
- Illuminate how the report can be part of our ongoing discussion and care working with one another.
- In other words, this document should be used throughout the year, and not just used to send this off to BYM as an administrative task.