

THE INTERCHANGE

Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends



Rolling Ridge progress 2024

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Seekers on the Journey: Deepening Your Spiritual Life with BYM's Spiritual Formation Program

We are all pilgrims on a journey, taking different routes to the same destination. We are all seekers on a quest, searching for that which is greater, and our relationship to it. It is a journey not of miles, but of increments by which we, nonetheless, hope to arrive at the Ground of Our Being. To stand in God's Presence and—once there—dwell in the Center. Along the way, we encounter other pilgrims and share the experience in moments of sacred intersection that feed our spirit, deepen our experience, strengthen our resolve, and build community. And we know it to be good. This is BYM's Spiritual Formation Program. And you are invited to journey with us.

The BYM Spiritual Formation Program offers practical ways for Friends to deepen their personal spiritual experience while building spiritual community. No matter where you are on your journey, the Spiritual Formation Program meets you there. The center of the BYM Spiritual Formation Program are two weekend in-person retreats, held each Spring and Fall. These popular retreats provide opportunities for individual reflection, sharing in small groups, exploring spiritual practices and readings, and fellowship. Whether you are a Christ-centered Friend or a non-theist Quaker, Spiritual Formation Retreats provide a space for you to rest, renew, and return to the Still Small Voice.

Save the date for the BYM Spring Spiritual Formation Retreat! May 3-5, 2024 at the Claggett Center in Adamstown, MD

In addition to retreats, the BYM Spiritual Formation Program can also help you begin or renew a spiritual formation program at your local meeting. Through large and small group activities, spiritual formation helps your meeting build mutual support and accompaniment. But that's not all! The Spiritual Formation Program at BYM hosts a year-long virtual program for Friends throughout the Yearly Meeting (and beyond!) to deepen your spiritual life in the company of Friends near and far - right from your own home. If you'd like to receive email updates about Spiritual Formation opportunities at BYM, email admin@bym-rsf.org. You can learn more and explore the Program Booklet available at <https://www.bym-rsf.org/events/spiritform/>.



Come walk the labyrinth overlooking the Claggett Center

STRIDE: Friends Share the Gift of Camp with their Time, Talent, and Treasures

Last spring, BYM welcomed Rachael Carter as our new STRIDE Coordinator Rachael Carter. Rachael is honored to have the opportunity to serve in the position and has had a wonderful experience getting to know campers, their families, and BYM Friends.

In addition to their day to day work, Rachael is bringing a few changes to STRIDE over the next two years to stabilize and grow the program. In their initial analysis, one thing has been crystal clear to Rachael: the BYM STRIDE program has been successful since its inception due to the enthusiastic participation of the Quaker Community. Whether you are a Young Adult or seasoned Quaker, support from you is essential to the success of the program.

At the same time, individual capacity has shifted since the pandemic, which has required BYM to revisit the most critical needs of the program and the responsibilities of volunteering with STRIDE with a goal of creating more sustainable engagement in the future. As a result, STRIDE has scaled back the level of individual volunteer responsibility in order to support the capacity and well-being of volunteers. Rather than asking STRIDE volunteers to commit to hours of Committee meetings year-round, the program is seeking volunteers so support specific aspects of the program through time-limited engagements.

In 2024, STRIDE hopes to support 24 campers with more opportunities for campers and their

families to connect with each other and the larger camp community. There are three ways you can help support these campers and the STRIDE Program in the coming season, **STRIDE Orientation, STRIDE Camper Transportation and STRIDE Gear Transportation.**

STRIDE Orientation

STRIDE campers have a short day hike, get fitted for gear, meet new and returning families, and also get a chance to meet others that are part of the community. Having 1-2 additional volunteers to help with planning a short hike route and other simple logistics for this 2-3 hour event would greatly support the program at this time. STRIDE Orientation

Hikes and activities are more helpful to STRIDE families when they are able to connect with people who know about the wonder of being at camp, and the challenges of it. There will be three camper orientations: April 27th in Philadelphia, May 4th in DC, and May 18th in Baltimore. Can you volunteer for a STRIDE Orientation?



STRIDE Camper Transportation You choose your starting location (Philadelphia, D.C. or Baltimore), destination camp (Shilo, Catoctin, Opequon, and the session dates you are able to drive! BYM can provide mileage reimbursement or a rental vehicle. This is a 4-6 hour commitment depending on where you are starting from and going to. This is one of the largest lifts for supporting STRIDE Campers as many families might not have the resources to take off time and to drive to camp.

