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Clerk of the Interim Meeting,

Baltimore Yearly Meeting

7/21/2024

Annual Report

Friends gathered together to conduct the business of the Yearly Meeting four times this year; three times for regular sessions in November, March, and June, and once for a called meeting in April. Over the course of these sessions, Friends came to unity on things such as BYM’s position on reproductive health, a new policy concerning reimbursement for representative travel, a reparations payment to the Equal Justice Initiative, the nomination of a new Recording Clerk for Annual Session, and our desire to see a cessation of armed conflict between Israel and Palestine.

We also labored over, but were unable to reach unity on a proposal from the Indigenous Affairs Committee for a reparations payment to be made to the Pawnee Nation Language Restoration Program to help mend the harm that BYM caused by our involvement in Indian Boarding Schools. The Friends present agreed that the cause is worthy, and that we greatly wanted to see it done; but were uneasy with taking such a large step toward repairing that relationship off the floor of the larger annual session gathering.

This year, Interim Meeting was hosted by York Friends Meeting in November, Bethesda Friends Meeting in March, and Goose Creek Meeting in June. Our Called Interim Meeting in April was held virtually. I (and all the BYM staff), are grateful for the tender hospitality that we were offered at all three meetings, and want to also thank Heidelberg United Church of Christ for providing us with a space to conduct our hybrid worship in York. While there remain some teething issues to be worked out, Friends appreciated the option to take part in the business of the Yearly Meeting without having to spend hours in the car; and we will be working on improving the hybrid experience in the next year.

Spiritually, it has felt to me like we have struggled with how to respond to Friends who do not proceed down the path of discernment at the pace we as individuals are traveling. Some of us see our Friends disappearing off into the distance ahead of us and feel fear and anxiety over being left behind. Some of us see Friends unable to match our pace and feel frustration and anger at being held back from a destination that seems just around the next corner. Some of us are somewhere in between, and feel the strain of trying to bridge the gap. While this tension is most evident when our attention is focused on our journey toward becoming an anti-racist faith community, it is always present; and it is important for us to be aware of and to name it when we notice it at work in our discernment.

We have also struggled with how to address microaggressions and missteps that Friends make as we labor together to find the way forward. It has seemed to me that we are not yet adept at balancing our desire to advocate for the members of our community who are harmed by these words or actions with our wish to support Friends who are still unlearning the racist behavior they have been taught. It is clear to me that we as a corporate body have not yet come to an understanding of what it looks like to do both of those things; to say to one Friend: ‘We see the harm that has been done to you and will work to see it healed,’ and to another: ‘We see that you did not wish to do harm and will help you learn how not to cause it again.’

Despite these challenges, overall, I have felt that we have been deeply enriched by the Spirit’s presence in our worship this year. Despite the tensions that we still labor with, Friends still approached the business of the Yearly Meeting with a joyous desire to see how the Spirit will move among us. I have witnessed Friends negotiate both spiritual and mundane stumbling-blocks with grace and good humor, offer up their most tender and fragile concerns for us to examine; and been humbled by the strength of the ministry we have been entrusted to us.