

*Bethesda Friends Meeting Newsletter for April 2020*

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**Query for April: Integrity**

How do we seek truth by which to live? How do we know it when we find it? In what ways does my life speak of my beliefs and values? In what ways is my life out of harmony with the truth as I know it? Why?

**April 2020 Calendar**

As we all know, these are unusual times in which the future is murkier than usual. We do know that the Meeting House is unavailable until at least April 13 and perhaps beyond that. In the meantime, each of us can hold Meeting for Worship on our own at 11:00 a.m. on First Days. All events listed below are tentative and may be cancelled.

5	Sun	7:30 p.m.	Experiment with Light (virtual)
13	Mon	8:30 p.m.	Deadline for the May Newsletter
14 to 20	(POSTPONED) Silent Auction Items Early: Buy It Now Sale		
19	Sun	9:00 a.m.	Committee Day: Pastoral Care (virtual)
		9:15 a.m.	Ministry & Worship (virtual)
		9:30 a.m.	Com. Day: Stewardship & F. and Outreach & C. (Virtual)
		12:30 p.m.	Coordinating Gathering
		12:30 p.m.	Spring Fling Coordination Meeting
		7:30 p.m.	Experiment with Light (Virtual)
26	Sun	POSTPONED	
		12:30 p.m.	Spring Fling for Ramallah: Food, Fun, & Contribution

**Details are available on our web site: [www.bethesdafriends.org](http://www.bethesdafriends.org)**

**Notes from Our Clerks**

(As of Friday, March 13, 2020) After much discernment by the co-clerks of the Meeting working with the ad hoc COVID-19 Advisory group and following the lead of Sidwell Friends

School, we are closing down our Meeting for Worship and all activities that usually take place in the Meeting House beginning now and lasting at least through April 13, painful though this change will be for us all.

The ad hoc Advisory group and co-clerks are in unity that the over-riding concern for our Meeting is the safety of the individuals who comprise our BFM community, especially our older ones. But another theme also emerged during our discernment process: our not gathering together means we are looking out not only for our own BFM community but also for the larger community, by mitigating the risk of transmission of the virus. We ask that we hold each other in the Light as we make a transition to other ways of carrying out our worship, fellowship, and Meeting business.

Below are several basic points that we wish to communicate now:

- Sidwell Friends School announced that the Meeting House and the rest of the campus would be closed beginning Saturday, March 14, and will not reopen any earlier than Monday April 13. The school plans to make a decision in early April about whether to extend the campus closure beyond that date. The duration of the closure of the Meeting House is tied to the school's decisions, and we know that the school is putting a lot of thought into these decisions that impact us all. During this period of closure that will cover the next five First Days, there will be no Meeting for Worship, First Day School, childcare, programs, committee meetings, or other activities at the Meeting House.

- We are mindful that the most important mission of our Meeting is the spiritual support of the members of our community. We are asking Ministry & Worship to take the lead in discerning how we can create ways to continue worshipping together. (See below.)

- We realize that the closure of the Meeting House and the social isolation caused by fear of this virus are challenging. We have asked Pastoral Care to develop recommendations that encourage and allow us to reach out to one another. (See below.)

- We will be working to ensure that the business of the Meeting can still go forward.

Committee clerks will decide how best to conduct their meetings. Some of the agenda items usually covered in Meeting for Business will be carried out electronically. We are exploring the possibility of electronic communication with video via Zoom ([www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)) We plan to appoint a Zoom Points Person to set up an Executive Zoom account for the Meeting, help committee members learn how to use it, and schedule meetings for them.

More detailed information on these matters will be forthcoming, and we will use the weekly bulletin and services exchange as the main vehicles of Meeting-wide communication.

Finally, with the unfolding pandemic around the world, we are facing unprecedented challenges, both practical and spiritual. It is very important that we remember that we are facing these challenges together, even in the face of "social distancing." Together we will keep our Meeting community strong, meaningful, and caring. Together we will support each other, finding creative ways through electronic communication, or simply just calling on the phone. Let us all also hold the whole world in the Light as humanity finds its way through the coming weeks. The Spirit is with us, and the way will open.

## **Ministry & Worship**

As of Saturday, March 14, with Sidwell Friends School having closed both campuses, we are unable to meet together for Meeting for Worship at the Meeting House. This situation prompts us to be creative about maintaining community, contact, and our nurturing practice of worship.

The Ministry & Worship Committee is considering a variety of options for upcoming weeks. One possibility is for those who wish to worship to settle in silence in their own homes at 11:00 a.m. At the conclusion, if you have a joy or sorrow to share, please send a message via the BFM list serve. If you are not already part of the BFM list serve, there are two options:

1. If you have a gmail account (If you don't, go to 2. below):

- a. Go to: <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!forum/bfm-listserve>

- b. You'll see the message: Bethesda Friends Meeting List Serve BFM-listserve email list. You must be signed in as a member of this group to view and participate in it. Sign in to view this group.
  - c. Click on the "sign in" link. Follow the directions.
  - d. After you've joined a group, you get a confirmation email.
  - e. The group owner needs to approve your application before you can participate in that group.
2. If you do not have a gmail account:
- a. Send an email to: Marion H. (see Directory) asking to join the BFM List serve. Marion will add you to the group.

