

## October 2021 Bethesda Friends Meeting Newsletter

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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 2021 Calendar

Sunday Meeting for Worship is held at 11:00 a.m. in a hybrid format. Most friends participate via Zoom. Some friends participate in person outdoors at the Sidwell Friends Lower School. (See guidelines under events.) Unless otherwise indicated, all of the other following events are virtual.

3	Sun		World Quaker Day
		9:00 a.m.	Meeting for Business
5	Tues	7:00 p.m.	Comparative Religions Study Group (every Tuesday)
6	Wed	8:00 p.m.	Mid-Week Worship (check in by email every Wednesday)
9	Sat	9:00 a.m.	Yearly Mtg. Dayspring Silent Retreats (Also Sun. & Mon)
		1:00 p.m.	Yearly Meeting Interim Meeting
		1:30 p.m.	Quaker Book Group
10	Sun	9:30 a.m.	Exploring & Deepening Our Quaker Faith & Practice
		1:00 p.m.	Library Committee
		7:30 p.m.	Experiment with Light (via e-mail/phone, Zoom sharing)
13	Wed	8:30 p.m.	November Newsletter Deadline
17	Sun	9:00 a.m.	Committee Day: Pastoral Care
		9:15 a.m.	Committee Day: Ministry & Worship, Stewardship & F.
		9:30 a.m.	Committee Day: Outreach & Communications
24	Sun	9:00 a.m.	Committee Day: Peace & Social Justice
		1:00 p.m.	Answering the Call of Equality: A Threshing Session
		7:30 p.m.	Experiment with Light (via e-mail/phone, Zoom sharing)
31	Sun	1:00 p.m.	Coordinating Gathering

See also, [www.bethesdafriends.org](http://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.

To donate to the Social Concerns Box, please go to: [www.bethesdafriends.org](http://www.bethesdafriends.org) Clearly designate that your contribution is for the Social Concerns Box. If you prefer, you may send your check, made payable to Bethesda Friends Meeting, to Assistant Treasurer, 3050 Military Road, NW, Apartment 834, Washington DC 20015.

Please make your donations to organizations supported through the social concerns box in the month designated for them.

In the Social Concerns Box for July, we collected \$25 for AsylumWorks. In the Social Concerns Box for August, \$277.52 was donated to Jubilee Jobs.

### **Religious Education for Young People**

The Religious Education committee is looking ahead at events and activities for the fall calendar. With the arrival of this season, we are anticipating that First Day School classes will start in November. The committee is clear that this can only occur if done safely, following all Covid-mandated protocols and any guidelines set by the school. Additionally, we are addressing a number of other matters, including a vaccination policy covering teachers and whether we should hire one teacher for a fulltime position. We have also been asked for our input on the child care manual, so we will be considering and responding to that. And for October we are hoping to arrange another community service activity. Look for more information in the future.

### **Events**

#### **3rd: World Quaker Day**

Celebrate World Quaker Day on Sunday October 3 with Friends around the world. The theme this year is “Resilience and Hope: drawing strength from our Quaker faith.” You can download the poster, share the news, view the reports from last World Quaker Day, and look at the resources for ideas about how to celebrate this year’s event. Please watch and share the Friends World Committee of Consultation (FWCC) video invitation to World Quaker Day 2021:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HgaCCPKJDkA>

In groups or on your own, you are invited to explore this theme and share reflections with Friends around the world. By the end of World Quaker Day 2021, FWCC hopes to have gathered stories, pictures, and messages of how our Quaker faith offers strength to Friends across the world. The following questions may be helpful in celebrating the day: How do you understand resilience and hope? Is this different from your Quaker neighbor? What elements of your Quaker faith enable you to have resilience and hope? How does being part of an international Quaker community help provide you with strength?

At the rise of Meeting for Worship at BFM on Sunday, October 3, there will be

an opportunity to reflect on these queries.

