

Spiritual State of the Meeting Report Homewood Friends Meeting 2025

Homewood Friends is a vibrant, spiritual community in a period of growth. Attendance at meetings is about 40–70 people, including on Zoom. Vocal ministry is generally grounded and seasoned, and that ministry comes from Friends who are new to us, who have been coming for some time, Friends with a gift for vocal ministry, and others to whom it would not occur to speak publicly. The silence of our meetings is deep and rich, grounding us in That Which is Eternal.

For the previous few years, Homewood Friends has held a semi-programmed meeting for worship that begins at our normal meeting time of Sunday at 10:30 a.m. After roughly 20 minutes of waiting worship, we transition into worship-sharing on the queries. Per usual, the Ministry and Counsel Committee weighed the queries provided to us by Yearly Meeting and used them to create three queries which we believed examined what the Yearly Meeting asks of us.

We send this report with love to our Friends in Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

Query 1: What do we mean by "Spirit" and how do we live together faithfully amid our different understandings of it?

Homewood Friends is a community of people with different life experiences. These life experiences shape how we see Spirit. Friends describe Spirit primarily as lived experience rather than doctrine. Many speak of Spirit as a loving curiosity about self, community, and world. Gathering regularly for worship is itself a collective affirmation that such attentiveness matters. Friends emphasize that presuming good intent and practicing restraint create the conditions in which curiosity can flourish.

Spirit is described as the Divine Life animating all things, the Light that prompts speech and action, and a wisdom that connects inward experience with outward faithfulness. Several Friends reflect on the distinction between an inward Light present in each person and the corporate encounter with the one Spirit in gathered worship. We affirm that our worship is not merely individual meditation but a shared turning toward the Source that touches all.

Friends also speak candidly of evolving journeys. We run the full theological gamut from various flavors of Christianity, Buddhism, paganism, and non-theism! Some wrestle with traditional language for God; others find meaning in metaphors of breath, intention, and integration. For some, Spirit moves us beyond rational self-interest and isolation toward connection and compassion. Despite differences, Friends unite around the conviction that

each person carries a measure of a radically loving Spirit—a Seed that does not need to be earned. We choose to see and honor that of God in one another, and that choice sustains our community.

Query 2: Are our lives, both individually and as a meeting, truly aligned with what we say we believe?

Friends engage honestly with the gap between aspiration and action. There is recognition that disengagement in the face of injustice can lead to complicity. Apathy, exceptionalism, and avoidance are named as forces that erode moral clarity and contribute to the injustices of our time. We acknowledge that the “spirit of the age” is shaped, in part, by our willingness—or unwillingness—to respond.

At the same time, Friends remind one another that we are not the Religious Society of Perfect People, but of Friends. We are human and fallible. Worship remains the anchor of our common life, and Friends testify that worship at Homewood moves quickly into a gathered depth that nourishes and strengthens us for engagement in the world.

Questions exist about the clarity of our collective witness. Friends wonder whether we articulate our testimonies clearly enough, and whether approved minutes sometimes substitute for sustained action. While many engage in acts of mercy, advocacy, and accompaniment, we have not always labored together to discern what faithful corporate response requires. This year we laid down our Peace and Social Justice Committee and restructured how this work is carried forward. Even without this committee, spirit-led initiatives continue to arise. There is energy and concern, though also a desire for greater coherence and accountability.

Friends speak personally of the difficulty of fully living into the Peace Testimony in a nation whose resources fund war and whose daily lives may contribute to the inequities in our city. Not all Friends find themselves in unity with all of the testimonies, yet choose fellowship with Friends who hold out for a better way than would otherwise occur to them. Still others ask which expectations reflect authentic Quaker leadings and which are socially imposed. We are keenly aware that there are norms which are cultural and class-based and we seek more clarity on this. While we strive to be humble, we also recognize the moral seriousness of acting or not acting, of our choices both individually and collectively. We recognize that integrity requires continual examination of how our daily choices—financial, professional, civic—reflect the Light we profess.

Query 3 – Are we listening and responding to Spirit together in ways that nurture one another and lead us into loving action?

Many Friends express gratitude for a Meeting marked by vulnerability, affection, and hope. The willingness to share pain and sorrow and to hold one another tenderly draws people into deeper commitment. Meeting is experienced as a place of spiritual nourishment from which we are sent back into the world to “let our lives speak.” Our Faith and Practice asks us if we recognize and encourage special gifts of ministry. The answer to that is no, and that has left some feeling “in the wilderness” with their perceived callings to ministry. The absence of consistent eldership is noted as a gap in our communal life. At the same time, Friends express a desire to strengthen structures of nurture. As our community grows, we do not always fully know one another’s gifts. There is longing for more intentional spaces to share stories, explore faith, and accompany spiritual leadings.

Concrete examples illustrate both possibility and responsibility. Gatherings such as a Death Café and subsequent topic-centered conversations provide space for faithful leadings to flourish. Friends affirm the power of such initiatives while acknowledging that we can be more deliberate in recognizing, testing, and supporting the movements of Spirit among us.

Conflict remains an area requiring growth. Experiences of deep hurt and temporary departure from Meeting are shared alongside gratitude for reconciliation efforts. Friends acknowledge that we do not always handle conflict skillfully, yet there is also evidence of maturation. We remind ourselves of the spiritual discipline of listening fully rather than preparing rebuttal. Recent difficult conversations have been marked by care, respect, and love even amid disagreement.

Homewood Friends Meeting is characterized by theological and social diversity, moral wrestling, and enduring affection. We are sustained by corporate worship and by a shared commitment to honoring that of God in every person. We acknowledge areas where we must grow: clarifying our witness; strengthening eldership; engaging conflict more faithfully; and discerning together how our testimonies call us into public life.

Yet we also testify to hope. Friends speak of the simple truth that as long as there is breath, there is possibility. We seek to nourish one another’s roots so that we may extend our branches into a world marked by violence, injustice, and fear. Our calling is not to be without flaws but to be faithful to the Light, growing that Seed within us.

We remain a community of Friends—seeking together the right way forward, trusting that the Spirit which gathers us also guides us into deeper unity and more courageous love.

Addendum: During the process of reviewing and revising the previous 2024 Spiritual State of the Meeting report, Friends asked that the SSOM be more than a snapshot from a single day: “How do we capture more of the Meeting's spiritual treasures throughout the year?”

Accordingly, the Homewood Ministry and Counsel Committee (M&C) has periodically assessed the spiritual state of the Meeting throughout 2025. During the summer, the corporeal aspects of worship in the basement dining room (uncomfortable chairs, squeaky fan, dark room) might have affected the quality of worship for some, but others felt freer to give messages in the more intimate space. It was a reminder that Quaker meetings for worship can happen in any location. The return to the meeting room in the autumn nevertheless brought more settled worship. M&C also noted that the increase in numbers has led to much more participation both in worship and in social and administrative activities. In particular, there are many more young people than in the previous several years, engendering energy and fresh perspective within the Meeting. Given today's abrasive and divisive political climate, M&C had worried that messages would become overtly political, but that has not happened; messages have remained grounded in the Spirit. M&C initiated a message flow chart that provided guidance for appropriate messages and over the weeks the messages became deeper. Friends are seeking refuge. Rather than talking, they are speaking, discerning, and examining.