Packing & Driving STRIDE Gear Gear volunteers pack large plastic bins for each STRIDE camper at the BYM Office or at the STRIDE Gear Locker, located near the Baltimore airport. You will receive a specific list of items to place in a bin and transport to camp. This option is a bit more flexible as dropping of gear can happen anytime before the camper arrives at their session. Packing takes about 20-30 min. You can choose to pack gear any time as early as May and as late as the day before the session. Gear volunteers receive a detailed list of specific instructions and have a brief virtual orientation.

Sign up to volunteer with STRIDE at <https://bit.ly/STRIDEvolunteer>

In addition to restructuring the volunteer program, STRIDE has been working on two website refreshes for the BYM website and the Camp Website to help partners, campers, fam-

ilies, and volunteers to understand more about the program. Rachael is also reaching out to our partner organizations to reestablish relationships. In addition, the STRIDE Coordinator will continue to visit with BYM meetings during the winter and early spring to strengthen relationships and connections between BYM Friends and STRIDE. If your meeting would like a virtual or in person visit please reach out to Rachael via email at rachaelcarter@bym-rsf.org.

Last but not least, your gifts to the BYM General Fund support the work of STRIDE year round. Thank you for your generous support!

STRIDE is not just a program, it is a collective community building activity for the world we would like to see. STRIDE looks forward to seeing you out on the trails!

2024 GRANTS & SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE THROUGH BYM

Spring is grant season at BYM! Baltimore Yearly Meeting awards over \$50,000 grants and scholarship each year to individuals and non-profit organizations. Grants and scholarships are made from restricted bequests and other gifts given to our Yearly Meeting by generous donors since 1874.

Miles White Organizational Grants

The Miles White Beneficial Society of Baltimore City (MWBS) is now accepting applications from non-profit organizations for grants of up to \$5,000. Application materials can be found at www.mileswhite.org. Questions regarding grant applications may be sent to grants@mileswhite.org. The application deadline is March 8, 2024. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions in May 2024.

Miles White Scholarships

The Miles White Beneficial Society of Baltimore City (MWBS) is now accepting applications for scholarships of up to \$5,000 from students who are planning to enter, or currently attend, an undergraduate college, university, or post-secondary trade school. Application materials can be found at www.mileswhite.org. Questions may be sent to scholarships@mileswhite.org. The application deadline is March 8, 2024. Applicants will be notified of funding decisions in May 2024. Scholarship funds are released directly to educational institutions beginning in July 2024.

BYM Educational Grants

The BYM Educational Grants Committee awards educational grants up to \$2,000 to members and regular attenders - and their children - of BYM Monthly Meetings. Grants may be applied to expenses associated with

full or part time undergraduate attendance at accredited post-secondary educational institutions. Grants will be awarded based on multiple criteria, including financial need and the Committee's assessment of an applicant's statement of purpose and its consistency with Friends' testimonies. Applications must be submitted in full by May 15th, and award decisions will be sent in early July. For further information including the application link, visit https://www.bym-rsf.org/what_we_do/committees/edloan/

Sue Thomas Turner Quaker Education Grants

The Sue Thomas Turner Quaker Education Fund supports the understanding and use of Quaker faith and practice in school communities - among students, staff, faculty, administration, Trustees, and parents. The Fund is targeted for, but not limited to, Friends schools. Grants are awarded for: materials, lectures and consul-

tants, workshops and retreats, programs, and activities to be brought in that explain Quaker faith and practice to members of the school communities; individuals or groups from a school community to attend workshops, classes or retreats on Quaker faith and practice; and the creation and distribution of materials related to Quaker faith and practice by members of a school community. The funds are for uses that in addition to those already funded by a school or school committee budget, or to augment existing funds for a use that exceeds ordinary funding. Applications from schools, committees, Friends' Meetings, Friends organizations, or individuals must be received by March 1. Please email requests to sttqef@bym-rsf.org. Paper requests also accepted, sent to the BYM Office 17100 Quaker Lane, Sandy Spring, MD 20860. The Committee meets once a year and awards grants in April.

ANNUAL SESSION PLANNING IN FULL SWING

Save the Date: July 30 - August 4, 2024

BYM Annual Session will take place July 30 - August 4 at Hood College in Frederick, MD. Friends from across our Yearly Meeting will gather for a week of fellowship, Friendship, business, and fun. Stay tuned for the special Spring issue of The Interchange, which will include all the details for Annual Session. In the meantime, Friends are invited to volunteer their time, talents, and treasures to help make Annual Session a success.