If you would like to join Friends around the world for online worship, you can do so with the Africa and Asia West Pacific Sections at 4:00 p.m. (Eastern time), with Europe and Middle East Section (EMES) at 6:00 p.m., and the Young Adult Friends of the Friends World Committee on Consultation Traveling Ministry Corps at 7:00 p.m. Registration is requested via the World Quaker Day website: <https://www.worldquakerday.org/>

### **3rd: Meeting for Business**

On Sunday, October 3, 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 and First Day School. Please join us if you can.

### **3rd/10th/17th/24th/31st: Meeting for Worship**

Bethesda Friends worship together each Sunday at 11:00 a.m. Friends can participate remotely via Zoom, or meet in person outdoors on the Sidwell Friends Lower School campus.

Participating in worship via Zoom. People wishing to join Meeting for Worship remotely can do so via Zoom. Please send a request for the Zoom link via the website. [https://www.bethesdafriends.org/Contact-Us#contact\\_us](https://www.bethesdafriends.org/Contact-Us#contact_us)

Outdoor worship. Friends are invited to gather in person for Meeting for Worship under the breezeway or tent between the Manor House and the Groome Building on the Sidwell Friends Lower School campus. The following COVID rules apply to those attending in person:

- You must be vaccinated against COVID-19.
- You must wear a mask and maintain social distancing.
- You must self-screen based on COVID symptoms or exposure. You may not attend in-person Meeting for Worship if you have a fever, have COVID symptoms, have tested positive for COVID, or have been exposed in the past 10 days to an individual testing positive for, or displaying symptoms of, COVID.
- You must sign in on a simple sign-in sheet.
- You must notify BFM promptly if you have a positive test after attending in person. BFM will provide notice to others who attended the same meeting of the COVID case (but will not identify the person testing positive).

Playground Supervision is in session. Playground supervision is available for children ages three years and up during outdoor Meeting for Worship on Sundays at 11:00 a.m. Two paid childcare providers will supervise play at the upper playground. Children should wear masks and bring their own water bottles.

### **5th/12th/19th/26th: Comparative Religions Study Group**

Beginning on Tuesday, October 5, Bible Study will morph into Comparative Religions, using the Great Courses series, Religions of the Axial Age (800 to 200 BCE, examining Zoroastrianism, Hinduism and Vedanta, Buddhism, Jainism, Confucianism, and Taoism). We will meet once a week by Zoom, starting Tuesday, October 5, at 7:00 p.m., for 24 half-hour lectures with an additional half-hour discussion, probably ending in late March. A group of 8 to 10 has been meeting over

the last two years studying the Old and New Testaments, and we greatly enjoyed the fellowship as much as the lessons.

### **6th/13th/20th/27th: 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. More information, use [https://www.bethesdafriends.org/Contact-Us#contact\\_us](https://www.bethesdafriends.org/Contact-Us#contact_us)

### **9th/10th/11th: Silent Retreat at Dayspring**

While Yearly Meeting Friends cannot yet share an overnight silent retreat at Dayspring, plans are in place for three one-day retreats on the long weekend of Saturday through Monday, October 9 through 11. The following arrangement is proposed for those who may be able to participate. This plan might, of course, be altered at any time because of changes in COVID numbers and public health guidance. The maximum number of participants for each day is 12.

Each retreat day will last from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Financial contributions are welcome, will be tax-deductible, and can be placed in the donation box in the Yoke Room upon arrival. All participants must show proof of vaccination. Masks will be required indoors, except while eating or drinking. Friends are asked to bring bag lunches which can be stored in the refrigerators. There is tea and coffee. There are eight chairs for those who wish to eat in the Dining Room. Seats in the Yoke Room are arranged to maximize physical distance. The vision is that most of us will spend most of our time outdoors and on the porch, depending on the weather. It is suggested that Friends consider bringing light, collapsible chairs for use outdoors if desired.

