

Bethesda Friends Meeting Newsletter for October 2020

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Query for October: Personal Spiritual Life: Learning

How can we most effectively foster a spirit of seeking the Light? What helps us to be open to new understanding, support, and guidance? What encourages us to share our spiritual insights with others and to willingly receive from them in turn? How does Meeting nurture our spiritual growth and transformation? What efforts are we making to become better acquainted with the sources of our spiritual heritage and the contributions of other religions and philosophies?

October 2020 Calendar

As we all know, these are challenging times in which the future is murkier than usual. For the time being, the Meeting House remains closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ad hoc COVID-19 Committee will work with the co-clerks during the fall to discern issues and address the possibility of eventual in-person worship. In the meantime, there have been creative responses to continuing Sunday Meeting for Worship at 11:00 a.m., including an opportunity to socialize before and after Meeting for Worship, committee meetings, and other activities via Zoom. We have a stay-at-home mid-week worship on Wednesdays at 8:00 p.m.

1	Thurs	7:00 p.m. Bible Study (via Zoom)
4	Sun	9:00 a.m. Meeting for Business (via Zoom) World Quaker Day
5	Mon	7:00 p.m. A History of Voting Rights (Part I) (via Zoom)
6	Tues	7:00 p.m. A History of Voting Rights (Part II) (via Zoom)
8	Thurs	7:00 p.m. Bible Study (via Zoom)
10	Sat	1:00 p.m. Reparations Workshop (via BYM Zoom) 1:30 p.m. Quaker Book Group (via Zoom)
11	Sun	1:00 p.m. Library Committee (via Zoom) 7:30 p.m. Experiment with Light (via e-mail/phone)

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13 Tues 8:30 p.m. October Newsletter Deadline
15 Thurs 7:00 p.m. Bible Study (via Zoom)
18 Sun 9:00 a.m. Committee Day: Pastoral Care (via Zoom)
9:15 a.m. Committee Day: Ministry & Worship, Stewardship &

F.

12:30 p.m. Virtual Spiritual Coffeehouse (via Zoom)
22 Thurs 7:00 p.m. Bible Study (via Zoom)
24 Sat 1:00 p.m. Reparations Workshop (via BYM Zoom)
25 Sun 9:00 a.m. Committee Day: Peace & Social Justice (via Zoom)
1:00 p.m. Coordinating Gathering (via Zoom)
7:30 p.m. Experiment with Light (via e-mail/phone)
29 Thurs 7:00 p.m. Bible Study (via Zoom)

See also, www.bethesdafriends.org

The Social Concerns Box

The Social Concerns Box for October supports the Interfaith Works housing program, which provides affordable housing and social services to homeless families in Montgomery County as they transition from homelessness to independence. On any given day in Montgomery County, 1,100 people are homeless. Between 2005 and 2015 childhood poverty increased from 4% to almost 10%. BFM has been one of the member organizations for more than 25 years.

In the Social Concerns Box for July and August, we collected \$150 for Jubilee Jobs.

Personal Notes

Fives Ways to Have Courage, Faith, and Hope to Love Across Differences

A focus of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting's pre-Annual Meeting Retreat this year was on five ways to have courage, faith, and hope to love across differences: In this time of multiple pandemics, how can we have the courage, faith, and hope to love across differences?

First, by staying spiritually grounded through daily spiritual practice.

Second, by staying connected to spiritual community.

Third, by making the practice of loving across differences one of our regular spiritual practices.

Fourth, by discerning in community "What is mine to do?"

Fifth, by being part of a community that discerns together "What is ours to do?"

Meeting For Worship: A Poem

After awhile,
after the settling down,

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waiting,
in the deep quiet time.
We are embraced
by the silence
that was there, expecting us,
when we entered.

(by Helen Morgan Brooks, in *Black Fire: African American Quakers on Spirituality and Human Rights*)

Invisible Work

This poem was mentioned in Meeting in September. As we all reel from the enormous difficulties and sorrows we see in our world, we can take some comfort in the enormous generosity of so many in our Meeting who are doing so much toward helping and healing – most of it unsung and unseen in any wider context – and how this may in fact be going on in many, many congregations and communities throughout our country and world. So much of this invisible work, which never makes the news, sustains, heals, and repairs our world.

