



Welcome to the **September Web Edition** of the Gunpowder Newsletter. Some information has been redacted. To receive the full monthly Newsletter please feel free to inquire with Gunpowder's Clerk at gunpowderclerk@gmail.com.

Members and attenders may access newsletters and monthly minutes in the log-in area of the website.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Clerk's Announcement:

If you would like an email or a notice to go out to members and attenders of the Meeting, please send your request to GunpowderClerk@gmail.com.

Please join our SECOND SUNDAY SINGS!!!

Each Second Sunday, 9:00 to 9:45am we gather to lift our voices in song; carrying messages of love and hope, and peace into the universe. Ruth Fitz's Spirit led leadership carries us beyond ourselves in ways that we hadn't anticipated into beloved community as she teaches, uplifts, encourages, enlivens and enlightens. Whether you consider yourself a singer, or not, doesn't matter! Spirit is in the room! Clearly a time not to be missed! Mark your calendar for every Second Sunday from 9:00am to 9:45am.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION PROGRAM

Always We Begin Again -- an invitation from Gunpowder's Spiritual Formation Coordinators

As the title of the beloved spiritual classic reminds us, the spiritual life offers many new beginnings. And so, **we begin again**. The first gathering of our Meeting's Spiritual Formation Program will be on Thursday, 9/19, 6:30 at the Meeting House. At this meeting we will share a dinner hosted by the coordinators and consider how we'll organize ourselves for the year ahead.

We believe the time is right for a reset of our Meeting's program so beloved by many Friends. Throughout the pandemic, we adapted our ways of being together to keep the program flowing. As the pandemic restrictions eased, we maintained some of these beneficial changes; now we hope to return to the foundational experiences of the Spiritual Formation Program, which supports our personal spiritual deepening in, with, and for community. We'll likely encourage a return to reading some of the spiritual and Quaker "classics" that have proven helpful and a reinvigoration of the small group experience that has deepened our connections with one another over the past twenty years.

For many of us this is the program that first attracted and settled us into the fiber of the Gunpowder community. Because we share table fellowship, rich spiritual exploration and receptive listening to each other's stories, we are woven more deeply into our spirit-filled community.

If you are new to the community or to the idea of Spiritual Formation -- please come, even just to ask your questions. If you are one of the numerous Friends who have journeyed in the program for years -- please come and discover how both old and new practices will help us spread the joy!

Amy Schmaljohn and Rebecca Richards

McKIM-GUNPOWDER PARTNERSHIP

Thanks to all of the Friends who made our two days with McKim's summer campers such a joyful success! From a visit to Dave Matthews' neighboring farm (and the experience of bottle feeding lambs!) to singing in rounds and harmonies, to making joyful rhythms with Gunpowder's drumming circle, to learning how animals move in and perceive the world, the youth enjoyed two full days of fun with Gunpowder Friends. Opening playful circle games drew out the silliness in all of us, meals served family style offered time for table fellowship, and quiet time in the worship room opened campers to some of the practices and stories of Quakerism. This was the third year of McKim summer camp at Gunpowder, and it is lovely to see youth who have been here one or more years settle in so quickly and feel at home among us. The McKim leadership team and staff affirm that the days at Gunpowder are among the highlights of their six week summer camp. They'll be back with us in 2025.

Summer camp is but one manifestation of the connection we have created with our friends at McKim. When our partnership began in 2021, we were renewing a longstanding relationship between our two communities. Quakers—namely John McKim, who worshipped in what we now know as the Aisquith Street (or Old Town) Meeting House in Baltimore's Jonestown neighborhood—founded McKim's free school in 1821. In that same year, Gunpowder Friends built our "new" Meeting House on Priceville Road, but even as we moved north, we sustained deep connections with that Baltimore Quaker Meeting (this is a rich history worth hearing about if you're interested). Over the years, many Gunpowder Friends worked and volunteered at McKim. So what we experience today isn't new—it's woven into the Meeting's history and life over many generations.

Several other activities have become mainstays of our renewed partnership. We have volunteered for three successive years at the spring McKim Community Games, at which nearly 1,000 youth from across Baltimore and Maryland compete in track and field events. This is always a feel-good day, full of affirmation of what is possible when youth are nurtured by parents, coaches, teammates, and cheering crowds. We have also hosted a winter retreat for McKim's youth leaders the past two years. This affords time for more one-on-one conversations with the teens leading McKim's athletic teams and after-school programs. Some Friends also connect with McKim's parents and grandparents in sharing and peacemaking circles.

Our partners in all of this work are Coach Garfield Thompson, Executive Director of the McKim Community Association and Miss tree turtle, Executive Director of the Baltimore Wisdom Project. Miss tree's name honors her ordination as a Buddhist Upāsikā. Both are extraordinary educators from whom we learn so much.

This partnership is grounded in relationships—with McKim's leaders and staff and youth. Together, we discover ways we can deepen our connections and bear witness to the values and beliefs that we share. Longtime McKim Executive Director Dwight Warren sums up McKim's values as "structure, discipline, love, and respect." The peacemaking work of McKim emerges through living these values. Our mission and vision (affirmed in December of 2019) calls us to sustain and bear witness to our faith and its practice in an ever-evolving world, and to create a more just, peaceful world.

