

BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING

2022 SPIRITUAL STATE OF THE MEETING REPORT

Reports were received from 39 Monthly Meetings and 14 BYM committees and working groups. These show that 2022 was a year of challenge, rebirth, joy, struggle and concern. This report is in three parts. First is an overview which captures the Ministry and Pastoral Care committee's sense of our challenges and strengths. Second is a summary of those issues arising from the many reports we received. Third is an addendum which, as last year, details specifics of work being done across all aspects of the Yearly Meeting to address our declaration to be an anti-racist faith community.

Part I, Overview

Coming out of the pandemic, many meetings still wrestled with questions about technology. Yearly Meeting wide we struggle to find a way forward in our desire to manifest the Beloved community among us. Concerns were also raised about aging meetings and small meetings on the edge of sustainability where new ways must be sought to provide support. As Friends, we must put our heads and hearts together and find ways to stitch our meetings back together.

At the 2020 Annual Session, some Friends spoke of their deep concern that work on the Yearly Meeting's commitment to be an anti-racist faith community was not being given significant attention throughout the Yearly Meeting. They spoke to their sense that Monthly Meetings must take responsibility to address the question of what it means in reality to be an anti-racist faith community.

How can Baltimore Yearly Meeting and all its branches, be a blessed community when some Friends tell us they are made to feel they don't belong at our meetings? Compounding this hurt, some Friends may give insufficient attention to the insidious presence of white supremacy culture among us, which blocks many doors of advancement to Black friends, other minorities, and people experiencing poverty.

It is a spiritual concern.

As Quakers, we must answer the call as our predecessors did to abolish slavery and racism, promote nonviolent resistance to war and, more recently, advocate for LGBTQ+ acceptance and gay marriage. If we can find a path forward, it won't just help our meetings but our wider communities, where hate, fear, and division are the new calling cards of some political leaders.

As always, there were hopeful signs at our meetings on our anti-racist work and other challenges. We have attached an addendum describing the anti-racism work at all levels of Baltimore Yearly Meeting in hopes of spurring copycats, best practices, collaboration, and new ideas.

The Spiritual State of the Meeting reports received from Monthly Meetings reported what we already know, that progress we see and strength we feel in facing these challenging times stems from the power of our worship together. Nothing else serves as well to help us navigate unsettled waters. Friends from every corner of our Yearly Meeting were clear in their reporting that worship remains the core of who we are. Meetings both large and small, rural and urban, attest to the centrality and power of worship to develop and maintain the health of their community. "We are a worshipping community, all else flows from there."

Part II, Arising from the reports we've received

That Baltimore Yearly Meeting remains committed to the Anti-Racist Declaration we made is demonstrated by staff, committees, working groups and in many Monthly Meeting activities. Yet, there remains considerable disparity among us as to the manner, methodology and structures within our Yearly Meeting for addressing the issue of racism. While we feel a sense of disquiet from the reports, it is important to celebrate the signs among us that point a way forward.

For some, one such sign was a special called meeting held in December. "Rising from the Ashes" was led by the Global Majority Caucus in celebrating the gifts and culture of People of Color while calling for a confessional attitude of complicity in perpetuating systemic racism in our wider community and within Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

Another hopeful sign, pointing toward a more diverse future can be found in the three Yearly Meeting summer camps. Alongside the camps, Strengthening Transformative Relationships in Diverse Environments (STRIDE) seeks to increase diversity in camp participation particularly from urban communities. The camping program provides a beacon for creating open and diverse communities.

We also note, with hope, that the concerns for LGBTQ+ people, Native Americans and the erosion of women's rights are also themes in many of our Monthly Meetings. The latter was expressed in many monthly meetings' strong statements in support for reproductive justice following the Dobbs decision.

However, there are many issues which challenge our Meetings. In asking about things which cause stress in the life of our communities, several common threads arose. Most meetings still struggle with various forms of distress stemming from the pandemic and the months of its traumatic disruptions. For many Meetings this struggle centers around the use of technology in worship spaces. While a "tech bridge" (hybrid) is a boon to those unable to come to the Meeting House (for reasons beyond COVID) the practice is not without controversy. Some Friends find the presence of technology disruptive to settled worship and inconsistent with long held Quaker practice and values.

Other Meetings find that, with or without the use of technology, the not yet resolved disruptions of long months of isolation and other impacts of the pandemic are still felt in their community. Some report basic shifts in the quality of worship, reduced attendance at events, the strain of keeping things together by fewer available volunteers, even "a pervasive sense of sorrow and loss about the erosion of community spirit." Another common thread of is an oft expressed worry, mostly among smaller rural Meetings, that they are aging out of existence. They share that, even with good spirit, dwindling membership makes it difficult both physically and financially to keep things going.

