

A Guide to What's Inside!

Calendar

Query: Meetings for Worship

Social Concerns Box

Personal Notes

Children's Religious Ed.

Events

Committee Notes

Stewardship & Finance

Nominating

Peace & Social Justice

Meeting Notes

November 2020 Calendar

Our Meeting House remains closed for the foreseeable future due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ad hoc COVID-19 Committee is working with the co-clerks to discern the possibility of eventual in-person worship. In the meantime, creative responses to continuing Sunday Meeting for Worship at 11:00 a.m., include 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	Sun	9:00 a.m.	Meeting for Business (All invited, via Zoom)
5	Thurs	7:00 p.m.	Bible Study (via Zoom)
7	Sat	10:00 a.m.	Baltimore Yearly Meeting Interim Meeting (via Zoom)
8	Sun	1:00 p.m.	Using Personal Queries about Racism (via Zoom)
		7:30 p.m.	Experiment with Light (via e-mail/phone, Zoom sharing)
12	Thurs	7:00 p.m.	Bible Study (via Zoom)
13	Fri		FCNL Advocacy Teams Summit (via Zoom)
		8:30 p.m.	December Newsletter Deadline
14	Sat	1:30 p.m.	Quaker Book Group (via Zoom)
14/15	Sat/Sun		FCNL's Annual Meeting (via Zoom)
15	Sun	9:00 a.m.	Committee Day: Pastoral Care (via Zoom)
		9:15 a.m.	Committee Day: Ministry & Worship, Stewardship & Fin.
16/17	Mon/Tues		FCNL's Public Policy Institute
19	Thurs	7:00 p.m.	Bible Study (via Zoom)
		7:30 p.m.	Interfaith Concert (via Zoom)
21	Sat	1:30 p.m.	Spiritual Formation Group (via Zoom)
22	Sun	9:15 a.m.	Peace & Social Justice Committee (via Zoom)
		7:30 p.m.	Experiment with Light (via e-mail/phone, Zoom sharing)
29		1:00 p.m.	Coordinating Gathering (via Zoom)

Details are available on our web site: www.bethesdafriends.org

Query for November: Meetings for Worship

In what ways do I prepare my heart and mind to receive the power of God's presence and love? How does worship deepen my relationship with God? How is this inspiration carried over into my daily life? Are our meetings for worship held in expectant waiting for Divine guidance? How do activities of our Meeting find their inspiration in worship? In what ways does worship uphold Meeting activities?

Social Concerns Box

A Wider Circle is the recipient for the Social Concerns Box in November. It is a local non-profit organization that assists individuals and families moving out of shelters to more stable living situations. A Wider Circle also offers intensive courses on job skills, financial planning, stress management, nutrition, and parenting. Its mission is to end poverty. Anyone in need of help can find it there. Each year, A Wider Circle furnishes the homes of more than 4,700 families (through donated items), helping to create the stability and dignity that everyone deserves. They also provide more than 400 educational programs per year. After A Wider Circle receives or picks up your donated item, it only takes about 24 to 48 hours for it to find a new home. More than 30,000 volunteers come to serve at A Wider Circle every year, including members of BFM. For more details: <https://awidercircle.org>

The September Social Concerns box for the Mary Jane Simpson Scholarship Fund received \$11,159.

Personal Notes

Listening as a Spiritual Practice

Here is the link to an article in *Friends Journal* written by a Bethesda Friend:
<https://www.friendsjournal.org/listening-as-a-spiritual-practice/>

Meeting for worship is our basic Quaker practice. It is a communal experience where we gather together in expectant waiting for the movement of Spirit within and among us. We sit together, mostly silently, but occasionally a Friend rises to speak, which we call vocal ministry. When we are learning about Quaker practice, there is a fair amount taught about vocal ministry, such as: When is it appropriate to speak? When should we wait? Is the message for me only or for the group? We are urged to be as concise as possible and not to speak too often. Although most of us rarely speak, we are all listeners. No one would give a message into an empty room. Vocal ministry involves everyone present. Although the Spirit creates the message and the speaker provides the words—the vocal part—it is the listeners who transform those words into ministry.