If you'd like to get involved, consider attending our monthly partnership meetings that happen the last Thursday of each month from 8-9 p.m. via Zoom. Email Amy Schmaljohn for the link and agenda each month: amy@schmaljohn.com.

QUAKER QUESTIONS IN A HAT -- Forum, September 15

Our focus for this group exploration of Quaker practice will be on Meeting for Business and the role of Clerk. Please look for the **HAT** on the library table and add your question. Together we will seek understanding.

Clerk's Musings

A word about language: I often express myself in "God" language; It is the language that I grew up hearing and using and so it feels comfortable to me. However – my own belief is much, much broader. It encompasses Holy One, Creator, Spirit, All That Is, That which is Unknowable and Unnamable, without gender, and so much more. I invite you to interpret the language I use in whatever way works best for you.

"Die before you die. There is no chance after." C. S. Lewis

"The secret to life is to "die before you die" – and find that there is no death." Eckhart Tolle

"Wash yourself of yourself. Be melting snow." Rumi

Many years ago I asked a friend who was a Roman Catholic Sister of St. Joseph named Anne, if she would be willing to work with me as my Spiritual Director. Anne was trained and experienced in this work. I was delighted when she agreed to work with me. Even though we were friends, this relationship, and Anne's approach to it, was quite different. Early on in our first meeting she asked me if I had any goals. What popped out of me, almost immediately, was a surprise to us both. I said that my goal was to find unity with God, and then I took a very deep breath as tears streamed down my face. That was more than twenty years ago.

Over the years since then there have been times when I have been clear that I was being well used by Spirit: When I brought reports to New York Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions around the work of Peacemaking and around Fiscal Equality I would come to realize that the words that I was speaking were no longer coming from my head, but from my heart; that they were not my words and I would know that it was Spirit speaking through me. When I bring a message in Meeting for Worship that comes through me and is not of me. When I do hands on healing work and am faithful to the energy that passes through me and to the Leadings of the Spirit. All of these are tastes of unity with Creator that make me hungrier than ever to live in that Presence full time! It is that hunger that drew me to Participating in God's Power.

So far, the School of the Spirit's Participating in God's Power program has been a deep, cleansing breath. It invites us to journey into the very center of our beings to engage in soul wrenching, Spirit awakening and uplifting work that we, a cohort of fourteen, plus our teachers, step into together. It is lots of reading that helps to open way as we learn to listen to each other and to the promptings of Spirit in our own and each other's lives. It is difficult, challenging work that leaves us with tears of joy, and sorrow, and sometimes fear. But today, it feels most important to lift up that we are learning, and relearning, that the path to Spirit is strewn with boulders of our own making. Boulders of pain and misunderstandings and grief that have been left unforgiven, unhealed, unheeded, that separate us from that place where Spirit is indwelling, and from Spirit that abounds outside our beings and in all places. I am now journeying through and among my boulders; coming to embrace them as I learn to make peace with each one of them. I have begun the conscious journey of dying. I am grateful to you who journey with me.

In Peace,
Greta



Thinking About Race (September 2024) – Rhiannon Giddens speaks about privilege

Rhiannon Giddens, singer, songwriter, opera composer, Oberlin College Alumna (2000), gave the commencement address at Oberlin in June. Here is an excerpt plus link to full text:

You, me, all of us here right now -- have privileges that have allowed us to be in this space, in this time. In general, privilege is nothing to be ashamed of -- but neither is it something to be proud of. It just IS. The curious and particular confluence of events that have led us to be sitting in that chair, right now, at this moment, is a consequence of circumstances beyond our control that in large part shape why and who we are. And this absolutely doesn't take away from the hard work you have done, the obstacles you have overcome, or the battles you have won. We all have varying degrees of privilege, some of us more than others, some of us different kinds. The way society might look and react to you because of the colour of your skin. The money you may have unthinking access to. The philosophical tenets you were exposed to that might help you think more critically. Privilege is a series of advantages we are simply born with and acquire as we age -- and one privilege often leads to another, like compound interest. Privileges don't always go hand in hand -- you can be poor in money and rich in emotional support; deficient in societal advantage yet exposed to incredible intellectual stimulation; and we can certainly lose them, so it pays to always be aware of the world that you are in and how it benefits you. Privilege doesn't make us more worthy, or deserving. It simply makes us lucky. When you have financial privilege, that broken down car is simply a nuisance; when you don't, it can completely wreck everything and change the trajectory of your life. It's absolutely not shameful to have privilege but it is shameful not to share it as much as you can, and to be aware that you don't just make good choices. You HAVE good choices. As you go out into the big world, and meet the people who will become the cast of your life - judge not. For you do not know the choices those people have been given.

https://www.oberlin.edu/sites/default/files/content/special-events/commencement/2024/rhiannon_speech_final-accessible.pdf

This column is prepared by the BYM Working Group on Racism (WGR) and sent to the designated liaison at each local Meeting. The BYM WGR meets most months on the first Saturday, 10:00 am to 12 noon, currently via Zoom. If you would like to attend, contact the clerk at david.etheridge@verizon.net.