

Spiritual State of The Yearly Meeting Report 2026

The state of Baltimore Yearly Meeting is vibrant and in flux. In these dynamic times, many are called to action, often feeling as “one crying in the wilderness.” There has been a wide influx of seekers flocking to Quaker Meetings as both encourager and anodyne in these startling times. We are, as Friend Carrie Newcomer wrote, “all of us crazy holy, hungry ones who still believe in something better.” It is time for Friends to come together, bridge the gaps that have long divided us, and join in the common cause of humanity as we continue seeking after and tending to The Light. It is time, as human-merely-beings and Friends, to let our collective Lights so shine, allow our good works to lead again, and robustly Let Our Lives Speak.

After reading through our fifty-plus Meetings and Worship Groups Spiritual State Reports, it is clear that there are repeated themes as well as clear differences and interwoven challenges enriching our Meetings. We will, with some interpretation and encouragement, have the Meetings speak for themselves about these themes:

1. Different faith interpretations and practices
2. How to welcome newcomers
3. How to treat each other tenderly
4. Reaching out to and working with other faith traditions
5. Antiracist work
6. Anti-empire work
7. Peace in and justice for Palestine
8. Support of immigrants
9. Where do we spend our money and why?
10. Support of the poor
11. The BYM camping program
12. Care, nurture, and oversight from the Yearly Meeting
13. Faltering Meetings and Worship Groups

Ministry and Pastoral Care's guiding Queries for 2025 are:

- 1. What do I mean by Spirit/spiritual? Do others in my Meeting mean something else? How do we react to that diversity?**

It is in the question of interpretations of spirit/the Light/God/the Inward Teacher that Quakers are most divided and diverse. This is an area of concern to which Friends must respond with generous consideration, seeking to meet each other in that which is eternal. We can feel the reverberations of the Hicksite-Orthodox schism within both the written and the implied answers of many of our far-flung Meetings. We can, and we feel we must, unite and rise beyond these doctrinal skirmishes if we so choose.

Deer Creek answered, *“Within our Meetings, Friends seek connection with the Spirit and one another, through lessons and vocal ministry. Although we may define The Spirit differently, as one member put it, ‘Within every man and woman there is the idea of fundamental God.’ As a faith community we welcome diversity in thinking.”*

Gettysburg responded, *“Each Friend in our Meeting has a different way to express their own experience of what is meant by Spirit, and in that diversity a spiritual wholeness with multiple visions of the light comes together in our silent worship. Feeling the presence of a Greater Being; recognition that there is something greater than us. What Spiritual means is seeking, finding and trying to live a life of purpose, simple and honest, kind and generous to others, living optimistically and feeling the “light” in others.”*

Homewood Friends adds, *“Friends also speak candidly of evolving journeys. We run the full theological gamut from various flavors of Christianity, Buddhism, paganism, and non-theism! Some wrestle with traditional language for God; others find meaning in metaphors of breath, intention, and integration. For some, Spirit moves us beyond rational self-interest and isolation toward connection and compassion. Despite differences, Friends unite around the conviction that each person carries a measure of a radically loving Spirit—a Seed that does not need to be earned. We choose to see and honor that of God in one another, and that choice sustains our community.”*

Others wrote that they have what feels like profound differences in their understanding of God, Jesus, or the Light, which trouble them individually and their Meetings corporately. At times Friends feel that they are doing their best merely to tolerate their neighbor on the bench or in the Meeting House. “We struggle for connection in a very active Meeting; struggle to allow differences in opinions, ways of worship, interpretations of the divine.”

Friends, whoever we are, whatever our interpretation of life, regardless of our personal, important cosmologies, we can choose to embrace our central Quaker understanding that the Light is within us all, and that regardless of names or chosen holy texts, be they The Bible, Leaves of Grass, The Tao de Ching, The Vedas, the poets of every land, or other inspirational writings, we are enjoined to “walk cheerfully over the world answering that of god in everyone.” Full stop.

We would do well to follow the beautiful answer of Charlottesville Meeting, *“The pervasive sense of the Meeting was that Spirit is ineffable; that our awareness of Spirit is grounded in experience rather than doctrine or creed; and that all efforts to capture in words the mysterious nature of Spirit fall short. Perhaps the most apt metaphor is that of breath or wind. Friends sense the movement of Spirit, but it eludes description.”*

One Friend noted that we need to love our differences, not just accept them. Another offered that we need to open our doors to the wider community through social action, reaching out beyond our silos. “Then the chairs will be filled and Spirit will prosper among us.”

2. Does my manner of living flow from my deepest beliefs? Do my Meeting's actions accord with its deepest shared beliefs?

Friends across the Yearly Meeting are much and gladly moved to follow their leadings to act upon our stated beliefs in living the testimonies.

Heathsville QWG echoed the sentiments of many Friends, *"We have also felt led to express our faith through action. In partnership with a local Unitarian Universalist group, we have participated in postcard-writing campaigns, public witness, and protest around issues of conscience. We wrote to congressional representatives, offered support to Bishop Mariann Budde at the beginning of the current administration, and took part in the Episcopal church's food drive. These activities have been expressions of our desire to live into Friends' testimonies and to respond faithfully to the needs of our community and the wider world."*

There is much profound good work on the part of the poor, immigrants, refugees, the unfolding climate disaster, the apartheid in Gaza, against the current regime, for the civil rights of all, against racism, sexism, misogyny, classicism, ableism, plus.