## **Pastoral Care**

Each of us is feeling the effects of the Coronavirus and the mitigation efforts of federal, state and local governments, but as a Friends Meeting, in this time of crisis, we have much to give and receive from each other and the Meeting as a whole.

While we have had to cancel Meeting for Worship at our Meeting House, we are making every effort to nurture that of God in each of us through phone calls and outreach. Our Pastoral Care Committee members are already reaching out by phone to each member of our community, offering practical and spiritual support.

If you need assistance with food, transportation, or financial assistance, or social connection, your personal Friendly Ear may be able to help, and you are always welcome to call them. Of course, your personal Friendly Ear doesn't have all the answers, but he/she does work with the entire Pastoral Care Committee and does have access to a large collection of resource contacts.

Groceries: If you can't get out, your personal Friendly Ear may be able to identify meeting participants in your neighborhood who could pick up items you need when they go grocery shopping. In addition, online delivery services are widely available at several stores in our area, including Giant (peapod.com), Whole Foods (wholefoodsmarket.com or amazon.com), Safeway (safeway.com) and Hungry Harvest (hungryharvest.net, known for its fresh produce and its mission of stopping food waste), among others. Most services charge delivery fees and request tips for drivers, so costs are higher than for purchases made in the store. Let your personal Friendly Ear know if you would like help in signing up for a delivery service. If, on the other hand, you are on the way to the grocery store, it can be very helpful to call a nearby friend or neighbor to offer to pick something up for them.

Financial Assistance: BFM also has some financial assistance available for those in need. You can get details from your personal Friendly Ear.

Staying in Touch: "Social distancing," which is critical to stop the spread of the Coronavirus, gives us opportunities to reach out to each other. Call family or friends, or call your personal Friendly Ear, or another member of the BFM community. That phone call can make all the difference. Social distancing does not mean social isolation.

Transportation: If you can't drive and need a ride (for example to a grocery store, a medical appointment, etc.), call your personal Friendly Ear. He/she will work on finding a volunteer to drive you.

Legal Aid: Maryland courts are closed for two weeks, except for emergencies such as criminal proceedings, civil actions to prevent abuse and neglect. Landlord-tenant matters, such as failure to pay rent and evictions are postponed, as are collections actions on credit cards. Federal courts will also delay non-emergency proceedings. DC Courts planned to announce their actions on coronavirus on March 16. Virginia state courts planned to make an announcement on March 15.

Stay in touch! We are a community and we hold each other in the Light. This is a trying time for each of us, but we are not alone. We will thrive as we help ourselves and each other.

## **Personal Notes**

## **Pandemic**

What if you thought of it  
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—  
the most sacred of times?  
Cease from travel.  
Cease from buying and selling.  
Give up, just for now,  
on trying to make the world  
different than it is.  
Sing. Pray. Touch only those  
to whom you commit your life.  
Center down.

And when your body has become still,  
reach out with your heart.  
Know that we are connected  
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.  
(You could hardly deny it now.)  
Know that our lives  
are in one another's hands.  
(Surely, that has come clear.)  
Do not reach out your hands.  
Reach out your heart.  
Reach out your words.  
Reach out all the tendrils  
of compassion that move, invisibly,  
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love--  
for better or for worse,  
in sickness and in health,  
so long as we all shall live.

--Lynn Ungar 3/11/20

## **I Worried**

I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers  
flow in the right direction, will the earth turn  
as it was taught, and if not how shall  
I correct it?

Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven,  
can I do better?

Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows  
can do it and I am, well,  
hopeless.

Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it,  
am I going to get rheumatism,

lockjaw, dementia?

Finally I saw that worrying had come to nothing.  
And gave it up. And took my old body  
and went out into the morning,  
and sang.”

--Mary Oliver in *Devotions*

### **Social Concerns Box**

The Social Concerns Box for April is for scholarships to the Ramallah Friends School in the West Bank (Palestine). RFS, founded by American Quakers in 1869, is a co-ed K through 12 school that provides a first-class, peace-oriented education to children of all faiths. Most of the money for two scholarships will be raised at Spring Fling on April 26 (see details below) or from contributions to the Social Concerns Box. This is an opportunity for us to help build peace in the Middle East. For those unable to get to the Social Concerns Box, please send a check to Bethesda Friends Meeting. (See the directory for the correct address.)

Contributions in February for TASSC (Torture Abolition and Survivors' Support Coalition) came to \$163.51.

### **Events**

(Please check with the organizers to see if these events are still happening.)

#### **5th/19th: Experiment With Light Sessions**

How do we quiet our brains enough to hear the still, small voice within us? How might we deepen our experience of meeting for worship? Experiment With Light is a meditative and centering practice based upon Rex Ambler's book *Light to Live By*, which describes early Quaker meditative habits and translates them into a highly accessible process of clearness and understanding.

