

February 2026

Greetings to All,

Birmingham Monthly Meeting sends you warm wishes as we review the past year of 2025. We would like to share news of our activities with you as we reflect upon another year in the life of our vibrant spiritual community.

Worship and Ministry

The center of Meeting life continues to be our twice weekly meetings for worship. On the first Sunday of each month, that month's query from *Faith and Practice* is read aloud as an opening exercise before worship begins. Friends are invited to share their thoughts as they reflect upon the query. On the third and fourth Sundays, individual Friends offer an opening exercise on a topic that is meaningful to them. Whenever there is a fifth Sunday in a month, we have intergenerational poetry sharing which some have called meeting for worship with attention to poetry.

During the pandemic, Friends also gathered to worship on Wednesday afternoons on-line, and this mid-week meeting for worship has continued. Our Zoom technology has made worship and many other Birmingham activities, such as memorials and educational programs, accessible to Friends near and far. We are deeply appreciative of the contributions of our technology volunteers who make this possible.

On January 25, Concord Quarterly Meeting was held at Birmingham, and Friends from throughout the Quarter worshiped with us. The Quarter sponsored a presentation on the current state of affairs in the Middle East.

The Worship and Ministry Committee sponsored a number of thoughtful Second Hour/Spiritual Enrichment programs throughout the year. These included presentations on the Holocaust and on the theology of Dietrick Bonhoeffer. Friends met to discuss the article *The Shock of Faith* by David Brooks and, on another occasion, to discuss the process of Quaker decision-making. Friends

participated in programs on the similarities and differences between Quakers and Unitarian Universalists and on the activities of Braver Angels, a group that tries to lower the political temperature between opposing parties and encourage people to engage in constructive dialogue. We enjoyed hearing about the experiences of two members who had traveled on the Quaker pilgrimage to the United Kingdom. These excellent programs provide an opportunity for small group sharing and discussion on topics meaningful to us individually and as a meeting.

On September 28, the Worship and Ministry Committee and the Children and Youth Committee hosted Birmingham's annual outdoor worship at the fire circle on the campus of Westtown School. Many attended this beloved tradition of outdoor worship followed by a picnic at the lake which we joyfully resumed after this program the previous year had to be canceled due to inclement weather.

On December 21, meeting for worship was held at 1 pm followed by our annual Carol Sing led by a Meeting family of singers. The program began with the procession of the Friendly Beasts as Friends sang, and we then joined in singing a number of traditional carols and songs. The Fellowship Committee coordinated special refreshments after these festivities which over 90 people attended, including many families gathering for the holidays.

Bible Study

Our Friendly Bible Study group meets monthly by Zoom. Participants take turns selecting and facilitating a Bible passage to read together and discuss using the Friendly Bible Study method. Each participant discerns what the main point is, what new Light is gleaned, whether the passage is true to experience, the implications for the participant's life, and whether there are problems with the passage. A brief period of worship precedes and follows the sharing, with further discussion by the group afterwards as led.

Oversight and Pastoral Care

The Oversight and Pastoral Care Committee continues to oversee the general functioning of the Meeting by addressing concerns presented to us, which currently include the re-imagining of our committee's functions and

responsibilities. We continue to provide pastoral care to our Meeting community through care groups, visits, cards, meals provided through our Casserole Patrol, and special events such as our new member luncheon. This year we welcomed five new members: Dee and Mike Kloss; Deborah and Charlie Gilbert; and Sara Wheeler Reichard. We celebrated couples with milestone anniversaries: Leslie and David Leonard with 60 years; Stephanie and Andy Kirk with 50 years; Ann and Rob Upton; and Marie and Rick Echelmeyer. We also acknowledged and wished well our one graduating high school senior Eliot Rufe as he went off to college. We joyously welcomed the birth of Carlisle (Lyle) Lenehan, son of Molly Lang and Sean Lenehan, and bid a final farewell to our member Valerie (Val) Suter as she passed on. We are grateful for Val's varied contributions, especially in providing technical expertise to the Meeting. We also received notice that George B. Steele, who had lived at a distance for some time, had passed. We provided an opening exercise on Quaker memorial services which constitute a gift of pastoral care provided to a bereaved family by the Birmingham community in which everyone has a part. We continue to seek ways to connect and interconnect with our members and attenders across generations and to appreciate the current participation and good will of our active spiritual community.

Administration

The Outreach Working Group has focused on updating Birmingham's website to make it more of an outreach tool, improving our promotion of the Chicken Barbecue and other Meeting activities. We have also been working on improving our signage to draw attention to the Peace Garden and to Birmingham events. Installing signs with QR codes allows visitors to easily connect with information on our website.

The Working Group on Committees has completed the first phase of their project of assessing the Meeting's needs for a more flexible and dynamic committee structure. The next step will be to suggest how best to meet those needs.

Birmingham recently transitioned to a new Office Manager, Sara Siacacchitano, who will be working at the meetinghouse on Mondays and

Tuesdays and also remotely. Her professional background includes web/graphic design, and her personal interests include blacksmithing. Cindy Spalding continues as our Bookkeeper.

Children and Youth Program

The year began with the Children and Youth Program (CYP) hosting almost 20 children aged 2 to 11 and their parents for the children's program of Concord Quarterly Meeting on the last Sunday in January. The committee was glad it had prepared thoroughly with numerous activities, games and snacks for the boisterous crowd. Parents enjoyed the opportunity to get acquainted and share parenting advice. It was a good experience to support the gathering of families in our Quarter on this special occasion.