Busy Herndon Friends shared, *"Our community is united to work towards peace and social justice in these difficult times. Silent vigils held monthly in front of our Meeting provided a public way to show that we believe peace and justice are necessary and possible. An FCNL advocacy team meets each month to plan lobby visits and participate in the FCNL national call with other advocacy team members. In addition to ongoing collections to supply our local food bank, we also supported one of our young Friends who was collecting food for a local women's shelter. In December, we provided and served two evening meals at the local hypothermia shelter. These activities help create deeper spiritual connections and draw us closer together. This interconnectivity increases our impact on the world."*

- 3. Have we helped each other recognize and follow leadings? Have we connected and grown in Spirit as a community?**
- 4. Have we helped one another tenderly, in body and spirit? Are any needs within the meeting going unanswered?**
- 5. Has Spirit led us to take social action as a whole community? Am I / are we satisfied with what we are doing together in the world? What do we long to do?**

Many Friends Meeting feel a profound sense of connection and spiritual uplift from worshipping, serving on committees, sharing their lives full of hope, fear, and purposing, while being in Friendly community. Hopewell Center spoke to these Queries thus, *"Most agree that Hopewell Centre's kind and welcoming presence supports our faith and outreach service as seen by our individual and collective endeavors to assist the Highland Food Pantry, the Winchester Area Temporary Thermal Shelter and Rolling Ridge Conservancy. At times a leading means being led by other Friends who inspire us to engage in activities that spur our personal growth or community outreach. Examples are our men's OATS (Open & Truthful Sharing) discussion group and interfaith spirituality retreats."*

We believe the key to effective outreach of our Quaker values springs from an ongoing and supportive communication flow among members and attenders. In addition, we have many individuals who have spearheaded actions which grew into meeting support with other community programs. Through Hopewell Centre's willingness to join with other faith communities, we have discovered the power of quiet action, developing, with others, a "whole" community of ministry and support of our brethren."

Patuxent adds to the rippling and mutable discourse across our Yearly Meeting, "Desmond Tutu once said, 'My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.'

We feel this movement of Spirit most clearly in our First Day Meetings for Worship. In gathered silence, Friends experience a palpable sense of Light and presence, and vocal ministry remains grounded and authentic, arising from our shared inward listening.

Friends speak honestly about the ongoing challenge of living in alignment with our deepest values. To live our testimonies requires continual reflection, adjustment, and struggle. Sometimes, we find that Quaker practice nurtures greater compassion and less judgment, even in a polarized world.

Mattaponi regales us, "We are seekers, in the tradition of the early Quakers, "seekers of the Truth." Our life journey, our life purpose is to find our place in the grand mosaic. Guided by Spirit, we can live into our true nature, that of God's love, as nearly as we are able. Every piece of the mosaic is essential to the whole. The mosaic is the past, present, and future embodied in Spirit. We are saved when we do our best to find our place in the mosaic through living fully into our true nature as expressions of God's Love. All the pieces are needed. Suffering and happiness both are a part of the mosaic. We are all connected and need to love one another.

Judging ourselves and others is an obstacle in our relationships. We must lead with compassion, with heart so that we can appreciate both the strengths and the weaknesses in ourselves and others."

Friends speak our minds and know our hearts. As poet John O'Donohue reminds us, "The power of the heart's attitude is expressed beautifully in the New Testament: 'Where your treasure is, there is also your heart.' And all through the Old Testament, God is interested only in the heart--not sacrifices, rituals, or rules--only the heart. Indeed, the mystical tradition would suggest the heart is beautiful precisely because it is where God dwells: the heart is the divine sanctuary."

What do Friends long for? What do their unique and corporate hearts and spirits cry out for? They ask for love, purpose, mercy, and justice. They seek to be justice forward, antiracist, pro-immigrant, welcoming of strangers, tender and patient with themselves and others. They wish to hold the Light, seek the Light, preserve and champion the Light, and embody the Light.

Importantly for the Yearly Meeting as a corporate, worshipping body, at least three Meetings/Worship Groups spoke of the deep struggle they are experiencing, whether through lack of funds, loss of purpose and hope, or because of a dwindling congregation. One spoke of reaching out to the Yearly Meeting and

working with our General Secretary as a source of comfort and hope. Jesus taught us that what we do unto another we do unto him: we are each other's siblings in the Light.

Friends wish for peace and work for nuclear disarmament, prison reform, equal housing opportunities, in the prisons, at shelters, and as literacy tutors. They choose gentle parenting, deep and persistent patience in community, reach out to their neighbors, walk the extra mile, and surrender their egos to the greater good. Plus.

Friends hope for a world that is sustainable, verdant, and reborn and they grow vegetables at home while also setting up community gardens, plant trees, turn off the lights, practice vegetarianism and veganism, bicycle to work, install solar panels, buy hybrid and electric vehicles. Plus.

Friends are against the all cruel encroachments of empire, and so they attend many, many protests, write congress people, support appropriate lobbying efforts, reach out to and support the forgotten, forbidden, overlooked, denied, and despised, plant meaningful signs in their yards, and never forget that we are all one and the ocean of light is always greater than the ocean of darkness.

Friends long for what all humanity longs for: love and acceptance, a gentle hand, a tender touch, a steady presence, a sense of purpose, to make sense of it all, to be remembered and uplifted. We are the question and the questing, and we are the answers we are looking for. As Rumi ever reminds us, "We are always either running from or towards the divine, and no matter which way we run, we meet them."