**2025 Spiritual State of the Working Group on Racism**

The Working Group on Racism devotes about half of its meeting time to sharing recent experiences related to race and racism.  In addition to sharing about challenges and dilemmas we face seeking to help our Meetings become antiracist faith communities, we share books, articles, films, and presentations on racism. This practice of sharing about what is commonly considered a fraught topic both grounds us spiritually and supports us in building the resilience we need to address that of God in other Friends to strengthen their own resilience in addressing racism.

This encouragement to Friends within BYM includes providing “Thinking About Race” items for distribution within each Meeting to stimulate awareness and discernment. We also ask local Meetings three times a year to let us know in writing how their own antiracism efforts are going. At Annual Session we invite Friends to a “Connecting Local Meetings” session where they can share their activities and challenges in helping their Meetings become antiracist.

The WGR sponsored a workshop by Loretta Ross describing how bringing empathy to antiracism and other social justice work can make it more effective and more enjoyable. She described to Friends five potential types of responses: “calling out,” “calling in,” “calling up,” “calling on,” and "calling off.” No one type of “calling” is best for all circumstances. Loving discernment is required to choose the best approach in a particular situation. The WGR also sponsored workshops by Debby Irving on developing the vulnerability, skill, and courage needed to create deep connections, resilience, and ways of being that sustain and grow us so that we can engage in transformative conversations.

As much as any other BYM group, the WGR struggles to be guided by the Yearly Meeting’s antiracism declaration and to apply the queries faithfully when we make decisions. We are aware that although the Yearly Meeting adopted the declaration that does not mean that all BYM Friends fully support it—only that no one felt strongly enough about their reservations to stand in the way. Consequently, we continue to need to engage in difficult—and hopefully transformational—conversations. We have discussed in WGR meetings how not all forms of oppression are based on racial or other forms of personal identity. We are challenged with addressing that reality while maintaining our commitment to antiracism.

WGR members are deeply affected by the election of a new U.S. Administration that has expressed clearly its hostility toward what the WGR seeks to promote and its determination to use the full authority of the federal government to prevent what the WGR seeks to accomplish. WGR members must continue to discern how best to join with others in resistance while still doing the work we had done before the election.

**Working Group on Racism 2025 Annual Report**

**Major Activities**

**Anti-Racism Training**

The Working Group sponsored three workshops during the fall of 2024:

·        Loretta Ross, a Smith College Professor and author of [Calling In: How to Start Making Change with Those You'd Rather Cancel,](https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Calling-In/Loretta-J-Ross/9781982190798)described how bringing empathy to antiracism and other social justice work can make it more effective and more enjoyable. About 30 Friends participated in this workshop.

·        Debby Irving, author of *[Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race](https://www.debbyirving.com/the-book/)*, used historical and media images to examine how she used her white-skewed belief system to interpret the world around her. She explored how she spent decades silently reaffirming harmful, archaic racial patterns instead of questioning the racial disparities and tensions she could see and feel. The goal of the workshop was to support white people in making the paradigm shift from ‘fixing’ and ‘helping’ those believed to be inferior to focusing on internalized white superiority and its role in perpetuating racism at the individual, institutional, and cultural levels.  Thirty Friends registered for this workshop

·        In her second workshop Debby Irving helped Friends learn how to engage in transformational conversations. Because dominant white culture encourages us to avoid conflict, many of us raised in it have not fully developed the insight, skill, and emotional stamina necessary to broach and navigate differences of perspective and opinion, especially when harm to a member of a marginalized group is part of the mix. Too often these conversations are completely avoided or broached only to go from bad to worse. Debby described a different way. In contrast to the social norms of whiteness are norms designed to develop the vulnerability, skill, and courage necessary to create deep connection and resilience; ways of being that sustain and grow us personally and collectively. The workshop explored how to embed new, transformational norms into our personal and institutional practices. About 50 people participated in this workshop.

Some Friends also accepted Debby’s invitation to participate in the online [21-day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge](https://comadrespeakers.com/21dc/) where participants were challenged to spend about five minutes a day for 21 days reading a short article, watching a short video, listening to a podcast, or checking out a website addressing equity issues.

The WGR provided funds to Stony Run, Sandy Spring, Richmond, Roanoke, and Midlothian Friends Meetings to pay honoraria for anti-racism presentations sponsored by those local Meetings.

**Racial Trauma Healing**

WGR funds were used for two Global Majority initiatives. Tiranny Thurmond led a trauma healing workshop for Global Majority Friends in January 2024. It was a follow-up to a workshop she had co-led in 2023. WGR funds also were provided to assist several BYM Global Majority Friends to attend the Friends General Conference Gathering.

**BYM Annual Session Workshops.**

The Working Group facilitated two workshops for the 2024 Annual Session. One was a Connecting Local Meetings session led by David Etheridge of the Friends Meeting of Washington and Peirce Hammond of Bethesda Friends Meeting.  It provided Friends from local Meetings throughout the Yearly Meeting the opportunity to share their experiences and challenges in addressing issues of racism within their Meetings. The other workshop was titled “Antiracism as a Spiritual Practice.” It was led by Barbara Bezdek of Homewood Friends Meeting and Beth Haw of Williamsburg Friends Meeting. For the 2025 Annual Session David Etheridge will again lead a Connecting Local Meetings session where Friends from throughout the Yearly Meeting share their experiences working to lower racial barriers within their own Meetings.

**Racial Justice Change Groups and Related Activities.**Much of the Working Group’s focus has been on encouraging and supporting racial justice Change Groups within local Meetings. Some Meetings have established or are working on establishing formal Change Groups. That process itself has occasioned a focus on racial dynamics within those local Meetings. Other Meetings have done racial justice work by forming trust circles or in other ways that do not involve creating a Change Group. The WGR serves as a clearinghouse, soliciting updates on local antiracism activities shared three times a year to facilitate exchange of information and inspiration as to what may be possible.

**Within the Working Group on Racism**

Before doing other business, the Working Group makes time at its monthly meetings for Friends to share their recent experiences with respect to racism. Friends share books, articles, films, and presentations on the topic of racism that have come to their attention as well as personal experiences.  Friends feel it is an invaluable component of WGR meetings.

**Communications within BYM**

The Working Group is under the care of the BYM Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee. The clerk of the WGR keeps that committee updated on Working Group activities and concerns and consults with the committee on WGR work. Several Working Group members participate actively in the Growing Diverse Leadership Committee and the Reparations Action Working Group.

The Working Group maintains a list of Monthly Meeting liaisons who receive items for their newsletters or other means of dissemination. It also maintains a Google group for distributing to 175 interested Friends information about WGR work and resources related to racial justice.

**WGR Leadership in 2025**: Beth Haw of Williamsburg Friends Meeting became presiding clerk of the Working Group on Racism in January 2025.