

## Baltimore Yearly Meeting Spiritual Formation Program Annual Report for 2022

The Spiritual Formation Working Group focused this year on refining our virtual retreat program in response to ongoing restricted physical interaction due to the COVID pandemic, developing our first virtual yearlong program, and creating our first face-to-face retreat as restrictions eased. Two more persons also joined the working group, particularly in order to lead the virtual online yearlong program: Rita Willett of Richmond and Chad Smyser of York.

Our Fall BYM-wide Spiritual Formation Retreat was held via Zoom on September 17-18, 2021. Thirty-two participants attended, many from meetings that have no local spiritual formation program and some who were then unable to regularly attend a local meeting. The theme of “Back to Basics” was chosen to assist participants in re-grounding themselves in simple daily practices intended to nurture and settle anxious seekers in difficult times. Our grounding Words Worth Hearing came from Brother Lawrence’s classic treatise *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

The Spiritual Formation Working Group has long been aware of many people throughout the Yearly Meeting who do not have access to regular or even periodic participation in a program at a local meeting. These seekers may be in meetings without enough individuals to actually create a spiritual formation program or may live at a long distance from a meeting that makes participation rare or impossible. We found that our two-year experience in offering virtual retreats to both individuals and to local meetings inspired us to set up a yearlong virtual program with its own online leadership that offers both the full experience of a dedicated large community of seekers and the essential small group sharing in spiritual friendship.

The virtual yearlong monthly program met with great success. Fourteen people participated from ten local meetings. The group met once a month for two hours. Before each gathering participants were sent written “Words Worth Hearing” along with one or more queries for their personal reflection. In the virtual meeting of the entire group each individual was given the opportunity to respond in worship sharing to the reading. On separate dates and times small groups of three and four participants met to share on what arose for them at the time.

The concluding retreat for the program year was held in person at the Claggett Center in Adamstown, MD. Twenty-eight persons from twelve meetings attended with a heavier than usual presence of people who had never attended a live retreat. Our theme of “Rejoice!” centered on the joy and comfort of returning to the embrace of a seeking community and the appreciation of the spiritual communities of our local meetings. We were able to resume our beloved time of community singing with Ruth Fitz in a covered, open air pavilion. What a joy to bring our voices together in harmony after a two-year hiatus!

The Claggett Center was a new venue for our in-person retreat. Responses from participants were very positive regarding Claggett’s location, food service, meeting spaces, rural setting and staff attentiveness. Claggett has now become one of our two locations for

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holding our retreats as it is important not to rely on only one possible retreat location. The Fall opening retreat (September 2022) will be at the Shepherd's Spring retreat center with possible return to the Claggett Center next Spring.

We are very grateful for BYM's new General Secretary's interest, caring support and personal involvement in the Spiritual Formation Program and their eagerness to assist in maximizing the program's success. BYM administrative staff also deserve recognition and our thanks for their support. The working group is also grateful for the interest and care of the BYM Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Amy Schmaljohn and Alan Evans, Co-clerks of the Spiritual Formation Working Group

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