Invisible Work

Because no one could ever praise me enough,
because I don't mean these poems only
but the unseen
unbelievable effort it takes to live
the life that goes on between them,
I think all the time about invisible work.
About the young mother on Welfare
I interviewed years ago,
who said, "It's hard.
You bring him to the park,
run rings around yourself keeping him safe,
cut hot dogs into bite-sized pieces for dinner,
and there's no one
to say what a good job you're doing,
how you were patient and loving
for the thousandth time even though you had a headache."
And I, who am used to feeling sorry for myself
because I am lonely,
when all the while,
as the Chippewa poem says, I am being carried
by great winds across the sky,
thought of the invisible work that stitches up the world day and night,
the slow, unglamorous work of healing,

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the way worms in the garden
tunnel ceaselessly so the earth can breathe
and bees ransack this world into being,
while owls and poets stalk shadows,
our loneliest labors under the moon.

There are mothers
for everything, and the sea
is a mother too,
whispering and whispering to us
long after we have stopped listening.
I stopped and let myself lean
a moment, against the blue
shoulder of the air. The work
of my heart
is the work of the world's heart.
There is no other art.

~ Alison Luterman ~
(*The Largest Possible Life*)

Religious Education for Young People

Parents joined with representatives from Ministry & Worship, the Religious Education Committee, and First Day School teachers for a Zoom conversation in September and had a wonderfully open and fruitful conversation about how the start of the school year has gone as well as how the past seven months have been overall. We talked about the challenges, the high points, and what has worked to give families solace during this difficult time. There was an incredible amount of support shown for one another as parents shared their quite varied experiences both for figuring out how to balance zoom activities with others, as well as how to bring in a spiritual and emotional balance. A concrete result of this meeting will be a collection of resources for parents by parents of ideas for all sorts of activities that will be located on a google doc so it can continue to grow as we get new ideas.

There will be a First Day School social for families in an October get-together during Meeting for Worship from 11:15 a.m. to noon in a Zoom break-out room. Please check the weekly bulletin for the exact date and directions on how to join. We hope to see you there for the whole time or just long enough to say hello.

Nadine Clare Hoover has written a wonderful resource book for Quaker religious education. It is called *Walking in the World as a Friend: Essential Quaker Practices*. What do we do that makes us Quakers? Follow how essential Quaker practices weave together the individual, Quaker community and Spirit, creating a unique, vital and transformative dynamic in 15 short, free videos, great discussion starters, and with the companion book. Here are brief descriptions and access links to the videos:

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- Three Key Quaker Roles: Minister (nurturing our inward lives); Steward (shaping our outward lives); and Witness (expressing faith and practice in our public lives), with five accompanying videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTkbTsYI4qZ3UbOg1rgoou3fBQ9p3tdFt>

- Experiences and the Experiment of the Spirit: Convincement, Conviction, and the Conversion of Manners. Quakers experience the Living Spirit that speaks to our human condition in easy and hard times, in every person, every moment, everywhere. Quakers experiment with allowing the Spirit to shape and guide our daily lives through our human faculties of love, conscience, and discernment, with three accompanying videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTkbTsYI4qZ1dlwbNQclCHvv7G89J5SPr>.

- Religious Society of Friends: Essential Quaker Structures. The Spirit transforms individuals tested by their community, who test other communities to reveal societal guidance that shapes the lives of individuals, creating a regenerative ecology of practice, with seven accompanying videos:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLTkbTsYI4qZ2KIYJ62JPE04SntlXRUqSg>.

Events

1st/8th/15th/22nd/29th: Bible Study

Bible Study will begin again on Thursday, October 1, at 7:00 p.m., on Zoom with the *Great Courses Series, Understanding the Old Testament*. The first five lectures cover Genesis - the Creation story, Noah and Abraham. There are 24 half hour lectures with an additional half hour discussion following. You do not have to commit to all six months. A group of 8 to 10 of us met from February through July learning about and discussing the New Testament, and we greatly enjoyed the fellowship as much as the lessons. The Zoom link will be in the weekly bulletin.

4th: World Quaker Day

Friends World Committee on Consultation (FWCC) invites you to join Quakers around the world to celebrate the 7th annual World Quaker Day on Sunday, October 4. The theme, "What Does it Mean to be a Quaker today? Living a Faithful Life in a Changing World," draws us into our shared experience of being Quakers. It is a chance to celebrate what is at the core of our Quaker faith at a time when COVID has given us a new lens through which to consider what we want in a changing world – where our faith is strengthened and issues of systemic inequality, climate change, and economic justice, among others, are elevated. We have been given new eyes... and much to consider! This year, with new experiences of gathering online, we are encouraging online worship, and the opportunity to invite another worship group to join you. Sections are offering online shared experiences. As usual, FWCC offers many resources that can be used, shared, and discussed. Please visit its website at: www.worldquakerday.org. FWCC hopes you will share your World Quaker Day experience with FWCC. It can be very simple - a description, a poem, a few photos or screen shot, or even a short video recording. It will be posted online for other

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Friends around the world to see. The vision is for Friends to have access to a montage of activity of all sorts via FWCC's websites and the FWCC World Office Facebook page. Please email any items to faithb@fwcc.world with WQD as the subject or post it on the Facebook page or Tweet FWCC at [#WorldQuakerDay #WQD](https://twitter.com/WorldQuakerDay).