There will be a facilitator for each retreat day. At 9:00 a.m., Friends will gather to discern how that group wants to structure the day. Beginning worship sharing and a brief closing gathering are suggested. As on an overnight retreat, individual Dayspringers will have differing needs. Some may especially hunger for a shared community meal, while others may most crave an hour of shared silent worship or private wandering or solitary journaling. This new way of being together at Dayspring will evolve as the way opens. The great silence will ground us.

Please register by Wednesday, October 6.

The Dayspring Silent Retreat Center is at 11301 Neelsville Church Road, Germantown, MD 20876: [www.dayspringretreat.org](http://www.dayspringretreat.org)

### **9th: BYM Interim Meeting**

Saturday, October 9, is an opportunity to get to know Yearly Meeting committees and Friends from other Meetings. Be a part of important decision making. Join Friends for morning committee meetings (at 10:00 a.m.) and the afternoon's Interim Business Meeting at 1:00 p.m. This meeting will be a hybrid meeting, with Friends gathering at Sandy Spring Meetinghouse and via Zoom connection for Friends elsewhere. Lunch will be available. Registration is required. For details:

<https://www.bym-rsf.org/events/interim/tenth21.html>

### **9th: Quaker Book Group**

The Quaker Book Group meets monthly via Zoom, from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m. on the second Saturday of the month, which will be October 9. 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 book for October is *Humankind: A Hopeful History*, by Rutger Bregman, which was postponed from September. In August, we read Barbara Shell Luetke's *The Kendal Sparrow*. In November, we plan to discuss Rosemary Moore, *The Light of their Consciences: The Early Quakers in 1646-1666 in Britain*. The group will be voting soon on our next round of selections, so suggestions are welcome! In addition to meeting for discussions, the group is invited to share announcements, summaries, and thoughts about the readings through an online mailing list. Questions? Use our Contact us form: [https://www.bethesdafriends.org/Contact-Us#contact\\_us](https://www.bethesdafriends.org/Contact-Us#contact_us)

### **10th: Exploring and Deepening Our Quaker Faith & Practice**

Do you sometimes wish you could have a deeper conversation with others about their experience in Meeting for Worship? Are you curious about what draws people to Quaker Meeting, and about how their Quaker faith and practice informs their lives? Would you like to feel a deeper connection spiritually to others in the Meeting?

Starting October 10, at 9:30 a.m. and continuing monthly on the second Sunday of the month, Ministry & Worship will have an hour-long discussion on Quaker faith and practice for both those new to BFM and those seeking to deepen their experience and their sense of connection with others. A short video from Quaker Speak will introduce a topic, and then we will share reflections on it.

On October 10, the video is entitled "What do Quakers Do in Silent Worship?" It is about eight minutes long, and so we will have plenty of time to talk with one another in response to the video. For a link to the Video, please go to the [event link here](#) or use our Contact Us form at [https://www.bethesdafriends.org/Contact-Us#contact\\_us](https://www.bethesdafriends.org/Contact-Us#contact_us).

### **10th & 24th: 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 10 and 24, 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. More information, use our [Contact us form](#).

### **24th: Call to Action: BFM's Identity and Role in Approaching Racism**

Will you join us in a conversation about whether BFM wishes to take a journey toward living our Quaker testimony of equality by taking steps to dismantle systemic racism within and around us? We're gathering on October 24, after Meeting for Worship, to engage in a "threshing" session to clarify who wishes to go on this

journey, what the initial leg of a collective journey might entail and require, and what preparation we choose to make for embarking on it together.

Background. America and the world have been calling on us in these last few years – even more loudly and visually – to come to grips with the racism that is woven into the fabric of our American belief systems and institutions. While there is an emphasis on equality in public discourse, there is an obvious lack of equality, particularly in the way non-whites are viewed and treated.

Many of us at BFM have been asking ourselves “what is mine to do”? Many of us have sought to engage in building our awareness, in seeking to understand our part in it, and we have found fellow searchers at BFM. Since BFM is a predominantly, but not exclusively, white community, we have also recognized that we have some clear blind spots. Our predominant lens errs toward being “white”, socio- economically “comfortable”, educated, professional, etc. In a word, many of us benefit from many advantages or “privileges” we can easily take for granted. It is inherently more difficult for us to see things from the lens of those who have not benefitted from those many advantages.

