

Member Spotlight: Baltimore Yearly Meeting

BY EMILY SIMMONDS, CENTER MEMBERSHIP INTERN

"It's easy to see the many apparent divisions between people, but it is up to us as helping organizations to remind folks of the rich common values that we all share," said Riley Robinson of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends. Like many nonprofits, the Baltimore Yearly Meeting (BYM) is strongly dedicated to strengthening the community it serves. It is distinctive, however, in that it is both a

What is a Meeting?

Similar to a congregation, a Meeting is where local Quakers can gather to worship, discuss ideas and work together as a community. These Meetings occur worldwide, and Center member Baltimore Yearly Meeting serves local Meetings in an area that includes most of Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

West Virginia. Historically Quakers in the region worked to abolish slavery beginning in the 18th century, and Quakers such as Johns Hopkins promoted education for all.

BYM serves as a way for local Meetings to connect and communicate with one another to share ideas and experiences. It also helps these smaller groups work with one another on larger projects that they could not handle independently. For example, the BYM runs four regional summer camps for children of all ages and origins and a year-round youth program in which teens volunteer throughout the community. Both of these programs are constructive ways for children and teens to find meaningful activities and support. There are also programs for adults, such as the annual Women's Retreat and the Spiritual Formation Program. BYM organizes many

different volunteer activities to connect the Quaker Meetings with the general public to help address issues faced by local communities.

Each year BYM hosts a regional Session where people of all ages in its service area come together. This year it will take place from August 2 to 8 at Frostburg State University in Maryland. Open to members of the general public who wish to register, the Session will focus on the theme, "Leadings for Today: Lessons from History," and includes workshops and events to appeal to a wide array of interests (www.bym-rsf.org).

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The Baltimore Yearly Meeting bases its goals and mission on its religious tradition of social action and pacifism. This focus on building peace is an effort that requires constant action and attention, and as Robinson notes, "such persistent work toward deeply held goals and values is something that everyone in the nonprofit community knows something about."

In the midst of the constant stresses faced in the day-to-day work of nonprofits, Robinson advises all nonprofits to stay centered on their deepest values, because these are what truly drive and motivate the work of such organizations.

A Center member since 1991, BYM utilizes many Center benefits including access to group buying programs. It also takes advantage of the educational programs, sending both staff and volunteers to courses offered through the Center. Says Robinson, "We rejoice in our rich heritage of 339 years, and the Center helps us reach toward the future."

To learn more about the Baltimore Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends and its Annual Session, visit www.bym-rsf.org 