Baltimore Yearly Meeting's (BYM) 1988 Faith and Practice says: Friends approach the meeting for worship confidently, believing that God speaks directly to us, revealing Divine Will and guiding those who listen. Each worshiper becomes a listener ready to receive God's message, which may come in the silence or in spoken words. Speak as if God is listening. Listen as if God is speaking. Speak as if Spirit is speaking through you. Listen as if Spirit is listening through you.

There is surprisingly little written about how to listen to messages in worship, as if listening is so easy that nothing needs to be said. I maintain listening is a spiritual discipline that needs to be practiced mindfully and with as much intentionality and discernment as settling into the silence or speaking.

So, how do you listen to messages in meeting for worship in a way that transforms them into ministry? How do you hear the Divine speaking in the message? How do you “Mind that which is eternal, which gathers your hearts together up to the Lord, and lets you see that ye are written in one another’s heart,” as George Fox wrote in 1653?

Expectant waiting. I find this phrase a wonderfully helpful description of worship. This attitude helps create a positive tone where I hope to be led to a deeper connection with the Divine, both through my personal meditation and prayer, and also through any messages that are given. There are many disciplines of prayer and meditation which can help us to create an atmosphere of worship, so I won’t try to describe them all. For myself, I come with a different phrase, song, biblical quote, or prayer every few weeks. These help me to center and become open.

Connection. I like the practice of deliberately connecting with everyone in the room when I enter into worship, saying each person’s name to myself or carefully observing each presence as I glance around the room. I keep my eyes open during this process, but even if you are someone who likes to keep your eyes shut, you can be aware of the people around you. Meeting for worship is not private meditation; it is communion. We are manifesting the Divine because we are all together and willing to share our experience one with another. From the 1988 Baltimore *Faith and Practice*: “Each is aided by the seeking of others, so that worship becomes a corporate experience.”

Gratitude. When someone rises to speak, be grateful and curious. We have been striving to hear “the still, small voice within.” Now someone is doing us the favor of speaking that voice out loud. Silently, sincerely, thank them in your heart as they rise to speak, and again when they conclude. I rarely speak in worship, but I know the quaking feeling it entails. The speakers are brave souls.

Discernment. Still your inner critic. Everything you may have read or heard about discerning whether you should rise and speak has zero relevance to the question of how to listen to the message. Assume that the speaker has done all the appropriate work and that they are channeling the Spirit in the meeting to the best of their ability. Your work is to discover how the message touches you; how God is reaching out to you through another’s voice.

Listen carefully. Think and pray on what is said. I used to passively let the words wash over me, but now I actively try to engage with them to see where they lead me. Sometimes it is the emotions, more than the words, that need to be heard. Maybe pain or joy is the primary message. Often, I am able to distill a few key words, especially when more than one person speaks. Something is stirring among us when one message leads to another and then another, although it can be hard to connect them all. I am particularly appreciative of those with a gift for rising late in the worship to unify all the messages. I think we too easily disparage a “popcorn” meeting when we should be impressed with the Spirit bubbling up in and through so many people. How can we bring the kernel of these messages back into the silence before worship is over?

Openness. We need to listen to the spirit behind the words. Sometimes we have to translate phrases into something we understand better. If a message is too “New Age,” is there a Bible passage with a similar theme? If the message is too Christ-centered, can I find a

Universalist theme instead? Does it sound too mundane, as if pulled from the newspaper or Facebook? Look to the eternal behind the everyday. Be careful. It is easy to get caught up in editing and lose the message. If we get too involved in disagreeing or correcting, we should let it pass like any other distraction. I can easily hear God in the birds outside or a child's laugh, so the message does not have to be profound to be meaningful. We need to listen with love.

Ministry. Ministry means service and healing. The easiest ministry is just to direct my thoughts inward and work on my own spiritual practice. For example, I can probably find something in my own life that is similar to the message of the speaker. It is more of a challenge to focus on what the message is telling me about the speaker, or what the words are telling me about the meeting as a group. Is there something I should be doing differently now that I have heard this message? Is there something the meeting could be doing? Do I need to hold the speaker in the Light? How might this message change me? How might it affect my relationships with others?

