**June 2024 - May 2025**

**Annual Report for Baltimore Yearly Meeting Peace and Social Concerns Committee**

This year brought a range of great challenges to the committee, both personal, national and global.  The health of loved ones has weighed heavily on some; social issues of bigotry and racism at the local level challenged another; one member moved from rural Virginia to New York. In sum, we lost five members of the committee and the co-clerk that convenes the monthly meetings found she must step down from her clerking role so that she could better tend to illnesses of family and friends. She will continue on the committee. Fortunately, the committee has been enriched with the participation of a Friend who hopes to join officially in July, and every member made meaningful contributions to our deliberations and decisions, as did the clerks of Working Groups.

National and global issues have dominated our attention; however, we feel we have been less able to adequately address the concerns of Friends in rural areas of BYM. We would welcome more members from rural areas to join the committee to provide their perspective.

**How does the committee find Guidance to clarify its path forward?**

We begin each meeting by centering in silent worship. We return to that silence as needed. We began an intentional practice of inquiring into the current concerns of local meetings.  We strive to maintain communication with FCNL and its state advocacy teams, and AFSC. We also held a retreat in December at which we discerned primary callings to the areas of immigration, Palestinian-Israeli peace, prison reform and health care. When a member discerns a call, for example, calling for Supreme Court ethics or supporting the British Yearly Meeting Minute on Genocide in Israel–we ask for a month to consider and then make the item a priority for discernment for the next committee meeting.

**What challenges has the committee had this past year?** There are so many concerns that Spirit calls us to attend to.

**What strengths?** The strength of the committee lies in the commitment of its members to Quaker values, their support for members and vulnerable groups, and the shared energy of each collectively taking action commensurate with their values and the rule of law. We continue to enjoy capable members with diverse experiences, perspectives and skill sets.  We listen to one another and take time for discernment together.  Our working groups are constantly evolving.

**What themes has the committee been led to follow?**

Carrying forward the Minute of Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) in Annual Session, approved on 8/4/24, on ongoing U.S. military aid as the Israeli - Palestinian War. Following approval of the Minute, the committee distributed the minute to FCNL (<https://www.fcnl.org/resources/minute-concerning-war-middle-east-baltimore-yearly-meetng>) and to all BYM monthly meetings, encouraging MMs to call or meet with their elected leadership in Congress. Letters to the editor were sent to national and local newspapers in the region. Members were able to present the minute and to meet with the staff of Senators Ben Cardin and Chris Van Hollen of Maryland and of Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia, and include representatives from many monthly meetings including Palestinian voices into those meetings. The committee supported the workshop, “Building Collective Power for Peace in Israel,” facilitated by Kali Boehle-Silva and Mikayla Lytton of Adelphi Meeting, attended by some 40 BYM Friends, out of which has developed a new working group under the Committee’s care (see Report below).

Networking Day. Each year, the committee sponsors a Networking Day. This year the theme was, in response to the new Administration’s rapid fire executive orders that seemed focused on dismantling our federal government and even our democracy, “Responding to the Firehose - How can we move from darkness to light?”  Workshops included:

* AFSC staff Brian Blackmore, Director of Quaker Engagement, and Noor Nabulsi, Communications Specialist: Palestinian human rights activism and Apartheid-Free Communities;
* Barb Adams (Roanoke Friends Meeting): climate justice/unity with nature;
* Molly Finch, clerk of Quaker Voice of Maryland, and Erinn Mansour (Patapsco Friends Meeting): immigration and legislative initiatives;
* Barbara Bezdek (Homewood Meeting): Quaker engagement with movements such as 50501 and Hands Off, incorporated insights from her training in Kingian nonviolent action;
* Jim Carpenter (Frederick Friends Meeting): screening and discussion of a video of Braver Angels, a NY- based non-profit dedicated to political depolarization.

