**Camping Program Seeks Discernment**

Introduction

The camping program of Baltimore Yearly Meeting is run by two committees. The Camping Program Committee (CPC), sets policy and makes major program decisions, selects and works with the Camping Program Manager and Camp Directors, promotes and supports the program in many ways, and maintains contact with camp alumni. The Camp Property Management Committee (CPMC) is responsible for managing the physical properties which BYM owns or leases for our camping programs, selects the Camp Property Manager and Caretakers, and establishes long and short range plans for maintaining our properties. (BYM owns Catoctin Quaker Camp and Shiloh Quaker Camp. We lease Opequon Quaker Camp from the Pidgeon family and the Teen Adventure base camp from the Common Ground Community.) Together, these two committees also run six Family Camp Weekends a year – two at each of our residential camps. The two committees meet jointly every winter, and as needed.

In early 2017 we had our annual joint meeting. Like the rest of BYM, we were concerned about the unexpectedly high cost of the new bathhouse at Catoctin, but supported the decision to proceed with construction, and the effort to save costs in reasonable ways. We also agreed to do what we can to support the additional fundraising efforts needed.

At the same time, we also looked at our plans for all of the camp properties, which is our normal task at this meeting. In recent years we have been working to address delayed maintenance issues at all of our locations, and to resolve urgent issues as they arise (trees falling on bathhouses and cabins, floors rotting in kitchens, etc.). Now that the bathhouses at Catoctin are being replaced, the next major issue for us to face is tackling improvements needed at Opequon Quaker Camp. The bathhouses there are as bad as those which were replaced at Catoctin. You can understand our reluctance to put that kind of investment into the Opequon property, which we lease. (For family reasons, the owners will not consider selling the property to BYM.)

**After much deliberation (see details below), the joint camp committees decided we should explore options for purchasing a different site for Opequon Quaker Camp. We now seek wisdom from the broader BYM community to determine if Friends unite with this idea. It will take yet another major capital outlay, and we do not want to move forward without general support for this move.**

In order to discern our next steps, we are asking Friends throughout Baltimore Yearly Meeting to consider the factors and share your thoughts with us. We would like input from individuals, Monthly Meetings, and those who attend BYM Annual Sessions. Ways to meet and communicate with us are listed at the end of this document.

A Brief Overview of the BYM Camping Program History

Summer camp programs have been available to the BYM community since 1922, when campers attended Camp Keewadin, near Annapolis, MD. (For more history and pictures, see our website: www.bymcamps.org.)

Catoctin Quaker Camp was purchased in 1957 through the investment of several member Monthly Meetings. In 1994, ownership was transferred to BYM. Summer camp for children began there in 1958.

By the mid-1970s Camp Catoctin had more campers than it could accommodate, so a second camp was started in 1978. This camp was variously called Glaydin, Opequon, and, finally, after the purchase of the property in Virginia in 1992, Shiloh Quaker Camp. The purchase of this property came about as a result of the 1990 Long Range Task Force for the Camping Programs. (See below)

It was in 1979 that the first pre-cursor to Teen Adventure Camp took place.

In 1990, Baltimore Yearly Meeting created a Long Range Task Force for the Camping Programs to examine our programs and make recommendations for the future. That report, completed over 25 years ago, is still relevant today. “*The essence of the camping experience in the BYM camping program has been wilderness camping and hiking as a means of community building and development of personal strength and skills. The goals of the program are to help young people build community, individual self-confidence, and growth in the life of the Spirit”.* The report goes on to say, “our assessment of the experience of campers and staff indicates the goals of the program are in large part being realized. We feel that maintaining a camping program with these objectives is an important part of the work of Baltimore Yearly Meeting and should be strengthened.”

Later in the report, the Task Force reported that “there exists a feeling…that some BYM members would like an additional camping opportunity of a different character….there is…some interest in a less Spartan program that might include art, crafts, music and practical skills, along with some hiking and climbing.” Thus the impetus in 2000 to create what is the current program of Opequon Quaker Camp.

The recommendations of the 1990 Task Force are instructive today, because, at the time they were written, the camping program was using the Opequon site on the Pidgeon Farm. That camp was located in a different place on the property than our current site, however, many of the issues are the same as when the Task Force made its recommendation to acquire a replacement site.

The Task Force report goes on to say:

“The desirable characteristics for a camp program site include:

* Adequate acreage to provide insulation from the public and urban activities
* Natural amenities that contribute to program aims and make for a pleasant facility. At a minimum, these include:
	+ A stream or lake
	+ Nearby or adjacent public park lands providing access to hiking routes
	+ Varied terrain and vegetation on the site
* Location away from the path of urban development, yet still accessible to the membership for summer and out-of-season use”

The report further notes that Opequon is leased land and that we need to consider our capital expenditures there carefully, with that understanding. We have since learned that there is no willingness on the part of the family to sell this site.

So, the discussion of moving Opequon Quaker Camp from the Pidgeon property has been an issue for discussion since we first began using the property.

To provide feedback about the future location of Opequon Quaker Camp:

* Meet with us at BYM Annual Sessions **Wednesday or Friday 6:15-7:15 PM**
* Email your thoughts to: cpcdiscernment@bym-rsf.org
* Write us a letter: CPC Discernment, Baltimore Yearly Meeting, 17100 Quaker Lane, Sandy Spring, MD 20860
* Contact Jane Megginson, Camp Program Manager, David Hunter, Camp Property Manager

Or Harry Scott, Sub-committee clerk

Responses before our September committee meeting will be included in our deliberations at that time. We plan to report at the October Interim Meeting.

Opequon Quaker Camp Challenges and Assets

2710 Brucetown Road, Clear Brook, VA 22624

Challenges:

* Leased property with no opportunity to purchase
* Bathhouses are old, cramped and a consistent negative on parent evaluations
* The swimming pool is at the end of its useful life and would have to be replaced by a commercial pool. The creek has water quality issues
* Small size of acreage available for our use
* Access to hiking, canoeing and rock climbing by bus trip only
* One more camper cabin needs replacement
* Staff cabins are nearing the end of their useful life
* Steep hill access into camp prevents bus access and makes parking and arrival/departure days challenging
* CPMC estimates the need for $120,000 in improvements in the next 2 years
* Any improvements we make become the property of the owner when we move

Assets:

* Close proximity to a BYM Friends Meeting (Hopewell/Centre)
* Good proximity to the center of BYM
* Leased property on historic Quaker family farm with a long connection to BYM
* Lease payments are very reasonable and 11 years remain on the lease
* Infrastructure we have already put into place (cabins, office and storage building), dining pavilion, and kitchen and staff room.
* 16 year history of the current camping program at this location