Resistance. I freely admit that there are people I find easy to listen to and people who are more difficult to hear. But perhaps we get more spiritual benefit in this difficulty; just like a strenuous workout makes us more fit than an easy one. At the very least, I can project love and gratitude toward each speaker. Our careful listening can help speakers grow and improve their abilities. Even the best speakers were novices once.

Social hour. Some people do not like to talk about the messages after worship, but I have found talking about the preceding worship often promotes spiritual dialogue. I have also heard the complaint that coffee hour can seem too superficial. When can we engage in deep spiritual dialogue? It is fun to speak with others about the messages; the conversation brings us closer as a spiritual community. For the people who spoke, I have found that they appreciate the acknowledgment, even as we remember that messages are brought to us through the Divine. Others often enjoy the opportunity to talk about how the messages touched them.

I invite you to experiment with participating fully in vocal ministry by listening with God's ears.

Choosing Life: A Book Review

Choosing Life: My Father's Journey in Film from Hollywood to Hiroshima, by Leslie A. Sussan. Leslie Sussan and I are both members of Bethesda (MD) Friends Meeting. Many, many years ago I was talking with Leslie about her book about her father, Herb Sussan. She was already frustrated about how long it was taking. I tried to encourage her by saying I would read the book as soon as it came out. Fortunately she is one of my Facebook friends so, when she announced that the book was available, I immediately bought it and read it.

Here is the official description of the book on Amazon:

In 1946, with the war over and Japan occupied, 2nd Lt. Herbert Sussan received a plum assignment. He would get to use his training as a cinematographer and join a Strategic Bombing Survey crew to record the results of the atomic bombings in Nagasaki and Hiroshima. From his first arrival in Nagasaki, he knew that something completely novel and appalling had happened and that he had to preserve a record of the results, especially the ongoing suffering of those affected by the bomb (known as hibakusha) even months later.

When the U.S. government decided that the gruesome footage would not be "of interest" to the American public and therefore classified it top secret, he spent decades arguing for its release. His last wish was that his ashes be scattered at ground zero in Hiroshima.

The author, his daughter, followed his footsteps in 1987, met survivors he had filmed more than 40 years before. And found that she met there a father she never really knew in life.

This book recounts Herbert Sussan's experiences (drawn directly from an oral history he left behind), his daughter's quest to understand what he saw in Japan, and the stories of some of the survivors with whose lives both father and daughter intersected. This nuclear legacy captures the ripples of the atomic bombing down through decades and generations.

The braided tale brings human scale and understanding to the horrors of nuclear war and the ongoing need for healing and peacemaking.

(Here is David's review:) It took Tolstoy seven years to write *War and Peace*, while it took Leslie over thirty years to write *Choosing Life*. Her book is similar to Tolstoy's classic because it is about war and peace, nuclear war, that is. But also, rather than a top-down academic history, her book is a Studs Terkel style history of average people and how the bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki affected an individual, his family, and the Japanese he photographed. This book is different than *War and Peace* in two respects. First, her book is about real lives rather than fiction. Second, it is a lot shorter in length.

Leslie is a lawyer and judge so she was adept at writing that language called "legalese." To write this book she needed to learn how to write regular English which emphasizes experiences, stories, ambiguities, unknowns, and emotions. She admirably succeeded as the book is full of emotion. I teared up a number of times reading some of the sad stories in the book. This is why the book is so good. There are many excellent descriptions of the atomic bombs and what they did to their victims, but for horror of nuclear weapons to be effectively realized, there also needs to be that gut emotional level of disgust. There is a lot of this in *Choosing Life*.

Like Tolstoy's novel, this book is also many layered as real life always is. It included Leslie's difficult childhood and rebellion, her attempts to understand her father, living in and adjusting to a foreign culture, the raising of her own child, Kendra, while in Japan, and the lack of bitterness among the Japanese people about WWII and the atomic bombing. While her father and later Leslie herself are almost unknown in the United States, they both have been treated as celebrities in Japan.

This book has come out at the right time. The world has just realized that all the atomic bombs in the world did not protect anyone from Covid-19 and that the resources spent on those bombs would be better spent on making the world a better, healthier place for all. *Choosing Life* provides a much needed emotional context to the abolition of nuclear weapons.

A reviewer ends a positive review by encouraging people to read the book. Let me express this in another way. You will be the loser if you don't read the book.

