

ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING

GUNPOWDER FRIENDS MEETING NEWS, Web Edition for April, 2021



STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH

QUERIES:

- Do you seek to preserve the beauty and balance of God's world?
- Do you seek to meet your needs in a sustainable way by preserving resources, enhancing the health of the earth, and by protecting the future?
- Do we intentionally explore and live our conviction that there is that of God in all creation?

ADVICES:

Connect with the earth and all it holds as part of your spiritual development. As John Woolman was concerned about the injury man was doing to the Earth, be aware that we are stewards of a gift of God for future generations. Misuse of the Earth and the abundance it offers often leads to injustice and war. Some common present practices so violate our sense of stewardship that they seem to constitute a war on the Earth. We need to be constantly aware of how our actions affect the rest of the world. By not using more than we need and by sharing with others, we help ensure that the earth will continue to support everyone.

VOICES:

The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.
-John Woolman, c. 1760

Sustainability as a concept has recently acquired new spiritual depth of meaning to include a resolve to live in harmony with biological and physical systems, and to work to create social systems that can

enable us to do that. It includes a sense of connectedness and an understanding of the utter dependence of human society within the intricate web of life; a passion for environmental justice and ecological ethics; an understanding of dynamic natural balances and processes; and a recognition of the limits to growth due to finite resources. Our concern for Sustainability recognizes our responsibility to future generations, to care for the Earth as our own home and the home of all that dwell herein. We seek a relationship between human beings and the Earth that is mutually enhancing.

-Quaker Earthcare Witness, 1998

All things are bound together. All things connect. Whatever befalls the earth, befalls also the children of the earth.

-Oren Lyons, Onondaga Nation

GUNPOWDER FRIENDS MEETING Spiritual State of the Meeting Report for 2020

Preparation of our Spiritual State of the Meeting report began with a gathering of 33 Gunpowder Friends via Zoom on 10th First Month 2021. Our sharing centered on three queries sent by Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee asking, in general terms, (1) how the Spirit prospers among us, (2) how Friends at Gunpowder Friends Meeting are supporting one another, and (3) how our spiritual life has been impacted by events of 2020.

In response to the third query, on spirituality, one Friend summarized spirituality as "finding ways to experience God in one another." This phrase goes a long way toward describing what our Meeting has been about both before and since the Covid-19 pandemic struck with full force in March, making worship and committee work dependent on videoconferencing into the present.

Thanks to the leadership of our clerk and standing committees, starting in March we found ways to continue our Quaker practices in virtual space via Zoom: Meetings for Worship, Meetings for Business, First Day School gatherings, committee meetings, Friendly Bible Study and a Richard Rohr discussion group, our Spiritual Formation program both large and small groups. We even found a way to continue our popular Coffee Social on the first First Day using small breakout rooms for informal conversation. Further, we've instituted some additional gathering times: a weekly Friendship Night for casual conversation, and a monthly Worshipful Conversation on race and racial justice.

A very rich addition to this year's spiritual journey together was provided by our Ministry and Counsel committee's choice of Marcelle Martin's book *Our Life is Love* for Meetingwide study. Copies of the book were mailed to 89 households and conversations planned over three Forums during the fall. Substantial and enthusiastic participation in these conversations has meant planning for an additional Forum early in 2021.

Having begun 2020 with a newly approved statement of our "Mission, Vision and Values," our Working Group on Stewarding our Vision guided us through a process of discerning our goals for its implementation. In two successive online retreats we listened deeply as Friends shared their hopes and Spirit's leadings. We felt a deep settling around a commitment to support the work of the McKim Community Center in Baltimore City. A proposal was to be put to Meeting for Business early in 2021 to establish a Working Group to explore and guide this work following the lead of the McKim community.

