

**Spiritual Formation Program Working Group  
Baltimore Yearly Meeting**

**Annual Report  
July 2025**

As we reflect on the Spiritual Formation Program we steward on behalf of Quakers in Baltimore Yearly Meeting, we celebrate its more than forty years of caring for the spiritual nurture of Friends in, with, and for community. We experience the program as an invitation to listen deeply to the Spirit within and among us, the Spirit that guides us into love and wholeness, the Spirit that helps us to know what is ours to do in this world and to find the courage to undertake and sustain this work. We know that the BYM program inspired the creation of other Yearly Meeting's programs, namely Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and more recently a local meeting in Pacific Yearly Meeting. We honor the faithfulness of Friends who created, sustained, and participated in the program these many years, as we remain open to how the program can continue to evolve and serve Friends.

**Our programs continue to reach many Friends across many Meetings**

Our fall and spring retreats have long been the heart of our program and continue to be so. Forty five Friends participated in these retreats, 13 of whom participated for the first time; these Friends came from 17 local Meetings. For the first time, in recent memory at least, we offered a lower cost camping option for one of our retreats and plan to do so again. Our themes were "To Live in Hope — Exploring Pathways to Spiritual Resilience" in the fall and "Preparing our Hearts to Make 'Love the First Motion'" in the spring.

Our retreats play a key role in supporting year-long programs in local Meetings. These local programs offer large and small group opportunities to deepen our spiritual lives as individuals and as worshiping communities. The retreats equip participants with practices and ideas they can take back to their Meetings. In recent years, we have also been providing direct outreach to local Meetings that would like to start their own programs. We sponsor mini-retreats, either in person or via Zoom teleconferencing, for interested Meetings to explain what the program is and to offer direct experience of the deep sharing in groups that it offers. We are aware of twelve local Meetings with active spiritual formation groups at this time.

Our year-long, online program that emerged during the Covid pandemic is now four years old. For the 25 Friends who participate, this program offers a gathering each month of the whole group with an additional opportunity to join a small spiritual friendship group. Participants have included those who do not have programs in their local Meeting, those from outside of our

Yearly Meeting (and even outside the Quaker community), and those who do have programs in their local Meeting but yearn for more connection and fellowship.

### **Evolution of how we work**

Caring for this work are the members of the Spiritual Formation Working Group, which is under the care of Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee. Together, we plan and host the retreats, welcome Friends to all formats of the program, reach out to local Meetings, coordinate all administrative and financial tasks, and reflect together on how the program can evolve and grow in response to changing needs. Members of the working group signal their willingness to take on new roles as needs arise and to welcome new Friends to the work, and we have organized ourselves effectively in smaller "teams" that carry on the work between our whole group meetings. All of our work is supported by the General Secretary and staff of the Yearly Meeting, for whom we are enormously grateful.

### **How Our Program Supports the Yearly Meeting's Anti-Racism Declaration**

Our Yearly Meeting's commitment to become an actively antiracist faith community calls us to explore what that means for our spiritual formation program. We have been laboring with this question, and our work reflects these concerns. Most fundamentally, we affirm that that commitment aligns with our core spiritual convictions of equality, community, peace, and justice. Becoming whole as individuals and as a community is a fundamentally spiritual task of deepening those convictions and discovering how to live them out, especially as we live in a broken world that so often and profoundly offends these convictions. Spiritual formation has a role to play in supporting such transformation.

We embrace the wisdom and invitation at the heart of BYM's queries for becoming an anti-racist faith community. We recognize the value of and commit to considering how our decisions about the program will affect those from marginalized communities, how to invite their voices and participation in making decisions, and how cultural biases influence our decisions.

As one part of these efforts, our faithfulness calls us to ask how we ensure that the program remains welcoming and inclusive of all Friends, and becomes moreso. We seek to lower barriers to full participation in the life of the community (barriers such as financial cost, travel, etc.). We seek to shape our retreats and other program activities around readings and experiences that speak to a wide circle of Friends. We seek to engage younger friends to encourage intergenerational learning about our spiritual journeys.

To those ends, some members of our working group attended workshops offered by BYM Friends on anti-racism as a spiritual practice (workshops offered during Annual Sessions in 2023

and 2024). We found this learning to be deep and meaningful. Facilitators of our retreats and monthly programs are committed to sharing readings from diverse spiritual seekers—especially those by people of color. So, too, we are deepening our knowledge of the variety of contemplative practices both within and beyond Quakerism that may speak to and nourish a wider circle of program participants.

In addition to this learning within the working group, we are committed to finding ways that widen the program's availability and its welcome for more Friends. Specifically, we will explore

- initiating conversations across Yearly Meetings to learn how we are caring for the spiritual nurture of Friends in, with, and for community;
- learning from spiritual nurture programs in our richly diverse Quaker communities (e.g., Friends General Conference, Friends United Meeting, the School of the Spirit) as well as those from other cultural and spiritual traditions;
- collaborating with other groups within BYM—e.g., the Camping Program, Young Adult Friends—that might facilitate more intergenerational spiritual deepening in, with, and for community;
- widening the circle of Friends on the Spiritual Formation Working Group to include Friends of Color as well as younger Friends;
- widening the Spiritual Formation Program's monthly program offered via Zoom for Friends without access to a program in their local Meeting, or those currently unaffiliated with a local Meeting;
- ensuring that all activities and formats of the Spiritual Formation Program are affordable and accessible to any Friend who wishes to participate.

We remain open to the support and encouragement of Friends in the Yearly Meeting in the ongoing and evolutionary work of the Spiritual Formation Program.