

Patapsco Friends Meeting - Spiritual State of the Meeting Report 2022

This past year was challenging for society, and hence our Meeting.

This year, the PFM Change Group has offered book studies, second hour sessions, and a trip to the Blacks in Wax Museum in Baltimore. Despite our efforts, we aren't insulated from society's struggles with racism. One Friend shared, "We have inherited abhorrent racist practices. During the last few years, there is a brokenness in our Meeting regarding racism that we can't gloss over, or its effects." Healing this brokenness remains a constant concern for us. Exploring how we handle fractures is the work of the whole community. There are times when a member of the community says something insensitive that lands hard and hurts others. This is an ongoing issue and shines a light on the very work we must continue to address. We seek Spirit's help in finding a way forward that reflects our ongoing commitment to be a loving, nurturing, and welcoming community. We keep listening for guidance. We support each other in our investment to keep the conversation going.

We have had many opportunities to test the unity of our Meeting! Through it all, we believe our greatest strength and most valuable asset are our people. The last few years since the pandemic have tested the patience and flexibility of us all. Covid continues to be a challenge. Our Meeting remains hybrid with roughly an even split between in-person and virtual attendance. An effort to revitalize Simple Lunch is underway although there are some who suggest we "simplify Simple Lunch" and hold one pot luck each month. Seasonal gatherings have been introduced by Ministry and Care to ensure social opportunities outside where all can safely enjoy a visit and meal together. A thriving Care Partner program has been a rich source of connection. In addition, small groups continue to play a vital role in maintaining our relationships. Spiritual formation groups, Friendly Eights, Meditation Circle, The Pamphlet Reading Group, Course in Miracles Study Group, Wednesday Worship and various committee meetings, allow Friends a chance to check in, develop ideas and work together for the good of the Meeting.

We have learned that what stresses us, strengthens us!

Covid, racism and conflicts over donations along with an influx of children in the RE program overtax the same small group of individuals who do the work of the Meeting. All these stressors offer opportunities for growth. For instance, week after week, the talents and ingenuity of our fearless tech team make it possible for us to join together. Friends living at a distance and those who are ill or immunocompromised, have access to Meeting for Worship, second hour sessions and small groups as a result of the tech team's efforts. Technical problems and troubleshooting are stressful, but also offer our community a map to navigate the virtual world. Their efforts and hard-earned knowledge have helped guide other Meetings that have asked for tech support.

One Friend remarked, “I’ve learned over the years to distinguish between good stress and bad stress.” When we address our issues intellectually rather than with an “open heart”, us Meeting suffers. Listening with love, opens the space for transformation. Practicing deep listening with patience and compassion, way opens. Easier said than done! But we keep trying!

Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business are held in a respectful manner. The tradition of opening with queries creates a frame for our time together. We find sharing about the queries a valuable and important practice. One Friend offered a wise view, “Silent worship is the most important part of the Meeting for Business. When the agenda becomes more important than Spirit’s guidance, we are all in trouble!” The steadfast work and devotion of our Clerk before the Meeting begins, leads to “less chaos and more worship!” When there are disruptions and strong emotions, silence re-centers us and reminds us to let Spirit lead the way.

Many Friends among us are also active in the Baltimore Yearly Meeting. This gives us a perspective that is inclusive of the issues that BYM has been grappling with in their committee meetings and during their Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business. For example, creating an anti-racist faith community has become fundamental to many of BYM’s committees’ efforts, as well as creating safe spaces for people to interact and learn from one another.

Patapsco Friends is a unique Meeting.

If we could put up a sign in front of the Meeting House, it might say:

“Welcome!”

“Come meet the G-d within!”

“Have you had a Spiritual adventure?”

“Come home to our Quaker community!”

We hope that we will continue our work, with all its growing pains, to be inclusive and respectful to all humans. Patapsco feels like an extended family and life in the Meeting is a true blessing from Spirit.