4th: Meeting for Business

On Sunday, October 4, at 9:00 a.m. Bethesda F(f)riends will consider various business items at its Zoom Meeting for Business. How the Spirit will lead us in discernment of issues both large and small is part of the mystery that is the Religious Society of Friends. All who come to Meeting for Worship are welcome and encouraged to participate in our worship. Meeting for Business will include reports from our Treasurer, Peace & Social Justice, and First Day School. Please join us if you can.

4th/11th/18th/25th: Meeting for Worship

Bethesda Friends continue worship together each Sunday, either by entering into silent worship at home, and then joining on the listserv for Joys and Sorrows, or by worshipping with Zoom, where we can see one another. It has been a real joy to see so many people, including out-of-town Friends, and some families with kids, joining us each week. The Zoom link will be opened at 10:45 a.m. to allow friends to socialize a bit before the beginning of worship at 11:00 a.m. After worship and announcements are concluded, Friends are invited to linger for informal conversation for 15 to 20 minutes. Many of us have missed the chance to connect after worship that we used to have with our weekly coffee hour. To fill this gap, Fellowship & Hospitality and Outreach & Communication will host a "chat time" each Sunday before the Zoom meeting is ended. The link will be in the weekly bulletins.

You do not need to have downloaded Zoom to join this meeting. When you click on the link, you will see a box that says, "Open with Zoom," and "Allow." Click on "Allow." Then you will be prompted to "open with computer video;" click on that. Then you will be prompted to "open with computer audio;" click on that. You will then see and hear others and be part of the Meeting.

Joys and Sorrows. For those Bethesda Friends worshipping by Zoom, there will be an opportunity to share joys and sorrows with one another in the Zoom meeting. Bear in mind that other Bethesda Friends are worshipping at home on their own, without connecting to Zoom, and then sharing joys and sorrows on the listserv. You may want to check the listserv after the Zoom meeting is over and see what other Friends have said; you might want to add your own joys and sorrows to the listserv as well.

5th/6th: A White Historian Explores Voting Rights

At the invitation of the Peace & Social Justice Committee, historian Susan Strasser will describe how American voting has historically been restricted on the basis of many things other than race, including gender, class, ethnicity, religion, age, and personal history. But race stands out. Only African Americans have had the right

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to vote granted and repeatedly taken away. Voting has been one aspect of a larger system of racist laws and customs, and the right to vote has been intertwined with the rights to good education, housing, and jobs. And that system has been backed by violence, terror, and intimidation. Using nearly sixty images and maps, *A White Historian Explores Black Voting Rights* surveys this history, with emphasis on two moments of possibility, Reconstruction and the early 1960s, and on recent attacks on the right to vote. Historian Susan Strasser seeks to serve people grappling with contemporary issues of race and racism. This is the third of a series of illustrated talks, *A White Historian Reads Black History*.

The presentation will take place over two nights, Monday, October 5, and Tuesday October 6, at 7:00 p.m. The first night's talk will last approximately 40 minutes. The second night will last about an hour and have time for questions and discussion. You must register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcsdOmuqj8jHNyVXuj-C8Hd-OIHStRfqJl6>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting. For more information, please email forum@bethesdafriends.org
To learn about Susan Strasser, see:

www.susanstrasser.net/a-white-historian-reads-black-history

7th/14th/21st/28th: Mid-Week Worship

Over-zoomed? Join BFM Friends' "low tech" email mid-week worship on Wednesdays from 8:00 to 8:30 p.m. Each of us worships in our homes without video or audio. While some simply join in spirit, those wishing to touch base with the others receive emails at the start and end of worship. At rise of meeting, email participants are invited to worship-share via reply-all with the evening's email group.

10th/24th, and November 14th: Reparations Action Working Group Fall Workshop Series

Mark your calendars for a virtual workshop experience designed to help those of us in Baltimore Yearly Meeting understand and embrace reparations in our community. There will be three workshops hosted on October 10, October 24, and November 14; please also block out time during the first week of October for pre-course self-led materials. All three facilitated workshops will take place from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. Those who register should commit to attending all three workshops. The training sessions are only open for people affiliated with Baltimore Yearly Meeting in some way. The price for workshops is a sliding scale of \$150 to \$300. Please pay at the time of registration. Note that this course is free to all Friends of Color and Black Friends. No one will be turned away for lack of funds. To sign up, see:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdttEsVN-O1fu4-irqIRjNgoPbjucHwPkbps5whoBXh9AyoKg/viewform>

10th: Quaker Book Group

The Quaker Book Group meets monthly via Zoom from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. on the

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second Saturday (October 10) of the month. Newcomers are always welcome (even if you have not read the book!). We read a mix of books by Quakers, books about Quakerism, and books that speak to Quaker values and concerns. The group is invited to share announcements, summaries, and thoughts about the readings through an online mailing list.

