**Update on racial justice Change Group work**

**for BYM Fall 2023 Interim Meeting**

 Note: This and all previous Change Group updates are available at this [link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1r9gVD3uuJEfkdKRcJ19Hc_7FEHiiusWs?usp=sharing).

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**Adelphi**

In December 2022, Adelphi Meeting adopted a minute of commitment to becoming an anti-racist meeting.  Part of that commitment was to establish goals each year and to report on our progress in our spiritual state of the meeting report.  In January, the Change Group began an evening conversation about goals for 2023, which generated a wide range of ideas.  In April, the Change Group convened a second-hour discussion to test these ideas using four practical queries:

·   Would I participate?

·   Do I think other Adelphi Friends would participate?

·   What could we realistically expect from this (idea, project) in the next 7 to 8 months?

·   How might the meeting change as a result of the work (idea, project)?

Three steps forward emerged as doable in what was left of 2023:

·   Move our focus to reparations and help people in the meeting toward a spiritual examination of reparations.

·   Establish a stronger and wider relationship with our neighbors in Adelphi Hills

·   Research the land on which the meetinghouse and white house sits.  Whose was it, as we look further back?  Was it at one time owned by one of the free former slaves who moved to Maryland?  Was it previously within the traditional lands of the Piscataway, or other tribal nation?

The meeting approved these steps as a statement of the meeting’s intentions for the remainder of 2023.

It is becoming clear that the *meeting itself* has made this commitment – not just the Change Group.  One visible demonstration of that adoption is that the Change Group is no longer “tasked” with reading aloud the Baltimore Yearly Meeting Queries on Anti-racism and Inclusion at each business meeting. Instead, the queries appear at the top of our agendas, and random Friends speak up and read each query and then we pause for a moment between each one.

The Peace and Social Concerns Committee had already undertaken “mini reparations” grants for the past three years; a total of about $30,000 had been invested in these efforts.  In late July, the Peace and Social Concerns Committee hosted a catered dinner/discussion about these mini reparations, with several small groups exploring possibilities relating to housing, economics, health care, and education. Committee members took these ideas back to the committee for research and discernment and incorporated the results into their budget request.

One of the mini-reparations grants provided seed money to the ‘Freedom Stories' project for a local dramatic production based on the stories of former slaves in Prince George's County who won their freedom through court cases.  The play, “*Uncovering History: Out of the Vineyard,*” launched this summer.

The Change Group planned a monthly series of readings and discussions on reparations, then rescheduled the first discussion three times, twice due to the press of the meeting’s other involvements, and once due to a computer glitch! The first discussion is now scheduled for October 19. It will focus on “what was broken” and “what needs repair” affecting survivors and descendants of enslaved people, and the Indigenous peoples whose lives were lost and lands were stolen and cultures and spiritual practices were suppressed.

Two members of the Change Group have continued to host monthly discussions of films on diversity and inclusion topics:

·   *Miss Representation* on the under representation of women in leadership roles

·   *Spotlight* on sexual abuse in Boston

·   *Not Your Model Minority* on anti-Asian violence

·   *Pride* on LGBTQ groups assisting Welsh miners

·   *13th* on how the 13th amendment has continued slavery through mass incarceration

·   *Intelligent Lives* on disability inclusion

·   *RBG* on the life and work of Ruth Bader Ginsburg

At least three other small groups continue to meet.  One is an accountability group that has continued to meet since its beginnings in 2021. Two or three other groups continue with readings and monthly or twice-monthly discussions. One group is currently undertaking The *1619 Project*, while another has completed its study of *My Grandmothers’ Hands* by Resmaa Menakem and is now exploring *White Women* by Regina Jackson and Saira Rao.

There is a rich environment around us – sometimes far away and accessible by Zoom – to deepen our understanding and to broaden the voices we hear.  Our twice weekly announcements continue to advertise and promote these presentations, workshops, films, and events for the further education of our community, such as:

·   A Friends Community School opportunity to discuss with parents the book “The Talk” about conversations with children and youth about race, love, and truth

·   A presentation by Dr. Doreen Martinez of Colorado State University titled “When Land is More than Dirt and Ownership: the Land Back Movement and Indigenous (Re)thinkings”

·   Presentations at the Atlanta Monthly Meeting Forum on Restorative Justice

·   On Indigenous Boarding Schools: “Facing our Histories and Ourselves,” a presentation by Paula Palmer at Philadelphia Yearly Meeting

·   Friends Association on Higher Education conference, “Quakers, Colonization and Decolonization

·       Many positive and inspirational readings on reparations and land-back stories from *Friends Journal* and *YES! Magazine.*

We have not made any progress yet on the research goal that we set for 2023, but we have reached out more to our local neighborhood. We have thought of our neighbors and included their hopes and views as we plan to remodel our meeting house.