The Annual Session Bookstore will offer a Used Book Section. Friends are asked to search your shelves for New or Like New books to donate. Donations can be given to Peg Hansen at the March or June Interim Meeting or dropped off at the Yearly Meeting Office.

Friends are invited to offer craft items for sale at Annual Session as a Bookstore Vendor. From quilts and pottery to clothing and independent books, we welcome crafts of all kinds. The application process is easy - simply email the Bookstore Manager at bookstore@bym-rsf.org.

Workshop Proposals will close on March 15, 2024. Individual Friends, Meetings, Committees, and Working groups are invited to submit proposals to offer workshops at BYM's 2024 Annual Session using the form located at <https://www.bym-rsf.org/annualsession/> Workshops will be offered Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 2pm to 4pm. Workshops can either relate to the theme of Annual Session, A Testimony to Social Justice: Rise Up and Let your Life Speak, or to another topic of interest to Friends. Program Committee will follow up at the end of March with confirmation of selection and the proposed workshop slot. Questions? Please e-mail admin@bym-rsf.org.

BYM HOSTS EARLHAM COLLEGE STUDENTS



In November, BYM provided overnight hospitality to a group of Earlham College students and their faculty advisors. The group had traveled from Richmond, IN to the D.C. area to participate in the National March on Washington for peace and ceasefire in Palestine. The students raised their own funds to cover transportation and reached out to BYM in search of solidarity housing. In under a week, staff and volunteers transformed the BYM Office into a hostel for 30. Friends felt joy at the opportunity to express Love and Care for these young adults as they sought to live out the Leadings of their consciences. From hauling mattresses and loaning linens to shopping for coffee and washing countless loads of laundry - **thank you** to the many hands that made this hospitality possible.



BYM WORKING GROUP ON RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH ANIMALS

If you missed participating in the Veganuary 2024 - BYM “No Pressure” Edition, it’s not too late to try plant-based! The web page of BYM’s Working Group on Right Relationship with Animals includes a link to our one-month intro to plant-based eating which you can try any time. https://www.bym-rsf.org/what_we_do/committees/animals/

A BAZAAR TIME WAS HAD BY ALL

BYM Indigenous Affairs Committee Sponsors Holiday Craft Bazaar

Friends can have fun while helping others. That's what the BYM Indigenous Affairs Committee did on December 2, 2023, with heartwarming support from Sandy Spring Monthly Meeting and its community. The Indigenous Affairs Committee (formerly the Indian Affairs Committee) has worked with the American Indian Society of Washington, D.C. for more than 20 years. This year, the American Indian Society needed a place to hold its annual Christmas Bazaar.

Knowing the AIS needs and thinking of possible Quaker solutions, a member of the Indigenous Affairs Committee contacted Sandy Spring Meeting to inquire about the possibility of using the Lyceum. The response from Jim Webner was a prompt, welcoming, "Yes!" Sandy Spring Meeting agreed to host the event, providing tables and kitchen access along with the space itself. Howard Zuses

helped with facility matters. He and Jim smoothed the path for everyone.

The Lyceum was filled with Native vendors on Dec. 2. The Native entrepreneurs offered jewelry and lapidary work they have made, ribbon skirts in a rainbow of colors, handmade beaded items, and more. One indigenous person from Ecuador sold coffee and cocoa he grows on his land in that country—and he sold out of the products he'd brought. AIS had a room for kids' activities. A member taught how to make corn husk dolls. Friends had a room of books for sale to benefit the AIS. We donated gift baskets and items for a silent auction.

After the bazaar ended, the combined groups celebrated by segueing into the annual AIS holiday party. We began with a blessing song.

Following tradition, elders, both Native and Quaker, received the first plates of food. There was plenty of food and fellowship. Afterwards, children and adults joined in dancing and games. AIS representatives were very pleased, saying the fundraising had gone very well. They felt respected and warmly accepted by Friends. Friends also felt warmly welcomed into the Native gathering. The AIS is an inter-tribal organization originally formed to gather Native people in our area, especially those away from their homelands, for example working for the federal government here. Meetings and events are times to



share and reaffirm cultures and traditions. At their August 2023 57th anniversary celebration and picnic, the AIS presented the BYM Indigenous Affairs Committee with a certificate of appreciation. They also gifted Pat Powers with handcrafted antler and wood sculpture.