Several Friends remarked on the effort, hard work, and responsibility involved for all of us in going virtual and maintaining the practices that weave our community together—from setting up a Gunpowder Zoom account to convening meetings to becoming adept enough with the technology to attend evening meetings, some after long days of work-related videoconferencing. Yet despite the effort of going virtual, Friends commented that without our points of connection on Zoom, the isolation of the pandemic would have been even more difficult. As one Friend states, “I echo the immense gratitude to those who have stepped up to continue to weave us together.” Indeed, technology has brought together not only current Gunpowder Friends (some of whom faced obstacles to in-person attendance even before Covid) but members, attenders, and visitors, including guests from across the country and the world. Although virtual meetings may not be optimal for most, some Friends have found them more personal than physically gathered groups, and many have expressed surprise at the richness of virtual meetings for worship. Yet another kind of effort must not be lost in all this—the efforts Gunpowder Friends have made to connect with those in our Meeting who are not comfortable using Zoom; the absence of these Friends from our shared life is palpable.

If spirituality involves finding ways to experience God or Spirit in one another, then Meetings for Worship provide space and time for encountering the Divine individually and corporately. *Connection* is a word associated with both physical proximity and the proximity technology fosters, and perhaps because our meetings have become technology dependent, many Friends described the experience of spirituality this year as a deep, nonphysical connection defined by welcome, acceptance, or love. As one Friend put it, “Being physically in the same space doesn’t have anything to do with our connecting spiritually.” Another Friend points out that from our separate Zoom squares we may be experiencing deep spiritual connection this year particularly because “the intensity of all our needs has been so much greater in 2020”—needs “for community, for acceptance, to give and receive love.”

Although many of us worship from home, from the time that safety protocols have allowed, some Gunpowder Friends each week have signed up to Zoom into worship from our building, sharing videos and photos as a visual anchor for the rest of us. Still, one Friend drew a parallel between our country Meetinghouse and George Fox’s characterization of church buildings as steeple houses. Fox and other early Friends asserted that encountering God did not depend on meeting in a steeple house, and so our Friend observed, “The pandemic has taught us that [encountering God or Spirit] is not about the steeple house, but it is about the community.”

In this same vein, another friend noted, “Community and Spirit overlap in a great way in our Meeting.” Whether through sharing insights from ancient and modern contemplative texts, through sending cards to Friends grieving, through journeying with a Friend facing open-heart surgery, in spending time with one another on the phone or outside on a porch, through picking up groceries for a quarantining Friend, or in “pulling on the strings of the universe to come together” as best we can to mourn the sudden death of a beloved Friend, the Spirit prospers in our Meeting as we find ways not only to experience one another but to extend generosity to one another and so to experience the generous gifts of God.

One Friend spoke of “tending the fire” and “rising from the ashes,” two Friends spoke of the ways they had found strength through their connection to a community of Friends who, when tested, dig deep and listen and share from the heart. One Friend who only started attending worship after we went virtual said, “One of the things I notice about this group is there is such a deep regard for each other. You can just feel it [in the] kindness and attentive listening.” We have been fortunate this year not only because we experience this generosity among ourselves but because we have been able to share what we can with the wider Quaker world.

Our younger Gunpowder Friends too have had an opportunity to share their thoughts about “how they feel loved and cared for by the Meeting community.” One Junior Young Friend expressed appreciation for “getting attention from grownups in the Meeting and feeling loved.” An older Young Friend said “we have a very, very accepting community. It is good to know that we will be accepted and loved for who we are no matter who we come to be.” Another spoke of being at Meeting is like being “pelted with pine cones of affection,” explaining a practice of leaving bunches of pine cones on a friend’s porch as a reminder of how much love comes her way. When asked about what they remember learning in First Day School lessons, one Young Friend said, “we talk about being kind” and remembered painting rocks with “kind words.” Even though it’s “one more screen,” Junior Young Friends and Young Friends still like coming to the monthly First Day School gatherings because “our friends are in the picture.”

As we looked to the future during our worship sharing on 10th First Month, some Friends recalled the past, before the pandemic—a New Year’s Day spent singing together, a night of sharing music at the meeting house, and the last Coffee Social gathering we enjoyed together. Zooming in from the Meetinghouse for our worship sharing, one Friend commented: “This little bottle of hand sanitizer has been here since our last coffee hour, which feels like a million years ago.” She went on to say that the bottle is a reminder for her “to be present in each moment.” It’s clear that our efforts to find ways of experiencing God in one another this year have strengthened our community. As future moments come, as the pandemic eases, and as what meetings look like changes, we want to welcome as many as want to join us in the year ahead.