As we gathered these notes together, we heard reflections from several Friends who continue to work and learn in small groups about racism and confront the realities that have woven themselves into our lives and continue to (mis)shape our perceptions and actions.  For example:

“Through our reading and discussions, we’ve come to understand how much we didn’t know. [These] readings and discussions have led me to listen more in all areas of my life and to assume less.”

And

“The patterns of racism are so ingrained in each of us. I am grateful for the opportunities to grow that our group offers.”

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**Alexandria**

Alexandria Friends Change group is in abeyance while we participate in Trust Circles.  We were trained by Kathryn and Clinton Pettus in April of this year and began meeting in a Trust Circle over the summer.  As of September, we welcomed more people into the group, and we have been able to form a second Trust Circle.  Each Trust Circle has 6-8 members and meets once a month.

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**Dunnings Creek**

On Sunday, October 1, Dunnings Creek’s Peace and Social Concerns Committee presented to the public our third event for our Still Listening Speaker's Series.

Harriet Gaston, Division of Undergraduate Studies Advisor, spoke to an audience of 54 folks from the public ( not counting Dunnings Creek folks) about Black History in Bedford and Blair Counties. It was well attended by our community. There were a number of zoomers as well. We owe that to Dave Lewis who is our publicity volunteer. The flier went out to all the surrounding newspapers, radio stations, and an extensive email list. Ms. Gaston's presentation will be available on YouTube.

It seems that we are getting a bit of a reputation for these presentations. We are thinking about an event in Jan/Feb, but we will look at the COVID numbers and take that into consideration. We plan to have an event in the Spring.

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**Gettysburg**

We support the Afghan refugee family in Gettysburg and the Heritage Festival.

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**Goose Creek**

The Goose Creek antiracism committee continues to meet each month.  We were energized by attending some workshops on reparations at Annual Session and have had many discussions about what that might look like at Goose Creek.  We have reached out to a black Baptist Church - both by attending one of their services and attending a fish fry.  In turn, they attended our summer picnic  and invited Goose Creek to a musical event at their church later this month.  We are encouraged.

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**Gunpowder**

Gunpowder Friends Meeting formally adopted a Working Group on Racial Reconciliation at our September Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business. An informal group has been planning and leading our Meeting’s work around race for the past ten years. We now have five members and welcome others to join us as we seek to bring this work more formally to the Meeting as a whole.

This group held a retreat in June of 2023 to plan our work for the coming year.

Gunpowder has selected Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm by Kazu Haga as our Meeting’s “One Book” which we agree to read, share, and discuss in the coming year. About this book:

  “ *Healing Resistance takes the timeless, universal teachings of nonviolence and builds on them with a fresh perspective, making them relevant to today’s issues.”   -- Bernard LaFayette and David C. Jehnsen, authors of Kingian Nonviolence Leaders Manual*

We will be using the approach described in this book as a model for our Spirit-led work moving forward.

Earlier in the year we held several Forums on Racial Justice and Racial Reconciliation including viewing a video interview with Kazu Haga where we used a worship sharing format to share our responses to the video as well as to seek where Spirit is leading us.

Using the “One Book”, we held one forum in October with another planned for November as our community has been particularly drawn to the capacity of principles of nonviolence to work toward the building of a beloved community.

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**Herndon**

Three members of Herndon Friends Antiracism Working Group (ARWG) attended and participated in the September 16th training session on systemic racism by Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training that was coordinated by BYM. Another ARWG member participated in a training on micro-aggressions that was coordinated by FCNL.

The ARWG History Committee (which works on researching and addressing the local legacy and racist history of the Herndon Friends Meeting House and surrounding area,) is still in communication with the Town of Herndon Director of Community Development regarding the process of changing the wording of a historical sign (near the HFM Meeting House) to include accurate information about segregation.

The ARWG Racial Justice Subgroup (which works on social/racial justice issues,) and the Peace & Social Concerns Committee have been participating in postcard campaigns (conducted by the Center for Common Ground and the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy) to encourage voters of color to vote.

The ARWG Racial Healing Subgroup (which works on facilitating a culture of racial healing and antiracism within HFM,) has discussed reaching out to other local churches/religious organizations at some point.