There will be two sessions in April, from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. on Sunday evenings. These will be done with each of us in our own homes and connecting by e-mail at the end of the session.

#### **19th: Coordinating Gathering**

Representatives of most BFM committees meet during the week before Meeting for Business to discuss the upcoming agenda. These meetings are open to all who wish to attend. There will be one at 12:30 p.m. probably via Zoom.

### **Into the Future**

#### **May 15th to 17th: BYM Spiritual Formation Retreat**

The Spiritual Formation Working Group welcomes you to our Spring retreat, which will be held at the beautiful Claggett Center in Adamstown MD. We will gather on the theme of prayer as both a practice and a disposition of heart and spirit. We will practice five forms of prayer, as we honor the yearnings of opening to Spirit, receiving blessings and expressing our gratitude. Come refresh and renew your spiritual being, as you share your story, community meals, conversation, and fellowship with seekers throughout the BYM area. The Claggett Center offers us comfortable accommodations, lovely mountain views, and walking trails through fields and farmland. To register, go to: [www.bym-rsf.org/events/spiritform](http://www.bym-rsf.org/events/spiritform)

## **June 5th to 7th: Catoctin Weekend**

We have high hopes of hosting a wonderful community event at the Catoctin Quaker Camp near Thurmont MD the first weekend in June. But the details of what we might be able to do will have to be worked out in light of public health challenges.

## **June 28th to July 4th: Friends General Conference (FGC) Gathering**

The FGC Gathering this year will be at Radford University in Radford VA. The theme is “Way Will Open.” The Gathering is a chance to be together with over 1,200 Friends. There are many opportunities to address spirit, mind, and body. Look up the program for this year at: [www.FGCGathering.org](http://www.FGCGathering.org) You can enjoy lots of activities: singing, dancing, good food, and good conversation. You really ought to go to a Gathering at least once. Early registration for the Gathering opens April 1. There are both half-gathering and part-time attender options for adults. Financial aid is available. Due to a generous donation, there are no program fees for children and high school students and more scholarships for families.

By way of background, Friends General Conference nurtures the spiritual vitality of the Religious Society of Friends by providing programs and services for Friends, meetings, and seekers. The work of FGC can be summarized into three areas of endeavor:

- Help meetings deepen Quaker worship and practice
- Support a loving Quaker community
- Support Quaker outreach

FGC is a volunteer-led association of regional Quaker organizations, primarily in the United States and Canada. Founded in 1900, FGC has grown from a voluntary organization of seven yearly meetings, created to hold a “general conference” every other year, to an association of fourteen yearly meetings, supplemented with regional groups and individual meetings. FGC continues to sponsor an annual Gathering of Friends. FGC seeks to use resources effectively with a concern for simplicity and openness. It is funded through the support of Quaker meetings, individuals, and foundations. FGC is a 501(c)3 organization. For details, see [www.fgcquaker.org](http://www.fgcquaker.org) If you would like assistance with expenses, please contact the Pastoral Care Committee.

## **Committee Notes**

### **Outreach & Communications**

The Outreach and Communications Committee has produced a comprehensive QuakerSpeak Glossary after its members consulted with many others. It’s a living document: anyone who wishes to add new entries or edit existing ones is welcome to suggest changes. You can see it at:

<https://www.bethesdafriends.org/FAQs#vocabulary> and  
<https://www.bethesdafriends.org/resources/Documents/Quaker-Speak-2019.pdf>

Here is an excerpt:

Committee name abbreviations:

M&W:	Ministry & Worship
O&C:	Outreach & Communications
PC:	Pastoral Care
P&SJ:	Peace & Social Justice
S&F:	Stewardship & Finance
RE:	Religious Education (for children), also known as FDS: First Day School

## **Meeting Notes**

### **Thinking About Race**

“I adore silence. However, as a Black woman, I am aware that for Black, Indigenous, and communities of color (among other marginalized groups), silence has been a form of oppression that cuts us off from sharing our voice and agency and more. A reframe for those quiet meetings would require us to explore questions about speech and silence. How do we teach about vocal ministry? What messages about silence and speech do we send to seasoned Friends and newcomers? How might silence inadvertently encourage greater distance among Friends? What is the right balance?  
....

“Even as we gather for meeting for worship and offer Spirit-led vocal ministry, this too is within a broader societal context of structures, systems, and institutions that further oppression and racialization.

“A reframe for Quakers would be to take a deeper exploration of our good intentions. How do our intentions affect others, either intentionally or unintentionally? How might we look deeper at our intentions and align them with our actions? When might our intentions not align with our values? What do we do individually and as a corporate body when this happens? How might our good intentions further support our implicit bias?”

From “How to Be an Inclusive Quaker: The Unwritten Norms of Speech and Silence,” by Valerie Brown, in March 2020 *Friends Journal*, pp. 18- 20.