So, in response to Baltimore Yearly Meeting’s “Call to Action” on systemic racism, and after some collective Meeting steps to identify near term actions committees might take, a Threshing Prep group was commissioned to research and ponder how we might conduct a “threshing” process to get more clarity about our community identity regarding systemic racism and the actions we would commit to in order to uproot it. What might we commit to as a group, rather than just as individuals?

We’re reminded of the African proverb: “If you want to go quickly, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.” We believe as a country we have far to go and the journey is not only to change the institutions but also the cultural orientation that creates and upholds them.

In our research as a Threshing Prep group, we concluded this is a process, not an event, that requires time and deliberate effort. It is one that would benefit from external guidance, as this area has its own expertise, which no one in the Meeting has. We wish it to be a process that brings us together as a community, enables us to have a shared experience, emerge with shared vocabulary, a shared sense of identity, and a commitment to a set of clear actions that will take us further down the road. At the same time, we recognize this will be a lifelong and likely multi-generational journey to support America in uprooting the systemic racism that is in the fabric of our assumptions, culture, and institutions. We can either take steps to uproot it, or risk perpetuating it. To begin to uproot it will likely involve discomfort as we look carefully at some of the assumptions we hold and the behaviors we exhibit as individuals, as the BFM community, and as Americans. We think this type of work may best be done in a community like BFM, which, while being overwhelmingly white, is committed to equality. To foster a safe environment that is free of shame while holding discomfort about the issue of race also requires a special type of facilitation support.

As we have looked at the scope of the challenge, we believe the identity aspect is the most foundational and the most difficult to grapple with. How do we gauge where we are and where we might be as a community? That is not easy to do without reference points, so having those who can help us understand the reference points and make some informed and positive choices is critical in doing this well. We believe clarity on identity needs to be at the heart of this effort, to guide any actions we then might take. We want our actions not to unconsciously reinforce the existing system but help to shape an alternative one powered from a different sense of Identity than the one that has shaped the white-centered culture and institutions we currently have,



whether at BFM or beyond. How can we retain the best while reworking the elements that have kernels of racism within them?

We wish, therefore, to understand who wants to go on this collective journey and sees value in doing it in the context of the BFM community. If we agree that – in light of our blind spots and the nuanced expertise required to do it well – we choose to engage someone to help us, we will need to generate funds from the current budget or from new commitments. A first step would be confirming the willingness of the community to undertake this effort, and to commit money and time to the process, which would indicate the importance we place on it. Is this important to you? Will you join us on October 24 and help to shape our approach?

### **31st: 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 31, at 1:00 p.m., via Zoom, in preparation for the Meeting for Business on November 7.

### **Into the Future**

### **November 17th to 21st: FCNL Quaker Public Policy Institute & Annual Meeting**

The theme of the Friends Committee on National Legislation's annual gathering is "Choose Hope. Work for Justice" and will be presented on line. The meeting will take place Wednesday, November 17, to Sunday, November 21, with the Quaker Public Policy Institute from November 17 to 18, and the Annual Meeting from November 19 to 21. By meeting online, Friends who have been unable to travel to Washington, D.C. in the past will be able to participate. Here is the link for information and registration: <https://www.fcnl.org/events/annualmeeting2021>

### **Committee Notes**

#### **Ministry & Worship: Spiritual Formation**

Some people from Bethesda Friends Meeting participated in the Yearly Meeting Spiritual Formation Retreat in mid-September and plan to continue to meet with others from BFM to nurture and strengthen their spiritual lives. You don't have to have attended the opening retreat to participate in this nine-month program. We will meet once a month on Zoom October through June at a time convenient to everyone who wants to participate. There will also be small groups which will meet monthly. Some of these will meet on Zoom and some will meet in person if it is safe to do so. More information, use our [Contact us form](#)

