

# Homewood Friends Meeting

## Spiritual State of the Meeting Report

2022

### Creating the Report

Every year, Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) asks all monthly meetings to submit a report on the meeting's spiritual state. These reports are later shared in BYM committee meetings and publications. To guide the annual process, BYM constructs queries in addition to encouraging meetings to develop their own. In recent years, the Homewood Friends Ministry and Counsel Committee (M&C) has used a variety of methods to solicit input from members and attenders. In 2020 during COVID lockdown, M&C contacted every member and attender individually and constructed the report from those calls. Last year, we created and distributed the suggested queries and asked both individuals and committees to respond in writing. This year, we returned to an earlier and cherished format: a specially called meeting that uses worship-sharing to give our community a voice. On a Sunday in April, as a part of Sunday Meeting for Worship, we held a group worship sharing that considered four queries. These queries were derived from those suggested by BYM Ministry and Pastoral Care. Members and attenders addressed each query with care and love, and their responses were recorded by three M&C members. (One member who could not attend the worship sharing responded in writing to the queries.) The notes were then compiled to create the bulk of this report.

As often happens, the process of worship sharing was in itself a rich experience. One attender who in her words "has been on the periphery" noted that the session helped her understand how to "come in" to the Meeting and participate.

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### How has the Homewood Friends Meeting community nourished you spiritually?

Many Friends spoke to the spiritual nourishment provided by Homewood Friends Meeting, particularly during meeting for worship. Meeting for worship is, as one Friend said, "deep, guided, and grounded. There are times when you can feel the Spirit covering the meeting. It is a gift and a service that everyone shows up." Echoing this sentiment was the feeling that messages about problems often speak to others in the room and provide new ways forward.

The nourishment extends beyond meeting for worship with, for example, our weekly Experiment with Light sessions, and with the care and love for those in need in our community. Simple lunch provides both social and physical nourishment; it is a beautiful moment that we share after meeting for worship.

Nevertheless, some feel the Meeting needs to nourish the Spirit more intentionally. We should provide frequent and structured opportunities that go beyond fellowship and focus more on sustaining the life of the Spirit.

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### **What is deepening our spiritual community and what is challenging it?**

Many components serve to deepen our spiritual community. Meeting for worship on Zoom during the pandemic sustained our community, and even now hybrid worship brings together more people. The Young Adult Friends' gatherings foster connections that have led to greater participation in meeting for worship. Another example is the recent Friendly Friday potluck, which was both socially and spiritually deepening. Social gatherings help us exist as a spiritual community.

Nevertheless, Friends acknowledged many challenges. The Owl/Zoom technology can be problematic. Settling into worship before meeting for worship formally begins is difficult because people are setting up the Owl and speakers. A few people have stopped attending because the technology complicates the quiet space. The microphone also is problematic. It can be intimidating to come up to the mic and remove the mask. We have been asked to consider traveling mics, which would allow people to speak from where they are sitting.

Our divergent opinions about priorities and approaches to racial equity continue to test us. We are challenged to love and accept messages and participation from those with whom we disagree. We remain predominantly a white meeting; we need to reach out more to Black/ BIPOC and queer communities. How do we address these tensions within the Meeting? We need to find ways to candidly and lovingly address conflicts by seeking to understand their roots. Without rigorous examination, the conflicts will remain. These challenges also stress our engagement with outside individuals and communities. In these polarized times we try to remember "that of God in everyone," even when we vehemently disagree.

The Meeting remains small, although there are signs of growth. A number of new people are coming - but facing us is the issue of retention. How do we teach attenders a practice that takes time to learn before we lose

them? Offering rich worship, classes, and simple lunch are only part of the solution. We cherish past years when Friends and families got together for dinner or hikes and other activities. In these busy times, perhaps we can renew those informal connections.

A longtime member reminded us that challenge also provides opportunity for growth. Deaths and illnesses have challenged the lives of many in our community, but the Homewood community has provided constant support.

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### **How have we been led as a spiritual community to do work in the world?**

Our collective spirit provides a foundation for how to do work in the world. For example, through a Homewood initiative, many Friends have assisted Afghan refugees in Baltimore. But achieving Spirit-led common cause is problematic: We all have our causes that we bring to our Meeting, but our work in the world doesn't feel cohesive. *Collective* discernment for action is lacking. We recognize social ills and injustice in our city, but we have not worked concertedly to find, for example, corporate work that pushes back against anti-Black racism. Our previous connection with Baltimore Ceasefire was an opportunity, but very few of us showed up at the street corners. Showing up takes a lot more effort. We should seek the places that need our Quaker presence, a presence guided and emboldened by the testimonies.

Collective action does not trivialize the importance of individual leadings and contributions. Homewood helps each individual find their own way of getting out into the world. Building on this idea, our collective spirit nourishes individuals to go out into the world in different and important ways.

Resolving the tension between advocates of the collective versus the individual leadings can be a challenge. We could break down Quaker involvement into three interconnected parts: Homewood Meeting; Homewood committees; and individual Quaker identity. Turning to Friends' writings can also provide guidance on this issue. For example, the writings of Quaker Thomas Kelly, which have been illuminated by a Homewood member, provide guidance for reaching out into the world.