The Indigenous Affairs Committee is grateful to Friends and friends who offered lodging, food, volunteer time and effort, sign making, and publicizing the event. This is an example of demonstrating our care and support of Native people and organizations through our actions. And it was Fun!

Submitted by Sue Marcus



Friends Afghan Assist Network (FAAN) BYM Quakers Step Up for Refugees

Afghans. They fled for their lives. Some came to the US through the airlift, others overland, through many countries. They had to start over.

My Meeting (Alexandria) received an email from Bette Hoover (Sandy Spring) in January 2022, five months after the fall of Kabul and the Afghan airlift. An Afghan family had been relocated to Alexandria. Could we help them? That is how it began for me.

About 40 people, Quakers, Brethren, Muslims and others joined together to help Afghan refugees in the Baltimore-Washington area. Fahima Gaheez, Founder and Director of the Afghan Women's Fund, and Bette Hoover sent pleas to Meetings throughout BYM,

asking for help for specific families. Bette and Fahima gathered us into a flexible yet cohesive force for good to help people in need. And there were many needs with more to come.

Fahima is an Afghan-American Quaker (Annapolis Meeting) who has dedicated most of her life to helping others, particularly Afghan women in the US and Afghanistan. Bette, our late big-hearted Friend, also gave to others throughout her life, and notably and most recently to Afghan refugees. People learned of Fahima through networks of contact and called her for help. Others contacted Minoo Tavakoli, who has helped refugees for years. Another family needed help. A planeload of

Afghans just arrived. They need places to live. They need food. They need Everything!

Our band of volunteers calls ourselves the Friends Afghan Assist Network. We are not an independent nonprofit organization. We are not an official appendage of any group, though Stony Run and Sandy Spring Meetings have provided some administrative support. Mostly, we just do what we see needs to be done. Our support varies from Meeting to Meeting. Our individual time and energy investments vary, too. We share information, ideas, strategies, and resources.

In 2023, with the leadership of Jamie Buss (Adelphi Meeting), we received a grant to fund some of our Afghan families' needs. The grantee wants to make sure that work done to manage the grant is paid for. That is a gift in itself because it means that we have a perfect grant manager, Halima K., who can communicate with our families, who understands Afghan culture, and who helps us be most effective.

We are learning as we go. First came the needs for what I call Stuff—household goods, clothes, furniture, etc. We learned about the resettlement agencies tasked, and paid, by the federal government to help some of the Afghan refugees. These are large organizations like Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, International Rescue Committee, and several others. All of these agencies were overwhelmed by the initial sudden influx of Afghan families. One harried case worker told me that she had 300 families to manage. Some agencies were more willing to work with us than other agencies.

We learned about language issues. Most of our Afghan families spoke Pashto as their first language, with Dari as their second language. Farsi is a common language in Iran. Dari and Farsi are related languages, and their speakers can usually understand each other. Some refugees spoke a bit of English; very few could communicate in English. Communica-

tion has been difficult at times. I also learned that Afghani was the currency of Afghanistan, not the people from it.

We also learned how much we take for granted. Let's say a family wants to register a child for school. How do they get to the registration office? How do they understand the forms? In what grade should the child be placed? Who will take them (family and helpers)? If a child is sick or misses a bus, how do they get home or to school? How will we communicate, both in terms of language, though even, do they have a phone? Who pays for the phone? We have to deconstruct each activity to determine how to make it work for that family.

Those were the earlier days. We thought those days were hard. They were easy compared to the challenges our Afghan families face now. Most federal support has ended or is ending. They are expected to support themselves. Where can they afford to live? Where can they work and how can they get to a job? If both parents work, who takes care of young children? How can they succeed here, because they can't return to Afghanistan anytime soon, even if they want to?

We have learned of the resilience and generosity of people who had stable, had those lives shattered, and now must rebuild in a new country - accepting help from strangers who don't even speak their language. It is humbling to be welcomed into our Afghan families. Our volunteering can be emotionally exhausting, yet it is an honor.

If you are led to help us, please contact me, Sue Marcus, at akumaldreams@gmail.com. We have the greatest needs for jobs, affordable places to live for families numbering up to 13 members, and help taking people to appointments.