McKim-Gunpowder Friends Meeting Partnership Group

February 22, 2021, Report

In this first meeting of the McKim-Gunpowder Working Group, we focused on learning about the journey and present moment of the McKim Community Association and Gunpowder Friends Meeting. We also spent time talking about our personal journeys with McKim and Gunpowder. Notable were stories of Dwight’s and Garfield’s deep ties to McKim and to one another.

Dwight, Garfield, and Tree described current programmatic emphases at McKim, including an after-school and summer program in STEM, Healing Arts, and Athletics, and a wide reaching track and field program. Expanding programming in the coming year will likely include new athletic programs (in volleyball and archery), a coaches academy to promote McKim’s trauma-informed and family-centered approach to coaching and working with young people, and outreach to new families coming to McKim’s Jonestown neighborhood (specifically women in recovery through the nearby Helping Up Mission). McKim is also widening its network of partners to facilitate the connection of children and families to nature and outdoor learning: new programming is happening with longtime partner Woodberry Crossing in Parkton, Maryland, and a new partnership with Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s Camping/STRIDE Program is opening channels for McKim’s children to attend summer camp. Finally, McKim is focused on the renewal of its two historic buildings in Jonestown (the 1781 Aisquith Street Quaker Meeting House and the 1835 Free School building) and on its transition to a new executive director, Garfield Thompson, as it celebrates its 200th anniversary in 2021.

Amy and Alan described Gunpowder Friends Meeting’s process of discerning the mission, vision, and values that are guiding its forward movement. This spirit-led process included the entire Meeting community. Among the emphases that emerged through this process is a desire to be more actively engaged in the work for racial justice and equity. Given some of our members’ historical and current relationships with the McKim Community Association, we now wish to deepen and widen these relationships and to accompany McKim in its long-established and caring work for children and

families in Baltimore. We wish to share our time, talents, and treasure in ways that will contribute to the work of McKim in ways that are guided by the leadership, staff, and families of McKim. Amy and Alan described the current membership of Gunpowder, including the range of interests and professional work of our members, our physical Meeting House and grounds, and our connections with the wider Quaker community. They also described our foundational Quaker beliefs, values, and practices.

The exchange was very joyful; we had a ready experience of connection and mutuality of interest in exploring how McKim and Gunpowder Friends can work together. Among the early ideas that emerged is a visit by McKim children and families to Gunpowder's Meeting House and grounds for some time out of doors and a picnic in the countryside: Miss tree asked whether Gunpowder is a place where McKim's children can "run around outdoors?" Alan and Amy immediately said "yes" and shared stories of Gunpowder children's enthusiastic play in our burial ground. Dwight, Garfield, and tree look forward to welcoming Gunpowder Friends to their historic buildings in Jonestown. With these introductions made and intentions shared, we agree to continue our mutual envisioning of how Gunpowder might accompany McKim in its work.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

GUNPOWDER FRIENDS MEETING



**MINISTRY &
COUNSEL**

FROM MINISTRY & COUNSEL:

Calendar Items

Sunday, April 11th: Forum for Listening as we Prepare to Return to In-Person/Hybrid Meetings for Worship as Covid Restrictions Ease

Thursday, April 15th: Spiritual Formation Large Group Poetry Night! (see note below)

Sunday, April 25th: Bible Study on the Book of Job (see note below)

