

Baltimore Yearly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends
17100 Quaker Lane
Sandy Spring, Maryland 20860-1267

301-774-7663
fax: 301-774-7087
info@bym-rsf.org

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To Friends Everywhere -

Baltimore Yearly Meeting gathered at Hood College in Frederick, Maryland under the blue skies and the theme of *Living in Harmony with the Earth and Each Other*. Our community was expanded and enriched by Friends joining us online throughout the week. As those of us at Hood renewed our connections to others, so did the online cohort who participated in workshops, plenary, business meeting, breaks, and so much more. We are grateful that we can enlarge our gathering via digital access. It was a week marked by the deep joy of being together. It is only together that we can see each other through.

Nadine Hoover began the week with a retreat based on our theme. We learned about conviction, the direct experience of Spirit, and conviction, experiencing spirit in times that we fall short. Our Convincement and Conviction become the solid ground where we can experiment with Spirit in our lives. As more Friends joined us, we heard from Evan Welkin from the Friends World Committee for Consultation in our opening plenary. As we navigate the uncertainty of the climate crisis and growing worldwide instability, Friend Evan offered us the metaphor found in Exodus of the people of God building a holy tent to take with them into the desert. Through community building, we too can build the structures that will see us through difficult times.

We gathered for an interactive plenary mid-week – hearing from groups within BYM and the larger Religious Society of Friends working to build God's peaceable kin-dom on earth. The presentations lifted up how seemingly disparate concerns intersect in the work of the spirit. There was a sweetness in dwelling in what we can and are doing to promote living in harmony with all of creation.

Throughout the week, we individually and corporately reflected on and lamented the impact of the United States government and global challenges on untold numbers of people in our communities, our country, and throughout our world. Friends witnessed the conviction of powerful spirit in business meeting, workshops, worship, play, and music. Friends utilized contemplative practices to restore their "inward ground," including chanting, mirroring (listening without preparing a reply), and holding queries in worship. These practices are essential antidotes to the individualism and disconnection that are contributing to the discord in our world.

The BYM camping programs were highlighted as successful models for putting faith into action. Initiatives like the STRIDE program and BIPOC Staff Gatherings employ a "pollinator garden" approach—creating proactive, diverse systems of support that nurture the whole community rather than exhausting specific parts. Systems are tools to restore humanity rather than merely

administrative structures; the goal is to create environments where racism, exclusion, and poverty become unthinkable.

We enjoyed a new feature for Wednesday night: Film night. Adults gathered to view films about vital concerns about Israel and Palestine and small solutions all over the globe that give us reasons for “climate hope.” Our children enjoyed a film about the migration of the monarch butterfly, which is also a lesson in multi-generational trust. We welcomed Friends young and old, returning and new, from near and far, in our business, our worship, our play, and our fellowship. We lingered in the warmth of each other’s smiles, broke bread together, and walked among the beautiful trees of Hood College, which reminded us we *are* part of nature.

Saturday culminated with lively worship with the Friends Church of Baltimore, singing and sharing messages about countering loneliness and isolation with connection and community. Harmony after all, implies being with others. Our Carey Memorial lecture by Valerie Brown highlighted the intersecting challenges our world presents to us. She reminded us that our inner work leads to outward transformation that ultimately heals us individually and collectively. Friend Valerie invited us to have the dexterity to balance hope and fear and not foreclose the future. She called us to share and celebrate what we love, so our joy can sustain us in our work.

As a body, our spirits are in harmony, though we may stumble in our processes and when conflict arises. The bravery of deep personal sharing by some modeled that when we take that leap in community, we can have healing and connection. But we know in our hearts that we are united in Love. We send our prayers that the Light of God’s Love will shine to give you hope and courage to live through these troubled and troubling times.