This year’s Networking Day had 70 in attendance on site and more online as well as from a broader geographic area, including Friends from as far as Roanoke, Virginia, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. BYM’s weekly announcements and individual phone calls were helpful in getting the word out. In addition, we worked on updating and contacting the current contacts at local Meetings’ Peace and Social Concerns committees across BYM.

While the technical aspects of the day posed some issues, they were largely overcome. We were pleased to have Frederick County’s Friends Meeting School host the day. The timing of the event - in April during the Maryland legislative session - proved to be challenging with some of our members deeply engaged with legislation. We will consider that scheduling conflict as we plan for next year’s Networking Day.

Those evaluating the day commented on the value of the George Fox quote the planners used to frame the day, “of the ocean of Light flowing over the ocean of darkness.” They appreciated the sharing of practical suggestions and the sense that we are all in this maelstrom together. 100% of those who responded on evaluation forms reported that the day was “very useful.”

Other Themes. Each month as our committee met, we invited Quaker Voice of Maryland and our Working Groups to report on their work. Their reports are attached. The three Working Groups currently under the care of our committee are on Reproductive Justice, Anti-Militarism, and Palestinian-Israeli Peace and Justice (PIP-J).

* Having said that, as the clerkship of Reproductive Justice rotated, that Working Group has experienced a hiatus as they re-organize.
* While technically not a Working Group, Quaker Voice of Maryland (QVM) is also under the care of this committee.
* The Working Group on anti-militarism had been in hiatus in the early months of the committee year but then organized an important webinar on the threat of nuclear war and is planning events to mark the 80th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima during WWII.
* The Committee nurtured a new PIPJ Working Group into being (Palestinian Israeli Peace and Justice), which has been very active, with representatives from 10 Monthly Meetings and about 20 active participants reporting on what they are learning, doing and needing help with.

Members of the Peace and Social Concerns committee have organized meetings, in conjunction with local Meetings, with the staff of members of Congress on the subjects of immigration policies, due process, support for peace and aid to Gaza. Members also joined in support of local Meetings contacting the Supreme Court to remind them of their allegiance to the Constitution and the need to be true to the highest calling of fair and just review of cases.

**Members this year:** Suzanne O’Hatnick and Annette Breiling, (co-clerks), Susan Williams\*, Richard Capron\*, Phil Caroom, Bob Rhudy\*, Louisa Davis, Dat Duthinh, Charles Goedeke\*, Barbara Bezdek, Walter Brown*,* and volunteers Doug Vaughn and Ken Woerthwein\*.

* denotes those stepping off the committee.

**2025 Working Group Reports**

**Palestinian-Israeli Peace and Justice Working Group (PIPJ)**

The Palestinian-Israeli Peace and Justice Working Group (PIPJ) has been very active since March 2025, arising from a workshop for forty-some participants sponsored by the BYM Peace and Social Concerns Committee called “Building Collective Power for Peace in Israel,” facilitated by Kali Boehle-Silva and Mikayla Lytton of Adelphi Meeting.

Since then, representatives from at least ten local Meetings and about twenty core participants meet and report monthly on what they are learning, doing and needing

help with. PIPJ set up an active WhatsApp group reporting on breaking news and urgent actions, a Google group and Drive (public) for sharing resources, and developed the following mission statement: “Our mission is to foster deep moral discernment, historical and human rights education, and nonviolent activism by BYM Friends promoting peace, justice, equality, and safety for all who live in Israel/Palestine.”

PIPJ members are looking for ways to support more Meetings’ involvement and will be sponsoring two workshops with PIPJ member Steve Chase from Friends Meeting of Washington and staff of AFSC at Annual Session—on becoming Apartheid-Free Communities and on Economic Activism for Peace. PIPJ is painfully aware of how both antisemitism and islamaphobia have colored the histories we have learned and strives to be: anti-racist, anti-apartheid, anti-occupation, anti-genocide and largely anti-zionist settlements in Palestine—and pro - a just and lasting peace for all.