Religious Education for Children

Centering and Meeting for Worship at home for children and families. Sidwell Friends School's Parents Association's Quaker Life Committee created a packet with supplies that Lower School families can use to create a peaceful space at home for worship. It's an inspiring story. For details, here's the link:

<https://www.sidwell.edu/about/news/news-detail/~board/homepage-news-panel/post/creating-a-space-for-peace> There is also a short video introduction to Meeting for Worship at Home: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWKpJpQ5K9I&feature=youtu.be>

Here is a link to energizing, thoughtful news from the broader Quaker community about religious education: <https://www.quakers4re.org/>

Events

1st: Meeting for Business

On Sunday, November 1, 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 Nominating, Child Safety Policy & Procedures, and the auditors. Please join us if you can.

1st/8th/15th/22nd/29th: Meeting for Worship

BFM Friends continue to 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 via 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 following link will be opened at 10:45 a.m. every First Day 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 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.

You do not need to download 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.

You can also join the Zoom Meeting for Worship by telephone (without video). You will be asked to enter your unique participant ID. Press # to skip this step and join the meeting. If you get a busy signal, please try again; it simply means that someone else was trying to join by phone at the same time as you.

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.

4th/11th/18th/25th: 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.

5th/12th/19th: Bible Study

Bible Study will meet the first three Thursdays in November at 7:00 p.m. on Zoom with the Great Courses series, Understanding the Old Testament. The lectures cover Exodus. We will not meet on November 26, Thanksgiving.

7th: Baltimore Yearly Meeting Interim Meeting

Get to know Yearly Meeting Committees and Friends from other Meetings! Be a part of important decision making. Join Friends for morning committee meetings and the afternoon's Interim Business Meeting. For details: www.bym-rsf.org/events/interim/eleventh19.html

8th: Using Personal Queries about Racism

On Sunday, November 8 at 1:00 p.m., the BFM Diversity Change Group invites Friends to participate in a Zoom session to develop personal queries on racism. The aim is to make us more self-aware of the impact that racism has on our thoughts, behaviors, actions and inactions. This will be a guided session which includes worship sharing in small breakout groups. In order to better manage the size of these groups, we ask that you register for this workshop at the following:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAsdeCsqT4rG9V_31xMvABxcemptpkLkz8Go To help us come to this session with hearts and minds prepared, a copy of the guided process will be provided prior to the workshop.

8th/22ndth: 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 on 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 participate. First-time participants have found the process quite easy to follow and richly rewarding.

This is an invitation to two sessions. One will be on Sunday evening, November 8, and the other on November 22, from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. Starting at 7:30 p.m., you can follow the prompts at home and write or draw responses you have experienced during those prompts. Here is the link to the prompts:

<https://www.experiment-with-light.org.uk/modindos.mp3> Then around 8:30 p.m., if you would like to worship-share from your meditation experience and want to join in a Zoom gathering, we can provide you with the link. We anticipate that part of the gathering could go until 9:15.

14th: Quaker Book Group

The Quaker Book Group meets monthly, via Zoom from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. In November, it meets on November 14, 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.

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 on line. The meeting will take place Saturday, November 14, to Tuesday, November 17, with the 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 to ensure that participants' actions have significant impact. Here is the link for registration:

<https://act.fcnl.org/survey/annual-meeting-2020/?source=ampage>

19th: Interfaith Concert

The InterFaith Council is delighted to announce the 41st Annual Interfaith Concert, which will be online at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, November 19. This year's concert will focus on the importance of kindness at this moment in time. We will be hearing from a variety of faith traditions, as they share music, arts, readings, and religious practices with all of us.

In addition to our music and the arts, we will also be recognizing Tamika Tremaglio, a longtime member of St. Peter Claver Catholic Church in St. Ingoes MD. Ms. Tremaglio has elevated the value of kindness throughout her life, from her work as a Managing Partner at Deloitte to her volunteering with foundations, including Born This Way and the WNBA Players' Association. For details, see www.ifcmw.org

21st: BFM Spiritual Formation Program

Approximately 20 people have signed up to be part of this year's Spiritual Formation program, which began in October and will continue via Zoom until June 2021. The group meets monthly on the third Saturday of the month. There are additional monthly small group meetings for personal sharing. The second meeting of the whole group will be on Saturday, November 21, at 1:30 p.m. This program is sponsored by Ministry & Worship Committee.