A note from the Ministry and Counsel Committee about Meetings for Worship

Among the charges to the Ministry and Counsel Committee is the care of our Meetings for Worship. We have, during the Covid-19 pandemic, adjusted to Meetings for Worship via Zoom, connected our worship to the Meeting House through volunteer "anchors" each week, and shared responsibility among committee members for the convening and "tech hosting" of each week's worship. We have been blessed as a community with consistently high weekly attendance in Meetings for Worship; geographically distant Friends have been able to participate in worship; those whose health makes even local travel difficult are with us each week; new attenders have joined us seeking a grounded and grounding community. What a blessing it has been to experience this widening community in worship! Friends have often described the Meetings as both gathered and covered, and we have noted the spacious balance between silence and spoken ministry. In March, when we pivoted out of necessity to our technology-mediated worship space, we were not sure how we would adapt. Our faithfulness to our practice and to one another, however, yielded such blessings. As we move into and through 2021, Ministry and Counsel will be seeking input from Friends about how to maintain the many positive qualities of our current Meetings for Worship as we anticipate a return to the Meeting House. We anticipate hosting a forum in April to share our experiences and discuss possible paths forward.

Gunpowder Friends Bible Study is focusing on the Book of Job from the Hebrew Bible for our winter session. Join us as we explore the wisdom of this ancient story of suffering and faithfulness and consider what it reveals to us in our own times. We have focused, to date, on the first two chapters. There is no need to read ahead: each time we meet, we read aloud the passage for consideration and spend time in quiet personal

reflection before sharing our responses. We meet the fourth Sunday of every month via Zoom from 9:00 - 10:00 a.m.

Spiritual Formation Large Group Poetry Night: Please join the Gunpowder Spiritual Formation Group for our annual celebration of Poetry Month. In anticipation of our April gathering, Friends in Spiritual Formation read poetry that we love or that stretches us in some way. We come to the third Thursday Spiritual Formation gathering (this year again via Zoom) to read aloud poems with which we have connected in some way. The sharing is always rich and revelatory. We welcome any and all Gunpowder Friends to join in the evening. Please contact Amy Schmaljohn (amy@schmaljohn.com) or Rebecca Richards (rebecca.richards4912@gmail.com) if you'd like to receive the link to the April 15th gathering.

Anchoring Worship at the Meeting House: If Friends would like to anchor Meeting for Worship at the meetinghouse during April and the succeeding months, please email Heather Sowers at heatherjo715@gmail.com.

NEWS FROM FIRST DAY SCHOOL

Friends will be glad to know that our young Friends, and some "oldsters" too, continue to meet every First First Day during the Coffee Social (11:30 to 12:30).

We encourage adult Friends to drop into the FDS "room" for a visit and let our Kids say "Hi!" Just check-in with the "Tech host" during coffee social who can usher you into the FDS space.

We are also planning an early April gathering at the Schmaljohns' meadow featuring lots of fresh air, a campfire and possibly an Easter egg hunt. Details will be sent to FDS families.

While this Spring gathering is somewhat limited (to continue virus precautions), we are looking toward a summer gathering when good weather and more vaccinations in arms (!) may allow a larger gathering.

The First Day School Working Group (under the care of Ministry and Counsel)



RICHARD ROHR:

The Richard Rohr discussion group meets 4th First days at 11:30am through May. No advance preparation is required. We will read a short passage aloud and then settle into a worshipful discussion. A link to the session will be sent closer to the date.

FROM CARE AND OVERSIGHT:

Virtual Coffee Hour, Sundays 4/4 and 5/2/21, At Rise of Meeting:

Care and Oversight Committee invites you to stay online at the rise of Meeting on 4/4 and 5/2/21 for some casual social time using the breakout room feature of Zoom (BYO coffee, tea and/or snack)

Meeting Directory: In mid-December Care and Oversight Committee internally republished our updated Meeting directory. It is available only by email attachment or in a print copy. If you need a copy, either emailed or printed, email louannesmith2@gmail.com with your request. Please use this resource to reach out to Friends!

Reminder: C&O is available to coordinate community support for those in need. Please let us know if you have needs the Meeting can help with!

GUNPOWDER FRIENDSHIP NIGHTS, WEDNESDAYS, 7-8PM, VIA ZOOM:

Looking for a lighthearted way to stay connected with Gunpowder Friends during this time of physical distancing? **Join us each Wednesday evening from 7-8 via Zoom.** You can drop in for a few minutes or stay the hour. The Clerk will send out a link each week.