Submitted by Sue Marcus

Community News

Adelphi Friends Meeting

Greetings from Adelphi Friends Meeting! As the year draws to a close we are heartened by the continuing gradual return of families to our community. Some are families who were with us pre-pandemic and some are new families. It is such a blessing to have them. Otherwise, we have been busy with the following: a Continuing Quaker Education series on George Fox in honor of his 400th birthday, a second Repair Cafe - this time also open to our surrounding neighborhood - to repair goods instead of sending them into the trash, hosting what seemed to be a very successful BYM Women's Retreat at Friends Community School, and a pre-Thanksgiving pizza night with bonfire to express gratitude and enjoy being together.

Our Change Group has convened sessions on the "why" and "how" of reparations, and for gathering advice on places where "mini-reparations" might make a difference in an unfair structure or system. After discerning where our investments in the community should go, the group incorporated these grants into its annual budget request. We also revived our Cornstalk Project in which we raise money to send to a particular community in Kenya hit hard by AIDS and other difficulties. The money generally goes to paying school fees for children and teens, and helping widows develop some ways to earn money. Finally, we have had Second Hour presentations by a member of our Meeting who has traveled several times to Ukraine to witness for peace; and by another member of our community about Maryland's leading role in much needed climate legislation and the specific climate issues that will be in front of the legislature starting in January. At the end of this month we say a very, very big thank you to our current Clerk, Marcy Seitel, as she goes into well-earned Clerk retirement. She will be replaced by our current Assistant Clerk Arthur Karpas. *Submitted by Carole Hoage*

Dunnings Creek Friends Meeting

Dunnings Creek Friends Meeting welcomed in-person and zoom attenders to our Still Listening October event. Local historian Harriet Gaston spoke on Black history in Bedford County. Our Peace and Social Concerns Committee is now planning a winter event. We reached out to neighbors with autumn flower gifts, small mums, locally grown. Christmas Eve we will welcome all to the Meeting at 5 pm for carols, reflection, and potluck. It is our first in-person Christmas Eve since the pandemic. In October the good, kind life of Dave Bohnert was remembered at a Memorial Meeting. Dave was a past Clerk, and a dear Friend. Always teaching, serving, and learning, he worked on building our first website. Dave traveled 120 miles round trip from Cumberland to Meeting, bringing us doughnuts. *Submitted by Ellen Prentiss Campbell*

Floyd Friends Monthly Meeting

This is a summary of Floyd Friends Monthly Meeting social concerns events for 2023. Floyd County has a small population of about 15,000 people and is a rural, conservative county, with about 96.7% of the population White, about 2% Black and 1.35% Hispanic. Our meeting tries to initiate and support any community relationships of diversity. In March a letter to the editor from Floyd Friends supporting reproductive rights was published in the Floyd Press newspaper. We also approved adding our Monthly Meeting's name to the American Friends Service Committee's anti-apartheid pledge and presented information about the pledge at the Floyd County Courthouse on March 24th 2023. We sang, waved at

passing motorists and handed out Apartheid-Free pledge and website pocket cards to those who wanted to know more.

Floyd Friends participating in Apartheid-Free pledge at the County Courthouse on March 24th, 2023.



In April members attended an Arab American Heritage Celebration at Bent Mountain's community center and in June we helped sponsor a Juneteenth Celebration, organized by Floyd Community Action for Racial Equity (CARE) at Floyd's Lineberry Park, and staffed the "mural arts" table. In September the Hispanic Heritage Celebration was canceled due to rain and rescheduled for October 14. Put on by Floyd CARE we again were one of the sponsors and staffed the "God's Eye" art table. Because our meeting is small and has about 6 regular attenders who come to Meeting for worship with a concern for business, we have to decide how to address social concern events requests. We decided about 5 years ago to have 2 different levels of endorsements for public events. The first level is: Endorsed Activity - use of our meeting's logo on a flier - evidence we support the spirit of the event. This level may include a financial donation. This year it was/is the Anti-Apartheid Pledge. The second level is: Meeting sponsored activity - meeting is committed to being physically present doing preparation before the event, serving during the event and cleaning up after, with enough people participating to achieve the goal. It may include a financial donation. This year it was the Juneteenth Celebration and Hispanic Heritage Celebration. *Submitted by Edna Whittier*