Other social concerns proved less divisive and brought a sense of purpose and strength in acting together as Friends worked to resettle refugees, address food insecurity, homelessness, and the work of addressing local instances of the persistent effects of systemic racism. For instance, in one rural community a Meeting joined with others to successfully advocate for the retention of a black cemetery and building which had been threatened with sale without the consent of those impacted.

Friends report a joyful return to more in-person contact and those activities which always served to create a sense of community. Friends are enjoying prayer circles and potlucks, Bible studies and book

discussions, game nights and drum circles. Spiritual Formation is often mentioned not only for personal spiritual deepening but in building a stronger Meeting Community. In addition to the longstanding semi-annual retreats and monthly local gatherings, a new aspect of the Spiritual Formation program has been an on-line version of the monthly groups which were attended by Friends across the Yearly Meeting and beyond.

Several Meetings have undertaken visioning programs or other long range planning strategies to assess and build on their strengths and develop a more cohesive sense of where Spirit is leading them to future service. These Meetings report that this visioning work has been richly rewarding in deepening their feeling of unity.

We were delighted by the energetic (and earnest) response to our query about what signs Friends might place in front of their Meetinghouse. A few samples:

- Come Gather with Us and Make Us Whole
- Curiosity and Doubt Welcome Here
- Welcome, Here-in Lies Wonder
- Have You Had a Spiritual Adventure?
- Enter as Strangers, Leave as Friends
- Quiet the Mind, Open the Heart
- Where Words Fail, Silence Speaks
- Shhh... We're Listening for the Divine Whisper

One Meeting shared that they already have a big sign that extends around their Meeting House. It does not have words, rather people who walk by readily see their gardens and enjoy the natural habitat for many small, living creatures from birds to moths. Young Friends at a First Day School described what they would want on a sign at the entrance to their Meeting. The sign should be colorful and include pictures of animals and flowers reflecting concepts of Peace and Nature.

Part III

BYM Spiritual State of the Meeting Report (SSoM), 2022

Addendum on Anti-Racism work

This report is not intended to be exhaustive or a comprehensive list of each Meeting's activities. Rather it gives a thumbnail sketch of the variety of activities across the Yearly Meeting. For greater detail on these activities, reference the SSoM reports submitted to the YM office.

Some Meetings did not submit a SSoM. Some meetings, particularly smaller ones, may have submitted a very brief report or not addressed the query related to racism.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting committees and working groups have also been contacted. Their activities are listed after the Monthly Meetings section.

BYM Monthly Meetings

Adelphi

– Adopted an extensive Minute on Anti-Racism, “mini-reparations” fund supported numerous local organizations which seek to address impacts of structural racism in their community

Annapolis

– 20 year journey of study and meeting conversations extending in the wider community through nearby churches, continues to work closely with Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform

Alexandria

– Annual Homecoming event held jointly with Gum Springs, an historically Black local community with long ties to AFM

Bethesda

– engaged “Collective Journey” consultants to guide their work in addressing racism at social and spiritual levels

Blacksburg

– numerous activities reported including book studies, visits to historic sites, participation in “Dialogue on Race” organized by The Community Foundation

Carlisle

– racism is a frequent topic of their “Faith in Action” series, participate in “Moving Circles”

Charlottesville

– a “Reparations Friendly Circle” has been meeting and plans to report recommendations soon to the wider meeting

Deer Creek

– recent work with Hosanna Church to restore an early African American school; toured local sites of Underground Railroad Stations

Dunning Creek

– sponsored a speaker event on Anti-Racism for the wider community which was very well attended by the community at large and the local press

Floyd

– individual members active in a variety of ways in their very conservative community to speak up through letters to the editor, at school Board and local government venues on diversity issues

Friends Meeting of Washington

– focus has been more on socio-economic and historic approach to racism, a recent “audit” helped move the conversation to more personal and spiritual levels

Frederick

– continuing Change Group, most activity by individuals but the SSoM query challenged meeting friends to look again resulting in creating a set of queries to move the work forward

Gettysburg

– (no mention)

Goose Creek

– adopted queries to waken discernment in the meeting, continued effort to rehabilitate historic Black church in Lincoln, spiritually much aware of the “sins of our fathers” and seek to allow the Light within to do its work on our “shadow side”

Gunpowder

– regular focus in Forum on racism and racial reconciliation guided by a working group, continuing partnership with the McKim Center and Baltimore Wisdom Project to support the East Baltimore neighborhood of Jonestown

Herndon

– no active program, but numerous individual initiatives, open to deeper examination

Hopewell Center

– intentional shift of addressing racism as an issue “out there” (social context) to more “spiritual” (part of us), an ongoing conversation

Langley Hill

– on going anti-racism working group provides opportunity for study and discussion