One ARWG member, who is also a Fairfax County NAACP member, joined the Political Action Committee of the Fairfax NAACP early this year. This committee coordinated and facilitated candidate forums and a Meet and Greet (the candidates) in the Spring and will be conducting a Get Out the Vote Rally & Meet and Greet and a Souls to the Polls event in October.

In addition, Herndon Friends Meeting continues its monthly vigils for peace, justice, and equality at the Meeting House.

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**Maury River**

In January we had the MLK parade on a fairly warm beautiful day with about 800 people and about 10 MRFM people with enthusiasm and a simple and inspiring MRFM sign.

Concerning some racist activities and communication with the principal in the recent past at Rockbridge County High School:  In 2021-22 several from MRFM had attended local school board meetings with a concern for students trying to produce a more antiracist environment at Rockbridge County High School.  A letter had been sent by the Peace and Justice Committee expressing concern and offering help.

An in-person meeting took place  with Ben Eland, co-clerk of MRFM,  Principal Dr. Craft, three of the staff working to help the students and Kathy Fox. The school has been working on better communication as requested by the students.  They had a mandatory (per Dr. Craft) session for teachers and staff about inclusion with a well-trained respected person.  They were making progress with the student advisory committee and in a few months planning to start an adult community group.  Kathy did a tour of RCHS with the assistant principal which showed continued positive signs of inclusion.

She met with Dr. Craft and three other staff members to share a letter from a senior student who had concerns related to progress working on racial justice at the school. They reported a coming program for good mental health following extra funding they had received.   Dr. Craft told Kathy that she was on the list for being in the community support group.  She had a good follow up conversation with the student also. At the end of school Dr. Craft explained they were having a grieving time at the school with the recent death of a well-loved student right before his graduation. Kathy sent spoken and written condolences on behalf of MRFM  to Dr. Craft and all in the school.

In June, she had lunch with a mother and student who is now in college. They thanked Kathy for her support. As it turned out, no community adult group was started but general improvement was noted and groundwork was set for communication between MRFM and RCHS.

 MRFM as a whole supports and has members doing activities with the Rockbridge NAACP.  They have many anti racist activities including funding local summer activities for over 20 children and scholarships for three  students of color at  local colleges.  They gave funds and general support to two recent educators of color hired locally.

They have an ad hoc committee to limit the theme park near Fairfield, VA run by the local Stonewall Brigade, part of the larger group, Sons of Confederate Veterans. There is a huge Confederate flag displayed prominently in their park. The park is wanting to get monuments as they are being removed from areas throughout Virginia.  A letter was sent throughout Virginia urging places with monuments not to send them to this park.

MRFM is a member of our local Racial Equity Coalition. They have supported the “Henrietta Lacks Deserves Genetic Justice”  case. The plaintiffs have received a good settlement per her grandson. There was a moving  program with her grandson who wrote a book about Henrietta and encouraged attendance at the unveiling of her statue in Roanoke. The coalition is supporting a program for African American entrepreneurs and a program for hiring more teachers of color.

Kathy attended the BYM Networking Day  via zoom with the theme “Intergeneration Peacemaking,” and a workshop on restorative justice.

Peace and Justice clerk Richard Capron attended a rally in Richmond about “Prison Justice.”

We had a good discussion/discernment from a report of overcoming racism material from BYM.  Richard talked with MRFM co-clerk Peggy Dyson-Cobb about proceeding with others of MRFM.  Judith Wiegand has been going through Pendle Hill’s courses, pamphlets, and streaming material to see what is related to various questions about race.

Kathy and Sandra Stuart participated in the MRFM book group reading and discussing Howard Thurman’s inspiring book, *Jesus and the Disinherited*.

On September 20, Richard and Sandra traveled to Glasgow to assess the problem with persistent flooding in a sector of the community in which the population is predominantly African American. It is evident that responsibility for the flooding is rather complex, involving the county, the town, the Norfolk and Southern RR, and probably the Mohawk factory. It seems that the problem is an illustration of environmental racism affecting a small but vulnerable part of the community. further investigation is warranted, and action strategies should involve a broad base of support for the residents.

The Rockbridge NAACP has been looking into this situation.   The peace and justice committee is leading a 2nd Hour in November to consider MRFM taking up this issue in a deeper way.

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**Monongalia**

Monongalia Friends Meeting reads and considers thoughtfully the anti-racism queries developed by BYM at each Meeting for Business. This practice has helped us in educating ourselves about racism, as well as in developing awareness about the history and impact of racism within the Society of Friends.