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## **Have we been spiritually engaged when we conduct our business?**

Many in our midst have never been to Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business, so they have yet to experience what it is like to discern corporately what the Spirit would have us do in this world. It is in this environment that individual leadings can become corporate actions, such as reading names of those murdered every week or delivering food and staples to poor neighborhoods. In 2022, we attempted to do our work in business meetings, to leave silence between those who speak, and to enter into silence when there is contention. We hope that more people will attend business meeting, to share the power of spiritual strength that comes from corporate decision making. Although difficult discussions sometimes challenge the collective Spirit, we are led by an understanding and seasoned clerk.

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## **Many initiatives contributed to our collective spiritual growth in 2022.**

A review of our 2022 business meeting minutes was a reminder of Homewood's efforts to move forward in many ways. The Meeting was mindful of the Testimony on Equality as we were led to continue our work on both racial and LGBTQ+ equality. In connection with our Centenary celebration (see more below), Homewood hosted an event honoring the work of early 20th century Baltimore civil rights activist Lillie Carroll Jackson and her friend, Homewood member Margaret Carey. The event, "For Common Cause," sparked an ongoing partnership between Homewood and the Lillie Carroll Jackson Museum (a project of Morgan State University). Homewood's recognition of Lillie Carroll Jackson was strengthened by the presence of her grandson Senator Michael Mitchell, who attended peacemaker George Lakey's talk at Homewood in November. (This event was preceded by the Interfaith Coalition-sponsored monthly Black Lives Matter vigil, which was held that month in front of the meetinghouse.)

The Meeting found ways to serve diverse communities and to experience the power of social justice. A Friend offered a course on Kingian Nonviolence and the Quaker Peace Testimony. Prompted by the BYM queries, our Trustees Committee sought to employ more Black-owned businesses, the most significant of which was an auditing company. Our LGBTQ+ support was demonstrated by our presence at both the inaugural Trans Pride event for Baltimore City and the LGBTQ+ Pride weekend. As in the past, Homewood provided a comfort station and showed support with banners outside. Homewood's support extended to healthcare when in July the Meeting signed onto the Maryland Healthcare for All resolution; that healthcare be available to all is a core

message of the Spirit. Our hands are the hands of the divine: the dedicated work of Friends in our Meeting continued the work of weekly collection and delivery for the Sandtown Mutual Aid Circle (formerly the Tubman House Mutual Aid Project).

Yet as much as anything, 2022 was a year of reflection and searching. The BYM anti-racism queries continued to be problematic. Some Friends felt that they should be applied more consistently and rigorously in business meeting and decision-making, while others found the queries to be heavy-handed. Since 2020, Homewood had periodically tried to craft queries that would apply more specifically to our community. In 2022, our Ministry and Counsel Committee grappled with revising the queries for several months, and when they finally presented a proposal for approval in January 2023, the Meeting decided that more study and discussion about anti-racism were needed. A group has convened to provide a way forward. Despite the long and frustrating process, that Friends want to continue to wrestle with this difficult subject is surely a sign of the Spirit guiding us. Similarly, though Homewood is proud to support the Interfaith Coalition vigils, a business meeting minute noted that Homewood participation is sparse. As the minute observes, “One question is whether this provides an opportunity for individuals or does it become a collective witness of the Homewood community.” This concern was echoed in the SSOM worship sharing.

Our beloved building turned 100 in 2022, and our ad hoc Centenary Committee worked very hard to provide several celebratory events, both in person and online. We celebrated Friends’ presence in Charles Village with a Homecoming event in April, which offered worship sharing and building tours and wonderful food. Our website offers a recording of oral histories from seven seasoned Friends. The event was full of joy and provided an occasion to reflect on where we had been and where we are going as we complete the first quarter of the 21st century.

As we sought to connect with the Spirit in 2022, we also sought to connect with each other. The year began with another meetinghouse closure because of the Omicron variant. There was concern that young Friends, who had been attending in person, were not connecting to Zoom worship, and that older Friends remained online, not willing to risk exposure. When the meetinghouse re-opened in February, these discrepancies gradually disappeared, with a robust in-person presence of diverse ages, along with those who worshiped via Zoom. Indoor simple lunch returned, and at year’s end we returned to our Christmas vigil and potluck, which engaged new and young attenders. Adding to our joy in being together again was the children’s Christmas play: 10 children were in the play, which they wrote, and the large and festive adult audience loved it. Throughout

the year, joy and grief also bound us together: we celebrated a marriage and united at memorials for loved ones. Our community has been blessed, as we noted in the worship sharing, with an influx of attenders and particularly young people.

The worship sharing was a snapshot in time and is subject to change. The SSOM was a starting point to think about how the Meeting might grow. As we move forward in 2023, we seek ways to nurture their spiritual needs, thus nurturing our own growth as well. Ministry and Counsel plans to create an arc of Adult Religious Education classes that will provide to newcomers and attenders a comprehensive and rich understanding of Quakerism, both past and present. The Meeting hopes to pursue discussions that will help all to embrace the different perspectives within our fold. We will continue to seek ways to promote anti-racism and to figure out how to work more actively in a city with a diverse population.