

THE INVITATION

Please consider being part of a Change Group providing leadership for your Meeting to lower barriers to Friends and seekers of color. Since each Meeting is different, Change Groups vary. Some Meetings have created new groups, while in others, pre-existing committees have taken up the charge of a Change Group.

Because each Meeting and its surrounding community are unique, you are likely to be most effective working in your local Meeting. You tend to know that Meeting, the surrounding community, and the resources available in both. You are also often well known *by* your Meeting and community.

As Arlene Kelley has pointed out in *Friends Journal*, we are not a homogenous community seeking to become more diverse, but rather an incomplete community seeking to become more whole. We heard at the BYM Called Interim Meeting in November 2017, “Over time we are taught (whether through fear, hurt, discomfort, or a sense of superiority/inferiority) to look away from each other. However, it is possible to reclaim our connection by examining the things that interfere with it.”

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

We learned about some of what is interfering with that connection at the 2017 Annual Sessions. A Friend of color told us of times when Friends made comments to her revealing that they viewed her as “other” because of her color. There are long-lasting health effects associated with such repeated painful experiences. Those effects include psychological issues such as ADHD, low self-esteem, low academic motivation and depression as well as stress-related illnesses like stroke, high blood pressure and heart attacks.

People of color who are drawn to our spirituality must decide whether the spiritual nurture in our Meetings is so important that they will endure being among Friends who treat them as “other.”

Fortunately, some people of color are willing to do so. Others, however, decide the cost is too great. Both our Meetings and potential Friends lose when that happens.

This challenge is not unique to Quakers. Many other faith communities struggle with it—some of them successfully. The BYM Working Group on Racism has identified several congregations in our area that have made themselves more whole and become multicultural. To succeed, however, someone must take the initiative and sustain it over time. Your work and leadership in a Change Group can help your Meeting succeed.

WHAT CHANGE GROUPS DO

1. Meet regularly and consistently.
2. Engage in assessment and discernment including on behaviors and systems within the Meeting that may contribute to racial bias and/or inequity as well as on strengths or resources within the Meeting that can help Friends move forward.
3. Recommend concrete steps and actions to the Meeting and help carry them out.
4. Share information about their Meeting’s experiences and progress to help other Meetings learn and connect.

RESOURCES FOR THE JOURNEY

The Yearly Meeting supports Change Group efforts in many ways:

1. Curating a growing list of ideas to reach your goals.
2. Developing resources to use in your Meeting.
3. Arranging visits to your Meeting by Friends or others who can help with your work.
4. Updating you regularly by email and on the BYM website about books, speakers, videos, podcasts, curricula, and other helpful resources.
5. Providing brief monthly items for your Meeting’s newsletter on racism and antiracism.

6. Facilitating communication among Change Groups so we can inspire each other.
7. Conducting confidential focus groups of Friends of color about their experiences in Quaker Meetings and communicating their insights to Change Groups.

If you are interested in starting or joining a Change Group at your local Meeting, let us know by contacting the BYM Working Group on Racism at wgr@bym-rsf.org.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Vision and Commitment

At the 2016 Baltimore Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions we changed our Vision Statement to declare:

"We Friends are of many skin colors, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, stages of life, and socially constructed racial identities. ...We aspire to live as members of the blessed community, which is one of liberation, equity, and great diversity across all differences."

By using the verb "aspire" we acknowledged that our vision is not yet a reality and committed ourselves to making the changes needed to make it happen.

You are Invited to Help Friends in Your Meeting Live as Members of the Blessed Community

**Baltimore Yearly Meeting
Working Group on Racism
2018**