

**Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) – 2022 Spiritual State of the Meeting
Reported to Annual Sessions in Eighth Month, 2022
Ministry and Pastoral Care (M&PC) Committee**

Each local meeting was invited to reflect on the spiritual condition of their meeting during 2021. BYM Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee suggested four queries:

- Talk about the joys and sorrows that your meeting has experienced this year. How have you grown in the Spirit?
- What wisdom and tools might your meeting share with other meetings about how the Spirit has guided your response to the pandemic. What have been the challenges?
- What wisdom and tools might your meeting share with other meetings about how the Spirit has guided your discussions on racism. What have been the challenges?
- And an off-beat one: If your meeting was asked to make a t-shirt that you would all wear, what would be the slogan? Would there be a picture?

Members of M&PC reviewed reports from thirty-one local meetings. Friends who played a central role in writing their meeting's report gathered online one evening for a BYM-wide discussion.

A common thread among local meetings was a spirit of resilience and hopefulness during an especially challenging year. Resilience required perseverance, creativity, and a willingness to try something new when the pandemic disrupted the usual practices of our communities. While Friends were grateful for their resilience, they did not minimize the sorrows and challenges. Communities lost beloved members, were separated by the pandemic, or dealt with conflicts amid change. Some Friends simply felt exhausted. Through joys and sorrows, accomplishment and adversity, there was hopefulness.

During these past two years, there was a concern about whether our rather small meeting could survive... Today, the walls of our Meetinghouse echo the laughter of our children and the joy of members and new attenders coming together again.

One wisdom of our collective voice was heard clearly throughout the year: that hopefulness is an essential tool of faith.

Friends and attenders demonstrated resilience and creativity, and worked faithfully to keep the Light shining.... We are aware, however, that, by year's end, many of us felt fragile and weary.

Having been stripped of our usual patterns and togetherness in 2021, we worked to remain a community. We are hopeful that the coming year will allow us to be gathered once again.

Overwhelmingly the thoughts, feelings, and actions that we experienced in 2020 have intensified this past year. Our feelings of joy, appreciation, and support have been great, as well as our feelings of despair, isolation, and longing.

Even with its challenges, we consider the past year a gift in which to be alive.

Meeting for Worship remained central to the life of meetings despite the pandemic. Online or in-person, Friends found spiritual nurture and joy. Meetings were grateful for the work that kept worship going. At the same time, worship during the pandemic was challenging. Meetings struggled to balance safety and the varied needs and preferences of their members. Participation was often difficult for families with children. Some Friends were excluded from access to online communication due to regional internet gaps or financial circumstances. Some meetings adopted multiple worship settings to meet varied needs – and then yearned for a more cohesive worshipping community. Some Friends stopped attending because worship was inaccessible or unsatisfying. Their presence was missed.

The fact that the Meeting (as a whole) is not able to share in the regular presence of children in worship and fellowship, again, deepens our sense of fragmentation.

The Meetings for Worship are the centerpiece of our life as a spiritual community.

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Some Friends met in person or on Zoom in the meeting room, and some outdoors. While this met a diversity of needs, some Friends lamented the division of the community.

Despite the ongoing pandemic...Friends have kept our Meeting. We have cared about the safety of our most vulnerable...We had no argument about what was right to do. Love and caring concern were our guide.

The relative safety out-of-doors allowed Friends to gather in person. This was especially important for children and First Day School. There was renewed appreciation and care for outdoor spaces.

We purchased a grill and 2 picnic tables... We gathered around a borrowed fire-pit... This fellowship felt healing.

Numerous [outdoor] workdays... helped renew our spirit and build community.

The meeting itself is renewed, healthier, 'blooming'.

An above-ground vegetable garden, which our children delight in maintaining.

A robust worship group gathered in our beautifully renovated garden each week.

With pandemic-related illness and isolation, community connections and pastoral care were especially important. Friends were grateful to those who provided support in their meetings. Technology – phone calls and online – helped Friends to stay connected when they could not visit in person.

Many Friends reached out and offered support to the community and to one another. All this helped to ameliorate our sorrows, tend to needs that arose and knit us together in new ways.

Healing prayer for Friends who request it is a meaningful part of the shared life of the Meeting.

... our dear Friends who are homebound... In normal times we would have been at their side as much as possible with cheer and soup and cookies. It frustrates and saddens us that we cannot be physically there for our loved ones.

I couldn't have gotten through the pandemic without meeting.

Meetings were intentional about becoming anti-racist faith communities. Efforts included use of BYM queries, change groups, and opportunities for education and reflection. Some meetings increased engagement with the wider community. Many provided financial support for community organizations.

We decided to involve ourselves with a local historic museum called the Christiansburg Institute, originally a school established in 1866 to educate freed slaves.

Our Faith into Action initiative has included regular meetings throughout the year. Friends mentioned that these conversations have encouraged them to be more active in attending community events whose primary focus has been racial justice.

The query about t-shirts sparked creativity and humor in this year's Spiritual State of the Meeting process. In many meetings, younger Friends enjoyed generating ideas. Some proposed t-shirts:

Symbols of peace on a Zoom screen

Thank God for Zoom (on front) I Hate Zoom (on back)

A blank t-shirt, to represent simplicity and silence.

Quaker UP, Small but Mighty!

Life is a Series of Moments