Herdon Friends Meeting

Herdon Friends have adopted Zoom not only for our hybrid meetings but also for other get-togethers. Our Men's Group meets every other week via Zoom to discuss topics of interest, including the Barbie movie, which was the subject more than once! A Seeking Light in the Bible group meets weekly, and having worked its way through the book of Mark, is now starting over with Matthew. The Anti-Racism group meets every month and sends out a query to the meeting listserv. On the other hand, the newly formed Spiritual Formation group is going the tried-and-true route and is meeting in person. Outreach to the greater community continues. We have made and delivered bag lunches to the local shelter once a month for many years, adding up to probably twenty thousand sandwiches so far. We collect contributions for Thanksgiving Baskets yearly. Our recent bike collection yielded 109 bicycles for Bikes for the

World. The public was invited to our Hiroshima Remembrance event and an open house to show off our solar panels and all-native plant landscaping. The Student Peace Awards of Fairfax County is still going strong, with 26 high schools participating this year. *Submitted by Margaret Fisher.*

Homewood Friends Meeting

Celebration and Memorial of Life for Phil Furnas on Saturday, November 18, 2023. Phil was a Quaker, an architect, artist, father, and grandfather. Phil, a 1959 graduate of Earlham College, was a member of Friends meetings in Pennsylvania. Phil and his dear spouse, Carol, moved to Baltimore in 2014 to enjoy retirement and to be closer to family. Phil transferred his membership in the Society of Friends to Homewood and quickly became a beloved part of our community. Phil's kindness, thoughtfulness, and creativity were remembered and appreciated through messages from family and F(f)riends. Memorial donations to Earlham College to celebrate Phil's life may be made at <https://earlham.edu/giving/>

The Homewood Friends Meetinghouse is over 100 years old and was built to accommodate relatively large groups of up to 275 worshipers in the Meeting room. We rarely have more than 50 people for worship and have been struggling with setting up the room so that messages offered by worshippers can be heard. Of course, being able to clearly deliver and hear messages are essential to having an optimal worshipping experience. We have tried several things, e.g., changing bench configurations and/or having those who are offering a message to come to a "speakers spot". Nothing we did was consistently successful. And we realized that we were in danger of losing members and attenders out of frustration with the quirky and unpredictable sound environment. But then Andres Lobo, an attender of our Meeting and a sound engineer by profession, volunteered to do a thorough analysis of the sound environment in the Worship Room and to make recommendations for addressing the problem at Meeting for Business in October. Our Meeting decided to "bite the bullet" and make some purchases of new audio equipment which Andres installed and continues to monitor. We also decided to use a "traveling" microphone by which a Friend indicates that they are ready to offer a message and a microphone is brought to that person. We are working to improve how people hold and speak into the microphone. Making the audio environment optimal for Meeting for Worship has become a priority. While we can say that hearing messages has improved markedly, it is still a work in progress. If you have a question or would like to share your Meeting's journey, please contact us at homewoodfriends@gmail.com.

Homewood is exploring the possible purchase and installation of three mini-split units to heat and cool the Meeting office, Library, and upstairs office for Hinenu, a Jewish congregation that rents space in the Meeting House. Three committees are working to develop a proposal. These are Trustees (for funding), House and Grounds (for optimization of unit installations), and the Green Organizing Action Team (environmental impact). Determining what we can afford is a key part of our discussion. The Meeting is very interested in seeking funding through the federal Inflation Reduction Act. If other Meetings have experience with procuring and installing heat pumps, Homewood will be very interested in hearing about your process. Please call or email to 410-235-4438 or homewoodfriends@gmail.com. *Submitted by John McKusick*

Hopewell Centre Meeting

The year here at Hopewell Centre draws to a close with a flurry of community outreach, as we lend hands and hearts to those who are homeless and food insecure at Kitchen of Hope, Highland Food Pantry, and WATTS (Winchester Area Temporary Thermal Shelter). We continue our work with Church World Services helping 300 refugees from Afghanistan and other crisis-stricken countries, to settle into their new lives in Winchester. Transportation to doctors, finding apartments to rent, shopping for food, school backpacks with supplies are just a few of their many needs. We're pleased to see some have

already found jobs at local businesses, including Rubbermaid, Kohl's and Home Depot. We've also been busy renewing friendships and building spiritual ties with other faith groups in our community, joining in for Unity Gatherings and Worship with the Baha'is, AME (African Methodist Episcopal church), and Metropolitan Community Church.