Louisa Davis serves as clerk.

**War and Militarism/U.S. Militarism and War**

Over the past year, the WG on War and Militarism.has accomplished the following:

Had 4-7 Friends who met monthly.

Wrote and approved (in 11/2024) a revised mission statement for 2025:

Our mission for 2025 is to: a) educate ourselves and other Friends about the increased threat of nuclear war; b) seek unity on actions we and other Friends can take to help reduce the threat of nuclear war; c) coordinate with sister organizations that share the same goal of eliminating the threat of nuclear war.

Early in 2025 we initiated a name change from WG on U.S. Militarism & War to WG on War and Militarism.

Organized, advertised, and on 18th of February (2nd month) hosted an online forum “The Doomsday Clock is Ticking: What is it? How to stop it? How to turn it back” with three speakers: Herb Lin, of the Science and Security Board of Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, Peter Kuznick Professor of History and Director of Nuclear Studies Institute at American University and Rishi Gurudevan, founding member of Students for Nuclear Disarmament. About 35 persons attended.

Wrote a letter to Monthly Meetings, encouraging them to write a minute on nuclear weapons/war. The letter was published in the BYM newsletter of 6th of May (5th month)

Asked for an Interest Group slot and table at annual sessions. The interest group will be worship-sharing around the 80th anniversary of the nuclear age, including the first above-ground test, the Hiroshima/Nagasaki bombings, and the current perilous state of international nuclear arms control. Both the table and the Interest Group will try to facilitate networking with other faith and civil society groups on this important topic.

Asked leadership of Young Friends (YF) if they were interested in inviting Rishi Gurudevan to speak with them. YF leadership is in transition over the summer so we will revisit this in the fall.

Mailed (email) with the help of PSCC, a letter to Monthly Meeting Peace Committee clerks and/or Monthly Meeting clerks asking them to consider having a Monthly Meeting observance of Hiroshima/Nagasaki commemoration (e.g. a specially called Meeting for Worship) and to be engaged in efforts to rein-in the nuclear weapons complex.

Stan Becker and James Wagner serve as co-clerks.

**Quaker Voice of Maryland (QVM)**

**The Quaker Voice of Maryland working group** prepared for the 2025 legislative session by surveying Maryland Monthly Meetings asking what areas of Maryland legislation were of greatest interest. From this feedback, they organized their focus on a few upcoming bills in the categories of Environment, Criminal Justice, Immigration, and Housing. They encouraged monthly meetings to promote the relevant bills with their delegates and senators.

Environment. Of the four environmental bills Quaker Voice promoted, their major success was the passage of the “Reclaim Renewable Energy Act.” The “Abundant Affordable Clean Energy” act was partially included in the General Assembly’s “Leadership Energy” package. A “Renew Act” passed out of the General Assembly as a “study and report,” but was vetoed by the Governor. And the “Maryland Bottle Bill” stalled without passing.

Criminal Justice. The “Geriatric-Medical Parole” bill passed and was signed into law. The two other bills were not voted out of committee – “Juvenile Court – Jurisdiction” and “Correctional Services – Restrictive Housing.”

Protections for Immigrants. The Maryland Date Privacy Act did not pass, but some provisions were included in the Maryland Values Act. The Protecting Sensitive Locations Act passed within the Maryland Values Act. It did not include places of worship and it passed literally two minutes before midnight on the last night of the General Assembly.

Access to Housing. The “Housing Development Act” did not pass out of the Senate, and the Good Cause Eviction” bill was not voted out of committee.

The full wrap-up report can be viewed here, [2025 Wrap-up\_Final.pdf](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a_G3v4Pppb3B0dQXDyzcn2Fxqg1YhQJA/view). WG members and monthly-meeting liaisons can be viewed at [www.quakervoicemd.org](http://www.quakervoicemd.org).

Molly Finch serves as clerk.