29th: 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, November 29, at 1:00 p.m., via Zoom, in preparation for the Meeting for Business on December 6.

Committee Notes

Stewardship & Finance

It is time again for our fall appeal. In this season of sharing and giving thanks, let us all remember Bethesda Friends Meeting. Financial support for our Meeting's routine activities, as well as for our contributions to Quaker organizations and others, comes almost entirely from our members and attenders. Some of us have limited income, heavy expenses, or both, but small, as well as large, contributions are appreciated. All contributions help us maintain our practical, as well as spiritual, connection to the Meeting and all it represents. Please donate as generously as possible either online at:

<https://www.bethesdafriends.org/Donate-Online-Now> or by check. Checks should be made payable to Bethesda Friends Meeting and mailed to BFM's Assistant Treasurer.

Nominating

At the September meeting for Worship with Concern for Business, the Nominating Committee proposed, and Friends approved, changing the nominating cycle from a calendar year to a fiscal/academic year cycle, July 1 to June 30. The January to December calendar meant that the committees started their activities after the summer break and then had to gear up in January when new members joined. The major reason for the change is to relieve the start/stop aspect of BFM committee work. We hope that this change will facilitate a smooth flow through the fiscal year. During the transition period (fall 2020 to spring 2021), committee members whose terms were expiring this year were offered the choice of serving through June 30 or being replaced. The Nominating Committee will propose appointments for January through June 2021 at the November Meeting for Business. In the spring, we will confer with all committee members to confirm dates of their terms and fill positions accordingly.

Peace & Social Justice

Ensuring the Integrity of Our Elections. The Peace & Social Justice Committee's decision to encourage the BFM community to participate in non-partisan efforts to encourage and facilitate registration and voting through, among other organizations, Reclaim the Vote was more successful than we had thought was possible. Reclaim Our Vote's focus was to reach out to people who are often ignored in voter participation campaigns. Our efforts were greatly enhanced by the fact that Laurie Wilner of Langley Hill Meeting was one of three coordinators in the District/ Maryland/Virginia area and Marion Harrell's willingness to help deliver postcards to individuals and groups in the Silver Spring area who had been in touch with Laurie. Marion commented that she stopped counting at 8,000 postcards and that Laurie has distributed more than 100,000 cards in the DC area. Ten to 15 people in BFM wrote postcards and involved friends and family in the effort.

FCNL Postcard/letter-writing. If you would like to write emails/postcards/letters to Members of Congress on an issue of importance to Quakers, FCNL asks that we recognize Domestic Violence Awareness Month and Indigenous Peoples' Day by calling on the Senate to introduce a bill to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) with provisions that protect Native women by respecting tribal sovereignty and restoring jurisdiction over non-Native perpetrators of violence in tribal communities. The House passed its version of VAWA (H.R.

1585) several months ago. Now it is time for the Senate to do its part. Additional information and an email template can be found at:

https://fcn.quorum.us/campaign/25240/?utm_campaign=contacts&utm_medium=email&utm_source=ak&utm_term=14357.209196.GVDPQj

Meeting Notes

Thinking About Race

In “Claudia Rankine’s Quest for Racial Dialogue,” in the October *Atlantic* magazine, Ismail Muhammad reflects on her new book, *Just Us: An American Conversation*. “Rankine’s intent is not simply to expose or chastise whiteness. She has something more nuanced in mind: using conversation as a way to invite white people to consider how contingent their lives are upon the racial order just as Black people’s are. ‘I was always aware that my value in our culture’s eyes is determined by my skin color first and foremost,’ she says. The same is true for white people, of course, however unaware of that reality they may be.”

This may prompt some queries for Quakers:

- Am I aware that my value is, in our culture’s eyes, determined by my skin color first and foremost? If so, how, when, or where am I aware of this?

- Am I aware that the value of a person of a different skin color than mine, is, in our culture’s eyes, determined by that skin color first and foremost? If so, how, when, or where am I aware of this?

- What (if any) is the difference between these two awarenesses?