Still we turn inward for reflection and spiritual growth. Our evolving Prayer Group is practicing Intercessory and contemplative prayer and Lectio Divina to focus on Joy, Forgiveness, Knowing Oneself and other spiritual self-growth topics. In quiet meditation we hold in the light individuals close to us who are unwell in body or spirit – as well as those suffering in the wider world. In First Day's Second Hour, members and attenders inspire and inform us in myriad ways, most recently with an interactive "Meeting for Healing;" painting river rocks with messages of hope; and Renewal for the New Year from a Jewish perspective. Of course there's always housekeeping and upkeep of our buildings and grounds to do. Our historical Hollingsworth graveyard, with Boy Scout help will, at last, see the rebuilding of its fallen wall. We are adding on to our new shed/shelter, a patio of commemorative bricks and old footstones from the Clear Brook graveyard. The shed has already housed many memorable events, from Homecoming to a yard sale, and we invite the public to enjoy it as well. Despite wrestling with microphones and where to put the WiFi receptor so the sun doesn't overheat, ZOOM meetings have taken a firm hold, keeping us close to members who've moved as far away as Washington state as well as those who are homebound at home. We've happily welcomed new attenders, and some kind Friends have opened their homes to newcomers in need of temporary housing. Come spring and summer, we foresee holding a Peace Workshop/Conflict Training day open to other meetings and churches, and we look forward to watching happy Camp Opequon campers take up their new campground at Rolling Ridge Conservancy.

Meanwhile, we wish you all good cheer and a happy, healthy New Year. *Submitted by Maggie Stetler*

Midlothian Friends Meeting

This past year the Peace and Social Action Committee (PSAC) of Midlothian Friends Meeting continued efforts in promoting awareness and change for racial justice. Run Richmond 16.19 took place in Richmond Virginia and the Midlothian meeting raised \$550, enough to cover entry fees for 11 low income youths. Eight MFM members set up, staffed, and took down a race water station. These efforts helped to initiate new connections with various social justice groups in Richmond.

PSAC led Midlothian Friends in discernment on Abortion and Reproductive Justice and reported the sense of our Meeting to FCNL. The Racial Justice Study Group, under the care of our PSAC committee, read and discussed the following works throughout the year: Stamped: Racism, Anti Racism, and You; Letter from Birmingham Jail, I Have a Dream; Autobiography of Malcolm X; and Richmond's Unhealed History. In addition, the PSAC committee selected main and mini grant recipients from the proceeds of the Thrifty Quaker Thrift Store for 2023 and into 2024. *Submitted by Susan Umidi*

Richmond Friends Monthly Meeting

This past year was a very positive year for RFM. We are grateful for the opportunity to meet in person and on Zoom for worship and other activities. Many activities that we had missed during the pandemic are now occurring in person: Adult Spiritual Education programs, committee meetings, potluck lunch once a month, fundraising activities, Friendly Eights groups, and Spiritual Formation. Religious education has thrived with more young families with children attending meeting. In the fall RE sponsored a First Day at the Clearing Retreat Center for RFM children to participate in a special nature program. Later, Care & Counsel hosted a dinner for RE parents and their children. This provided a chance for families to meet each other and share a meal. Afterward while child care was provided, parents had an opportunity

to talk and share in the community room.

The Clearing, RFM's rustic retreat center in Amelia County, Virginia, was closed for over a year during the pandemic. It is now back to being used frequently by the RFM community and by other groups wanting a peaceful woodland setting for retreats, workshops, celebrations, and just experiencing nature. The all-season Lodge, with its well-equipped kitchen and two meeting rooms, has had recent upgrades, including new acoustic treatment in the large meeting room, which now provides a quieter and better environment for hearing during presentations and conversations in small groups. The sleeping cabins (unheated) are best suited to Spring, Summer and Fall. Cleared campsites are available for tent-camping. The covered Pavilion and cleared field next to it provide a setting for outdoor meetings, picnicking, games and worship. The center has trails through its woods and is adjacent to the Amelia Wildlife Management area. We encourage individuals and groups in BYM to make use of this unique spiritual resource. Details for reserving The Clearing are on the RFM website: richmondfriendsmeeting.org.