NOTICE FROM BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING

Friends,

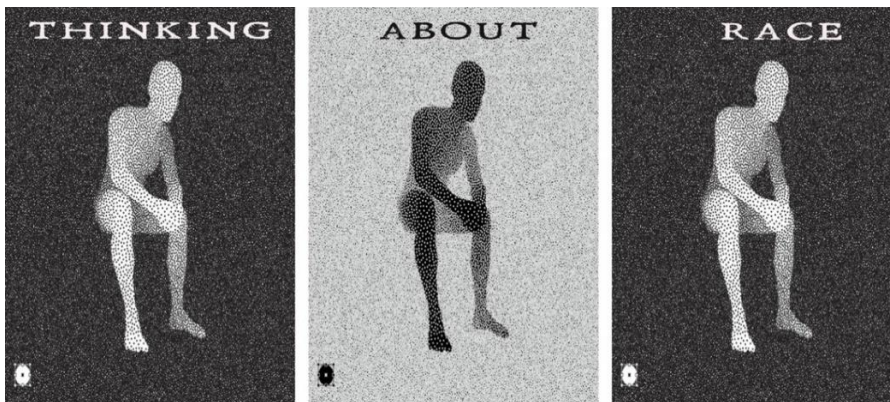
I know it is still March, but it is time to start thinking about the spring edition of the *Interchange*. The submission deadline is the close of business on Monday April 5. The current plan is to have the electronic version, complete with full information about Annual Session 2021, transmitted within 2 weeks of then. However, as with last year, it is possible that the timing will be delayed as the Program Committee adjusts plans due to the ongoing pandemic.

The theme for Annual Session 2021 is *Seeking Wholeness: Knowing Our Shadow and Our Light*. We are suggesting that you focus reports and articles on the theme.

As always, we encourage brevity in all submissions. If needed, we will edit as lightly as possible for length. Images should be sent as separate attachments in the highest resolution available. It is fine to paste a copy into the text if you feel strongly about the relative positioning, but we can't promise to be able to perfectly accommodate the formatting.

Thank you all!

Wayne W. Finegar II Acting General Secretary
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Thinking About Race (April 2021) – from “me and white supremacy” [sic]

“If your understanding of racism and white supremacy does not include a historical and modern-day contextual understanding of colonization, oppression, discrimination, neglect, and marginalization at the systemic level and not just the institutional level, then you are going to struggle when it comes to conversations about race. You will assume that what is being criticized is your skin color and your individual goodness as a person rather than your complicity in a system of oppression that is designed to benefit you at the expense of BIPOC in ways that you are not even aware of. This lack of understanding leads to white fragility, either by lashing out to defend your individual sense of

goodness or feeling that you as an individual are being shamed for being who you are, thus leaving the conversation. This is a dangerous impediment to antiracism.”

Note: If the acronym BIPOC is new to you, it means Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.

From *me and white supremacy – Combat Racism, Change the World, and Become a Good Ancestor*, by Layla F. Saad (2020), pp. 41-42.

WORSHIPFUL CONVERSATIONS ON RACE AND JUSTICE:

Final gathering, **Thursday, April 1, 7:00pm**

These conversations, offered under the care of the Ministry and Counsel committee, are intended to offer a space for sharing concerns and experiences on the subject of race and racial justice. This will be our eighth and last session as we wrap up our Conversations on Race and Justice series. Please join us for this final step of the journey.

Queries:

How does my faith and practice as a Quaker inform my involvement in efforts for racial justice?

What is one simple thing I would like to see Gunpowder Friends Meeting do next in its journey to become a more open, loving, and inclusive faith community?

GETTING THE LINK: If you have participated previously, you will receive the zoom link. If you have not, but want to join in, please email Anita Langford at amlangfo@verizon.net.

The Planning Committee: Anita Langford, Helen Berkeley, Bob Fetter, Rebecca Richards

The Web Edition of the Newsletter does not include minutes from Gunpowder’s Meeting for Business. Personal Information has been redacted. The full newsletter, complete with minutes, is available at the Meetinghouse – attenders may also request the electronic or print edition.

Please feel free to inquire with Gunpowder’s Clerk at gunpowderclerk@gmail.com.