

**THE SPIRITUAL STATE OF BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING
OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS, 2007**

The spiritual state of Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends is embodied in our sense of community. Constituent Meeting communities report their awareness of solid, deep and broad spiritual underpinnings. Seekers come from near and far to attend Worship in our widely scattered Meetings. Many attend Meeting as part of a search for meaning, out of hunger for peace, and for help in the ongoing challenges of the everyday. They find safe haven grounded in the Spirit where Friendship and fellowship abound.

Our Meetings are spiritual homes rather than mere organizations. They are places of watching and waiting upon God. They are safe, caring places flowing with healing energy for the needy soul. Our diversity of beliefs seem unimportant to the total gathering of Friends. What we share is a deep commitment to discerning the Spirit when we are gathered in community for worship, to attend to business, to study, and to play. These times of spiritual nourishment prepare Friends to meet the joys, sorrows and challenges in our daily lives.

Deep and powerful silent worship is sometimes punctuated by enriching Spirit-filled messages although some Meetings report that months or even years may pass without vocal ministry. Whether silent or audible, the Inner Light shines brightly during worship time together, and its warmth continues to nourish and sustain us while we are apart. Meetings report being encouraged and enriched by the attendance of traveling Friends from the wider Baltimore Yearly Meeting community.

Grief and mourning of accumulated losses of cherished and seasoned Friends, taken from us by death, transfer or other occasions hang heavily over some Meetings. At such times, we are aware of how much one person can affect the life of a spiritual community. We take comfort in knowing that community does not necessarily mean living face-to-face with others; rather, it means never losing the awareness that we are connected to each other in Love, which is eternal.

In times of hardship, tragedy, need or crisis, Friends are lifted by the Spirit. As we earnestly wait in the Light, addressing our differences and seeking resolution of our conflicts, healing and reconciliation come to the distressed or wounded Meeting communities, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly.

Strong feelings of connectedness, one to another, allow us to recognize and share our unique spiritual gifts. We have found thriving meetings and clearness committees useful to directly engage and seek understanding and God's will on matters of great concern. On occasion when one of us is being difficult we remain open to the Spirit and willing to greet that of God in one another. As we minister to each other, we have times to be active and giving, and times to be reflective and receptive.

Our mission as a Quaker community is to help each other to live our Quaker values in our daily lives and to realize those values in the greater community. Prophetic witness grows and calls us to lovingly speak truth to power. We find many occasions to act upon our testimonies and carry our message of peace, love and justice to a waiting world.

Attendance at some Meetings has grown and diminished repeatedly over the years. A few Meetings find themselves in a state of constant transition. They struggle to understand Quaker process, practice and traditions. Their strength and hope rest in their commitment to our simple faith, mutual respect and caring, and willingness to work together as a community.

There is an awareness of the spiritual nature—God at work—in all that surrounds us, and all that we do. Participation in committees and activities focused on peace, social justice, hospitality, stewardship of the environment, matters of finance, and care of our buildings and grounds offers vital context in which we come to know one another. We come to fullness during Monthly Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business and in committee work. Monthly Meeting expands our communal spiritual experiences. It provides a sense of shared responsibility and common purpose. Friends are watchful that Quaker process does not become diluted and less meaningful. When we trust the process, resist pressure for quick decisions, listen for that still, small voice, and speak from the heart, no issue is so great as to divide us. We are amazed by how unexpectedly and beautifully Way continually opens to us. We remain rooted in the Divine, prepared to be vehicles of it to our Meeting community and a needy world in even more faithful and creative ways.

It has been a year of spiritual growth and enlightenment for the Baltimore Yearly Meeting community. We are thankful for blessings past, for our present joys, and for our hope of future growth and improvement. Our spiritual state is strong; made stronger yet, as our communities struggle and seek, change and develop, while attending to the Spirit and each other. We come together in bonds of Love with open hearts, ears ready to listen, hands ready to help, and feet ready to go where we are needed. We have tried what Love can do. We have been blessed by what Love has done for us.

Forwarded by the Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee

to Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends in Annual Session at Frostburg, Maryland, 8th month, 2008