

Epistle of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women's Retreat 2022

February 5, 2022

Greetings to Friends Everywhere,

On Saturday morning, February 5th, 2022, fifty women gathered together virtually via Zoom to share worship and fellowship. Representing approximately 25 meetings from within Baltimore Yearly Meeting, plus other meetings farther afield, we welcomed each other and expressed gratitude at seeing these familiar faces. This entire weekend was to be our annual Women's Retreat, which usually has around 150 women sharing meals, workshops and worship in a residential setting; however, Covid-19 is still preventing us from our much-loved, in-person retreat.

The three members of the Working Group asked for new volunteers to be a part of the Working Group, and asked for women to seek leadings within their meetings to step forward and form a Planning Committee for a hoped-for in-person retreat next year.

Attendees were divided into virtual breakout rooms for worship sharing around the query "How do you find your way to Spirit? What are new pathways for you in this unusual time?" Friends reported finding nourishment in the small group connections.

After we returned to the main gathering, women's faces lit up and eyes grew moist as we sang along to the multi-voiced recording of the chant "We are Strong", which has become a touchstone for many. The Spirit was with us as we settled into silent worship. Whether women were joining the retreat for the first time, or recollecting silent snow walks, beautiful vistas, or gorgeous harmonies of prior retreats, we felt the depth and breadth of this tradition, like a giant oak spreading roots and branches far and wide. Nature sustains us, whether through images or in actuality, much as we are sustained by images of each other on the screen. Perhaps not quite as palpable as the real thing, but meaningful and impactful nonetheless. Women also spoke to radical spirituality, being transformed by giving ourselves over to LOVE. The daily practice of 'sinking down into the seed' is vital to transforming the ocean of darkness into the ocean of light. As we see the snow-covered ground, know that the energy of new buds in the spring is pushing up from below, potent. Can we 'let go and let God?' One friend also called us to consider a winter retreat open to all genders. We held many in the Light whose names were lifted up silently and aloud.

At rise of meeting, we shared several announcements. As we look to the formation of a retreat for 2023, we ask women to remain open to the call to serve as plans unfold throughout the year.

In the Light,
The Women's Retreat Working Group

on behalf of
The Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women's Retreat