Last year, after thoughtful research and discussion, our Meeting decided to remove a wall painting depicting William Penn signing a treaty with Native Americans. One of our members is actively involved in a local anti-racism group and others are engaged in reading and self-education about the impact of racism.

The Meeting put a “Love thy neighbor, no exceptions” sign in the window and included language in the Meeting’s new tri-fold brochure about advocating for anti-racism and belief in equality.

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**Richmond**

Richmond Friends Meeting continues to publish the Thinking About Race column prepared by the BYM working Group in each monthly newsletter.

On December 18, 2022, Richmond Friends Meeting approved formation of the Ad Hoc Committee on Race and Racism and charged the committee with the task of engaging the meeting community in an inclusive, open discernment process to learn what we are led to do around race and racism; then using this learning, to develop an action/implementation plan to that engages individuals, committees, and the meeting as a whole.

 The committee began meeting in January 2023. We embarked on our discernment process in June, inviting all attenders and members of RFM to submit written responses to the query:

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 around race and racism?”

Query responses could be submitted online or written and placed in a box at the meetinghouse. We received a total of 54 digital and handwritten responses

In July, the committee made all of the query responses available on the RFM website for everyone in the community to view. Then we held a series of five listening circles in late August and early September-- two in person, two on Zoom, another on Zoom for people of color only. A total of 54 people participated, with many participating in more than one or multiple listening sessions. The ad hoc is now summarizing and distilling the written and oral query responses and plans to bring them to a Meeting-wide gathering on December 2. We hope to find unity around a minute on race and racism that can be used to develop a plan of action.

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**Roanoke**

In June Roanoke Monthly Meeting played a significant part in Roanoke City’s third annual gun buyback, Groceries Not Guns. The program especially tries to reach out to lower-income sections of the city where we have had a terrible rise in gun violence. Quite a few Friends were very involved in planning and serving in various roles to make the gun buyback a success. Our Meeting serves in the important role of the fiscal sponsor of the gun buyback program.

Our Meeting’s Quaker Reading Group is currently reading John Woolman’s *Journal*. Many of our discussions have centered on the slave trade, the history of Quakers, and Woolman’s struggle to be faithful to the Spirit’s leadings.

Several Friends are active in the Roanoke Reparations Group, which includes representatives from numerous congregations, and which meets monthly. The Reparations Group is currently planning to have teams visit other congregations to share what we are doing and invite them to join the reparations effort. Also, individuals in our Meeting have organized a Reparations Book Group with a focus on Duke Kwon’s and Gregory Thompson’s *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair*. The book group meets monthly and is well attended by Quakers and non-Quakers.

Several of us are very active in the Roanoke Branch NAACP, with two of us on the Executive Committee. One Friend serves as the branch Secretary and, with branch members, attended the NAACP national convention in Boston, MA. She helped the youth participate in NAACP’s national youth competition, ACT-SO. One of us is currently teaching a “Peace and Justice Studies'' course at Roanoke College, with a focus on understanding systemic racism and related issues of injustice. As part of the course, the Roanoke City historian, Jordan Bell, was a guest in the class, speaking on “Gainsboro Revisited,” Roanoke’s self-thriving community destroyed by urban removal programs and systemic racism. In addition to college students, Jordan Bell’s talk was very well attended by Roanoke Friends as well as other community members.

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**Washington**

The Friends Meeting of Washington Change Committee sponsored two workshops on writing testimonies of complicity to encourage white Friends to think deeply about the role of race, racism, and white privilege in their own lives, the Meeting, and wider society. Participants have found this to be difficult work best tackled in the context of a compassionate community. Those participants formed the Anti Racism Spiritual Friendship Group that meets monthly and that centers on both racism and compassion. Presentations on racism are followed by meditation and worship sharing.

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**Williamsburg**

Members of the Meeting participate in an organization called “All Together Williamsburg,” which seeks to bring together people across racial, ethnic, and cultural lines to communicate and engage in activities that foster unity, inclusiveness, and equal opportunity. All Together provides opportunities to gather socially to exchange ideas and learn about one another. Through an annual scholarship program for high school seniors the group recognizes students for their kindness and spirit of bridge building.

Group members regularly set up and staff the “Black Lives Matter Lemonade Stand” at the Williamsburg Farmers Market to engage the community in conversations about why Black lives matter and to provide suggested readings to understand the history of Black lives in the U.S.