Little Britain

(Eastland and Penn Hill Meetings) – trying to get traction on the issue in this very small meeting

Little Falls

– in 2020 adopted a Minute on Racism which guides their work, much individual effort, attend Coming to the Table and other organizations that work in their locality toward an anti-racist society

Maury River

– social justice, including anti-racism, is for many members a large part of their Quaker identity

Midlothian

– historic context (Richmond VA) gives great weight to the horrific legacy of slavery and need to address it ongoing imprint on our society, continuing Racial Justice Study Group

Monongalia

– exploring what it means to demonstrate belief of “that of God in everyone,” financially support indigenous and black communities, working on land acknowledgement documentation

Patapsco

– Change Group offers book studies, frequent focus of second hour presentations, field trips to museum and historic sites

Patuxent

– small meeting with oversized impact recognized in the wider community, part of “Big Conversation on Dismantling Racism in Southern Maryland” well attended by community leaders

Pipe Creek

– action to protect a local Black cemetery and building, connecting to local anti-racism work and local history

Richmond

– Fall Meeting Wide Retreat focused on relationship to Native peoples and sparked deeper conversation on how to address anti-racism generally

Roanoke & Lynchburg

– many individual are leaders in local anti-racism activities, meeting wide activities include study of Pendle Hill Pamphlet “Radical Transformation”

Sandy Spring

– led by “Crossroads” consultancy to examine systemic racism and set goals for structural change, partners in activities with Sharp Street Methodist Church an historic Black Church

Shepherdstown

– education and activism including sponsoring a monthly Black Lives Matter vigil locally

State College

– education and discussion in meeting, participation in local police oversight board and in NAACP

Stony Run

– using Trust Circles to learn from each other and gain greater openness, considerable individual activism

Takoma Park Preparative

– worked with Adelphi in development of Minute and other activities

Warrenton

– (no mention)

Williamsburg

– big push on “Get Out the Vote,” large Black Lives Matter banner on front of building

York

– community discussion on racism and indigenous peoples concerns

BYM Committees and Working Groups

Camps

Working to bring young people of color to camp and to make them feel welcome and supported.

Growing Diverse Leadership Committee

Coordinated with STRIDE, Reparations Action Working Group and Camps. Sponsored Lucy Duncan and Rob Peagler broadcast their Juneteenth presentation. Discussed feedback to the BYM Committee to revise *Faith and Practice*. Provided financial and personal support for the event to open access to more individuals for the STRIDE Equality workshop.

Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee

Discussed the topic with clerks of ministry committees from monthly meetings in several Coffee Hours and set up a process to share and collaborate on the issue. Met with Global Majority Caucus Friends. Participated in the “Rising from the Ashes: a BYM Programmed Meeting Toward Connection and Repair of the Harms of Racism” session.

Peace and Social Concerns Committee

Presented “Restorative Justice & Right Relations: Friends Roles in Repairing Racist Systems & Attitudes” workshop at Networking Day.

Reparations Action Working Group

Sponsored Mutual Aid workshop. Offered a reparations workshop at Networking Day. Helped organize the “Rising from the Ashes: a BYM Programmed Meeting Toward Connection and Repair of the Harms of Racism” session. Discussed Yearly Meeting conflicts about racial justice. Planning fund for reparative justice.

Stewardship and Finance Committee

Facilitated a conversation about the work and funding of three BYM groups: the Working Group on Racism, the Reparations Action Working Group and the Indian Affairs Committee.

STRIDE

Working to bring young people of color to camp and to make them feel welcome and supported. Offered “Testimonies of Mercy” Equality workshop at Powell House in New York. Planning to restructure STRIDE by adding a youth advisory board.

Working Group on Racism

Presented an “antiracism roadmap”. Sponsored the One Book Project encouraging BYM Friends to read and discuss *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*. Helped design, organize and contribute to an online programmed Meeting for Worship with a Concern for the Impact of Slavery. Provided both financial and personal support for the event to open access to more individuals for the STRIDE Equality workshop. Developed a statement entitled, “Why Should White BYM Friends Do the Hard Work of Overcoming Their Racism?” Sponsored three workshops for the 2022 Annual Session: a Connecting Local Meetings session on efforts to lower racial barriers in local Meetings; “Quaker Response to Enslavement in BYM Territory”; and a workshop for Friends who have read or are reading *Caste*. Supporting Racial Justice Change Groups within local Meetings. Planning three workshops for the 2023 Annual Session: a Connecting Local Meetings session on efforts to lower racial barriers in local Meetings; a mini-Spiritual Formation Retreat “Anti-Racism as a Core Spiritual Practice”; and a workshop on Quaker Faith and Political Action.

Thank you for your attention and special appreciation to all those who contributed their time and energy to bringing forward this spiritual state of the meeting report.

Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee