

Gunpowder Friends Meeting Spiritual State of the Meeting Report for 2022

Gunpowder Friends gathered in worship sharing centered around the queries provided by Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Ministry and Pastoral Care Committee. Thirty-one Friends joined in worship sharing at rise of meeting on January 15, 2023. Young Friends and their families, as well as our members who live at Broadmead Lifecare Community were invited to respond via a Zoom gathering. Three members who live at Broadmead and one family with Young Friends shared their discernment.

The past year has been filled with many diverse experiences, feelings, accomplishments, and continuing challenges. We have come together in celebration of new memberships. One new member shared that "the mutual respect and kindness and openness" found at Gunpowder informed her decision to seek membership. Another new member is a Young Adult Friend who grew up in our meeting. A longtime member shared, "When I think about coming here, I feel joy." To the great joy of many, we have led one another in song, harmony, and in monthly drumming circles. Our Quiet Saturday practice continues. We are uplifted by Gunpowder Friends' care for one another in the sending of cards, making calls, providing meals, and more. Spiritual Formation program brings us together in large group, small groups, and, this year for the first time, in a spiritual friendship format of duos. These times together and the meals we share during the large group gatherings help strengthen the bonds between individuals and within our community. Outdoor intergenerational gatherings have brought us great joy and an opportunity to build connections with the young members of our community. One Young Friend shared, "It would feel better if there were more people my age." We agree.

Our worship time together remains deep and centered. We are nonetheless challenged by ongoing concerns around our worship format. After a series of worship sharing forums and threshing sessions, we have not yet reached sense of the meeting as to how to proceed. Early in the pandemic, when our only mode of worship was via Zoom, we shared worship with all Friends who wished to attend: those who were ill, those too far away to otherwise be able to attend our meeting, those searching afar for a spiritual home. As we returned to our meeting house to worship, we faced a dilemma which has sparked a conversation within the Meeting concerning what it means to worship together and whether physical presence is essential for meaningful communal worship. We continue to hold all of these experiences and concerns in the Light and in Love, trusting that Spirit will open way. At the close of 2022, we are worshipping on First Days at 8:30 a.m. in-person only and at 10:00 a.m. with a technology bridge through which Friends can join worship from beyond the Meeting House (Zoom link with a projector and camera/speaker system) with some friends worshipping on the porch; on Tuesday evenings at 6:30 we host an in-person worship hour at the meeting house. A Friend shared, "if we really keep listening to one another, we will unite on this issue as we have on so many others ... I know that all of us will rise to any challenge."

Our Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business are very well attended. Friends engage openly and freely. One friend named this as a sign of our strength; "That willingness to show up for one another to do the work is what reveals our unity." Another lifted up times during Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business when, as we dealt with challenging issues, "tensions and confusions and passions" rose which may have gotten in the way of

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“welcoming God.” A Friend lifted up the “sacred nature of the role ... for the clerk and for those being clerked. We are called to settle deeply into worship, never more so than when an issue becomes contentious.”

Several years ago, the meeting began a visioning process to help us discern how to best use our financial resources. Through a series of deeply spiritual workshops that initial process led to the creation of our Mission, Vision, and Values Statement. Two subsequent workshops helped us lift up the work that we, as a meeting discerned, to engage in. This year, we took yet another significant step by engaging in a series of three Spirit-led weekend workshops returning our focus to money and how we use it. This year’s workshops culminated with the approval of a set of Key Financial Principals which will be used as an adjunct to our Mission, Vision, and Values Statement. These two documents guide our work both at home and in the world. Many Friends attended each of these processes, which provided opportunities for fellowship coupled with work to build and uplift our community.

Gunpowder Friends are reaching out into the world. COVID-19 protocols brought a pause to our nascent partnership with the McKim Free School and the Baltimore Wisdom project through the McKim-Gunpowder Partnership Working Group. McKim is a community and youth program in East Baltimore with deep and historical Quaker connections. We are grateful and excited as we renew our partnership and find opportunities for overnight campouts with the youth, serving as greeters at McKim’s Athletic Day, sharing with a monthly gathering of mothers and grandmothers, and, hopefully, more! Another project has seen a Friend coordinating refugee resettlement as part of the International Rescue Committee’s resettlement program. The meeting has enthusiastically supported the settlement of twelve families with strong backs and funding. Another Friend has carried her peacemaking work in the U.S. and in the country of Georgia into the meeting’s care and warm embrace. Yet another group of Friends continue to guide the meeting in addressing racism as a spiritual concern. Our monthly newsletter prints “Thoughts on Race” from Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s Working Group on Racism, and we have an annual forum with readings and deep discussion. Friends lift up that they hope to “provide more opportunities for reflection on this topic, particularly as a spiritual concern. A Friend reflected that “there exists a perspective that [racism] is the greatest challenge of our times, but . . . the fuller challenge is to love our neighbors.”

Many Friends engaged with the question of a sign for the front of our Meeting House. We noticed the tone of responses differed between last year’s tee-shirt question and this year’s sign question. Our tee shirts were very uplifting! Many of our proposed signs are as well. Several offered the theme of welcome: “You are Welcome Here,” “Welcome,” “Gunpowder Friends Community—a Welcoming Community.” Others make clear the challenges that we face. One would read, in part, “All Welcome. We’re experimenting with your comfort and safety. Hard Hats, ear protection required, masks optional.” Another spoke of a “willingness to commit to humility and vulnerability ... an ability to say I don’t know, I was wrong, I’m sorry, I need help.” The vulnerability of these messages to our community and the outside world touched and awakened our hearts and minds.