On 12/22/2022, RFM approved formation of the Ad Hoc Committee on Race and Racism and charged it with engaging RFM in an inclusive, open discernment process to learn what RFM is led to do around race and racism. Using this learning, the committee was asked further to develop an action/implementation plan that engages individuals, committees, and the Meeting as a whole. The committee began meeting in January 2023 and embarked on a collective discernment process in June by inviting all attendees and members of RFM to submit written responses to the following: "Please think about your own experiences and actions regarding race and racism and those of RFM and the wider society. Then please answer this query: 'What should Richmond Friends Meeting do regarding race and racism?'" Query responses were submitted online or were written and placed in a box at the meetinghouse. A total of 54 responses were received. In July, the committee made all of these query responses available on the RFM website for everyone in the community to view. The committee subsequently held a series of five listening circles in late August and early September. A total of 59 individuals participated, with many people attending more than one listening circle. Notes were taken at each listening circle and printed out. The committee then embarked on an extensive, facilitated process of recording the themes that emerged from the online query responses, the written responses, and the listening circles. The committee is grateful to RFM attendee and professional facilitator Plum Cluverius for leading this process. At its October 22nd meeting, the committee decided to draft a Minute on Race and Racism to encapsulate what the committee learned from the query responses and listening circles. The entire Meeting was invited to reflect on the draft minute at a "Meeting for Discernment" on December 2. The committee hopes that Richmond Friends Meeting can find unity around a minute that can guide future action. During the 12th month, we shared a potluck breakfast with caroling before worship and a candlelit meeting for worship on Christmas eve. As 2023 came to a close, we reflected with gratitude for the many blessings of our community. We look forward to the new year and hold a prayer for peace in the Light. *Submitted by Clarisse Harton*

Sandy Spring Friends Meeting

A few highlights from Sandy Spring Meeting. Lots of fellowship and service is happening in our meetings these days. Our Refugee Assistance Working Group continues to support four Afghan families with rental assistance, resume building, and other financial support; a fall picnic provided a chance to share fellowship with the families we sponsor; we raised over \$13,000 in 2023 for assistance. Our Change Group has been receiving consultation from Crossroads Antiracism and Training since September. Young Friends raised over \$300 and collected two trunks of non-perishable food donations for the nearby Sharp Street United Methodist Church food pantry. The Peace Committee hosted Saleem Zaru, executive director of United Palestinian Appeal in October.

Sandy Spring Friends making Christmas Crafts for everyone



AIS banner at Sandy Spring



Meetings for Learning in the fall included monthly Sharing Spiritual Journeys and three programs on the Spiritual Dimensions of Aging & Dying programs in the fall. Our annual Halloween Party welcomed over 250 visitors from the surrounding community. Our “spooky graveyard” is a big hit at this event. The Community House was packed for Christmas Crafts Sunday, and the annual Christmas Pageant was a blast. In January we are looking forward to an all-meeting retreat day focused on Community Stewardship; a panel discussion on creating peace in Palestine/Israel, and the start of a four session meeting for learning series, “Beyond Acknowledgment: Committing to Antiracist Work Through Transformation and Reparative Actions.”

Collington Quaker Worship Group

The Quaker Worship Group at Collington Life Plan Community in Mitchellville, Maryland (a Kendal affiliate) has recently experienced a growth spirit. As recently as a year ago, the meeting numbered six to eight, but it now frequently numbers above twenty for our weekly gathering on Tuesday afternoons. The growth is a combination of resident arrivals, bringing Quaker connections with previous meetings, and an increased curiosity from non-Quaker residents. (We now include members from at least five yearly meetings.) The fourth Tuesday each month is devoted to a guided discussion based on a QuakerSpeak video. This often leads to discussions of Friends’ practices and beliefs and has been helpful to those less familiar with Quakerism.

On November 14, 2023, the Collington group welcomed Sarah Gillooly, BYM General Secretary, who provided participants with updated information on the yearly meeting, its programs and practices. Visiting Friends are always welcome for our 4:00 Tuesday afternoon gatherings. (And please plan to join us for dinner afterwards in the dining room!) We’re located just outside the Washington Beltway, or someone can meet you at the Largo METRO station. For more information contact: Steve Woodbury, 301-925-7581, woodburybauer@verizon.net and Dave Elkinton, 410-610-1304, daveelkinton@hotmail.com Submitted by Dave Elkinton

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Lucy Azenga	Admin Associate lucyazenga@bym-rsf.org	Rachael Carter	STRIDE Coordinator rachaelcarter@bym-rsf.org
Barbara Wille	Interim Development Director development@bym-rsf.org	Brian Massey	Camping Program Manager brianmassey@bym-rsf.org