#### **Outreach & Communications**

We are happy to report that there is a new editor of the BFM weekly bulletin. Melaura H-S has helped the Meeting make the transition to the bulletins being sent via our website since the end of June and is coordinating closely with the former editor, and with the administrator of the web site. Prior to the Thursday evening deadline at 6:30 p.m., please send items for the weekly bulletin to: [bulletin@bethesdafriends.org](mailto:bulletin@bethesdafriends.org) The former editor is stepping back from producing the weekly bulletin after 29 years, but will continue to prepare the monthly newsletters,

the services exchanges, and the BFM directory. In essence, instead of having one editor for all publications, we now have two: one for weekly bulletins and one for the rest.

## Meeting Notes

### Yearly Meeting Annual Session Recordings Are Now Online

Recordings from Annual Sessions including many of the workshops are available online. Many of the workshop leaders were pleased to be able to share the recordings of their workshops for Friends to view. The Plenary Speaker presentations and a portion of the 350th Anniversary Kick-Off are also available. Here is the link:

<https://www.bym-rsf.org/publications/speakers.html#workshop>

### Thinking About Race

(September's Thinking About Race)

Race Manners: Which Black People Should I Believe? by Jene Desmond-Harris (June 28, 2021, *The New York Times*)

As you know, there's no committee that gets a consensus from the over 41 million Black people in this country and issues proclamations about the right way for white people to think about racism.

For what it's worth, the fact that you care at all — that you value what Black people have to say and that you take seriously the idea of listening — puts you ahead of plenty of Americans who wholly disregard what Black people experience or simply want the worst for us. So, in my opinion, you're on the right track.

And I have empathy for you because I've been there — wanting to do the right thing when it comes to marginalized groups to which I don't belong, while encountering conflicting takes about what the right thing is. Is it helpful to transgender people or cringe worthy for cis people to put pronouns in our bios and email signatures? Are straight people a supportive or annoying presence at Pride? Am I honoring or alienating people if I use "Latinx" instead of "Latino"? Is "fat" a straightforward descriptor that I should use to support people who have reclaimed it, or is the pain the word still causes for some reason enough to avoid it?

I've had to accept that there won't be a single clear answer and that I have to take responsibility for wherever I land on these questions. To get to a similar place, here's what I think you should do: When you're thinking about this, start by replacing "Black people want racism to stop playing such a big role in their lives, and I want to make sure I'm listening to the right ones so that I can feel like a good ally" with "I want racism to stop playing such a big role in all of our lives, and I'll support things that I believe will make that happen." You've heard the expression about how we need co-conspirators, not allies, right? Even if you're not personally a victim of racism, you can — and should — still think of yourself as someone who has skin in the game.

See:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/28/opinion/race-america-defund-police.html?searchResultPosition=1>

(October's Thinking about Race)

Recent high-profile efforts to prohibit teaching about the racially fraught history of the United States and from suggesting that history has any impact or creates any responsibility today, is addressed succinctly by Isabel Wilkerson on page 15 of



her latest book, *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*:

“We in the developed world are like homeowners who inherited a house on a piece of land that is beautiful on the outside but whose soil is unstable loam and rock, heaving and contracting over generations, cracks patched but the deeper ruptures waved away for decades, centuries even. Many people may rightly say, ‘I had nothing to do with how this all started. I have nothing to do with the sins of the past. My ancestors never attacked indigenous people, never owned slaves.’ And, yes. Not one of us was here when this house was built. Our immediate ancestors may have had nothing to do with it, but here we are, the current occupants of a property with stress cracks and bowed walls and fissures built into the foundation. We are heirs to whatever is right or wrong with it. We did not erect the uneven pillars or joists, but they are ours to deal with now. And any further deterioration is, in fact, on our hands.”

### **Directory Changes**

The process for updating our BFM Directory began in mid-September when you were sent an e-mail asking if the listing in the e-mail needed to be changed in any way. Please respond as soon as possible. Texts do not work. We try to reach everyone who is listed in the Directory to keep it as up-to-date as possible.