11th & 25th: Experiment with Light

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. All are welcome to attend. First-time participants find the process quite easy to follow and, often richly rewarding.

This is an invitation to two such sessions, on Sunday evenings, October 11 and 25, from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. People will listen to the prompts on their own at their own homes. The following link should work to hear the words in audio format:

<https://www.experiment-with-light.org.uk/modindos.mp3>. There will be a phone call or e-mail reminder at about 7:15 p.m. followed by a phone or e-mail check-in at about 8:30 p.m.

18th: Virtual Spiritual Coffeehouse

On Sunday, October 18, at 12:30 p.m., we will continue with the Zoom session and create space for the spirit to speak to the community at a Virtual Spiritual Coffeehouse. During this time, you are encouraged to share writings, poems, artwork, music, photography, and anything else (your own or that of others) that speaks to your spirit. Offerings are encouraged but not required.

25th: 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 on Sunday, October 25, at 1:00 p.m., via Zoom, in preparation for the Meeting for Business on November 1.

Into the Future

November 14th to 17th: FCNL Annual Meeting

The theme of the Friends Committee on National Legislation's annual gathering is Fierce Love and will be presented online. The meeting will take place Saturday, November 14, to Tuesday, November 17, with Quaker Public Policy Institute on November 16 to 17, and the Advocacy Teams summit on November 13. By meeting online, Friends who have been unable to travel to Washington, D.C. in the past will be able to participate. The gathering is just two weeks after one of the most pivotal elections of our lifetimes. FCNL will organize telephone and video lobby visits so that

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participants' actions will have significant impact. Here is the link for registration:
<https://act.fcnl.org/survey/annual-meeting-2020/?source=ampage>

Committee Notes

Peace & Social Justice

If you would like to write emails, postcards, or letters to Members of Congress on an issue of importance to Quakers, the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) recommends that we write to demand that Congress pass the Dream and Promise Act (H.R. 6). In 2019, the House passed H.R.6 to create a path to legal status for many of these young people. Even though this legislation has broad support from members of Congress and 1,200 faith leaders, the Senate has failed to act. FCNL seeks an equitable society supported by policies that recognize the Light of God in each of us, no exceptions. Yet Congress has so far refused to reform the U.S. immigration system, leaving millions of immigrants in fear of family separation, deportation, and detention. Even though they came to this country as children and grew up in our communities, approximately 3 million Dreamers, including individuals with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, have been forced to live in the shadows as the administration, courts, and Congress debate their fate. For details, see:

https://fcnl.quorum.us/campaign/28605/?utm_campaign=contacts&utm_medium=email&utm_source=ak&utm_term=13856.209196.Gxq7ub

Meeting Notes

Thinking About Race

From "Criminal Conditions," by Jan A. Fernandez, ACLU Magazine, Summer 2020, pp. 24-29.

<https://www.aclu.org/aclu-magazine/aclu-magazine-summer-2020>

"The United States has many distinguishing traits, but its most damaging distinction is that it imprisons the most people on Earth: 2.3 million, or nearly 35 percent of the world's incarcerated population. Environmental, judicial, and institutional factors feed this unconscionable bloat, filling jails and prisons with people who can't afford fines or bail while disproportionately punishing Black and Brown communities.

"Driving this national tragedy is an exploitative cash bail system that funnels hundreds of thousands of people into local jails. More than 70 percent of those incarcerated (about half a million people) are pretrial detainees who have not been convicted of any crime, and many are only there because they could not afford bail. It's a profitable, prejudiced machine that targets poor people and people of color, who are jailed at higher rates and charged higher bail amounts.

....

"... Black and Latino men are on average assigned substantively higher amounts than white men for similar crimes, and those who cannot afford to pay land in jail.

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Trapped there, they are subject to a system that perpetuates negative outcomes: Defendants are four times more likely to be sentenced to prison if they spend their pretrial time in jail; they are more likely to take guilty plea deals for lesser charges to obtain release, even if they are innocent; they suffer the psychological trauma of being cut off from family and friends for weeks, months, or even years; they are exposed to violence, abuse, and poor health conditions; and they risk losing homes, jobs, and custody of their children.”

“To support your state’s efforts toward rapid decarceration and an end to cash bail practices... visit www.aclu.org/smartjustice.”