

Interim Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Assessing Racial and Generational Inclusion 4 June 2017

At the Meeting for Worship with a Concern for Business in April 2017, the co-clerks appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on Assessing Racial and Generational Inclusion. The Ad Hoc Committee was charged – among other things -- with helping Bethesda Friends Meeting discern its way toward a response to Baltimore Yearly Meeting's request for age and racial/ethnic demographic data, and to report back to the Meeting in June.

After considering the goals behind BYM's request and a variety of possible responses (and non-responses) to BYM's request, the Ad Hoc Committee has come to unity and proposes that Bethesda Friends Meeting invite and encourage all who come to Meeting for Worship over a period of weeks from mid-June through September to respond anonymously as they are led to two questions, worded on a postcard as follows:

1. We understand that race is a social construct and that all human beings share common ancestors; nevertheless, how would you describe your racial and/or ethnic identify?
2. Are you between the ages of 18 and 35 inclusive? Please circle one. Yes No

In both cases, respondents will have the opportunity to declare explicitly that they choose not to answer the question. The Ad Hoc Committee invites people to comment on this initiative, and those comments will be synthesized and reported to BYM as part of this Meeting's response. The Ad Hoc Committee will also draft proposed language for the Head of Meeting to read to alert people to the cards and to encourage them to participate.

In seasoning this proposal, the Ad Hoc Committee drew on the work of some of the Meeting's standing committees which had considered BYM's request, as well as the leadings of individuals within our community, including some who have worked closely with Baltimore Yearly Meeting on issues of diversity and leadership. The Ad Hoc Committee considered various objections to the request and some responses from other monthly Meetings. The Ad Hoc Committee was unified on various principles, including: (1) responding to BYM's request was part of a considerably broader effort to diversify our Meeting and the spiritual journeys of those within it; (2) the purpose of BYM's request – establishing a baseline from which progress might be discerned – was rightly ordered, even though the questions might be seen as separating out our common humanity at least temporarily; (3) seeking the data voluntarily from those who actually attend Meeting over a number of weeks was the best methodology among many imperfect alternatives, offering a reasonably representative sampling of those in attendance without undertaking a complete and necessarily intrusive survey of everyone in the BFM directory.

If the Meeting for Business approves this proposal, the work of the Ad Hoc Committee will continue and intensify, as it shifts from the issue of responding to BYM's request for data to the issue of identifying the obstacles to our becoming the kind of diverse community we wish to be.

Ron Akins, Lauren Brownlee, Jane Coe, Peirce Hammond, Susan Kaul (ex officio), David McClelland, Ralph Steinhardt (ex officio), David Whitford