In planning for 2025, the CYP committee affirmed its goals of continuing to guide experiential learning for children and youth and providing childcare for babies and toddlers every week. The adult guides presented stories; accompanied the children in their journeys of exploration, wondering and discovery; and appreciated that each child is growing and learning at their own pace. The committee also adopted an intention to provide a more consistent routine and place more emphasis on exposure to the fundamental elements of the Quaker way. Three new members joined the committee mid-year, bringing new energy, talents and rich offerings including baking and singing. Committee members were grateful for all the adults who showed an interest in the children and youth and supported the committee's work.

The CYP committee was delighted to welcome a few new families in 2025. The children's group ranged in age from 3 to 8 years, and two older ones entered middle school. Youth program for middle school and high schoolers, separate from Youth Committee, met periodically with adults who brought topics for discussion that ranged from an introduction to conscientious objection to origami to Robert Frost's poem *Mending Wall*.

The children and youth enjoyed service projects, and for their ministry of care of the Earth, they cleaned the Peace Stones and planted trees and seeds on

the property. Families deepened connections during swim time on Summer Sundays at the Quarry. Other time-honored traditions of the Meeting celebrated by our children, youth and families included the Easter Egg Hunt, outdoor worship and picnic at Westtown School, Pennies for Pumpkins, and the Friendly Beasts procession that opened the annual Christmas Carol Sing.

Over the summer, the committee discerned that the children were ready to hold their own weekly meetings for worship. They quickly came to their own routine of “getting ready” in the foyer, “crossing the threshold” in their room, settling onto carpet squares arranged in a circle, and “centering” in the silence. After a short period of worship, the program typically moved into singing, a story or other activity. Smiles spread across the worship room when the children return to “report” on their morning by leading everyone in song.

Youth Committee

The Youth Committee has been focusing on friendship this year. They enjoyed spending time together making many friendship bracelets. With the initial proceeds from the sale of these bracelets, they sent \$90 to World Central Kitchen for feeding the responders to the Los Angeles wildfires and displaced persons. Further sales provided the Heifer Project with \$300 towards a clean water project and \$30 for honeybees for a family. The youth also set up Birmingham’s traditional Giving Tree to collect \$1,913 in gift cards for Friends Association for the Care and Protection of Children. In friendship, they baked and sent cookies to five of our college kids. The Youth Committee joined with Fellowship Committee flipping pancakes at a breakfast for the Meeting, and they also hid the eggs for our children to find on Easter morning. Finally, they enjoyed their annual June brunch before summer break.

Library and Book Club

The Birmingham library increasingly reflects the interests of Meeting members as new books are added to the collection by request and through published reviews. The library is also supported by individuals who donate books,

old and new. These include books that reflect early Quaker thought that still resonates today and books that reflect the views of Friends worldwide.

Birmingham's book club continues to meet every other month. There are generally 12-15 participants in-person and on-line. The books are chosen by the group and include both fiction and nonfiction. A short biography of the author and book-related questions are presented and stimulate lively discussions.

Fellowship

The Fellowship Committee organized a variety of events this year to strengthen connection and community within the Meeting. In January, we joined with others in hosting the Concord Quarter in meeting for business, worship, and luncheon. In April, we sponsored a taco and movie night, as well as the beloved Easter Egg Hunt later in the month. In October, the Fellowship and Youth Committees collaborated to serve a hearty pancake breakfast for all to enjoy. In addition, the Fellowship Committee continues the cherished weekly tradition of organizing snacks and beverages after Sunday worship, creating a welcoming space for Friends and visitors alike to relax and share conversation. Periodic fellowship luncheons are also sponsored by other committees to provide such opportunities.

Chicken Barbecue

On August 9th, sun and perfect temperatures greeted Birmingham Meeting as we held our annual fun(d) raiser. Delicious entrees and desserts were enjoyed to the accompaniment of toe-tapping acoustic music. Many volunteers ensured good food and fellowship for the 204 guests served. Net proceeds of over \$3,600 were added to other Meeting funds to total over \$5,100 for donation to charities. Mark your calendars for this year's chicken barbecue to be held on August 1st.

Property

This was a year in which there were no major projects. However, it was a busy one. The ceiling in the worship room had sustained water damage from a leak. The source of this leak was located and repaired, and the ceiling was repaired and repainted. The roof was inspected and tiles replaced. All windows in

the meetinghouse were caulked and repainted. A section of the rear cornice was inspected and repainted, and the fuel tank was also painted.

Additionally, stonework was done to improve the Meeting's driveway and parking area. The gateway to the Peace Garden has been upgraded. A tree that had fallen across Birmingham Road damaged the wall surrounding our burial ground; mason work was done to repair the wall and its cap. In December, the Property Committee organized the annual grounds clean-up which had a nice turn-out.

Burial Ground South

The regular maintenance of our grounds continues. We have had some heavier expense due to the removal of an aged hemlock tree along the common property line with the former meetinghouse. This cost was shared between Birmingham Meeting and our neighbors beside the burial ground.

Peace Garden

Last year, a large spruce tree fell in the Peace Garden, taking down several trees and damaging the already outdated design of the garden. As a result, a Peace Garden design committee was formed, and in July, the Meeting approved entering into an agreement with the Flowers and More company to collaborate on this project. A new design was developed, with a particular emphasis on the Peace Stones and the central meditative space within the garden. Walking paths and seating areas were added, as well as trees and decorative stones. The plant materials are all native plants as per Meeting policy. The work to implement this new design began in October and is now complete.

We began last year with only one bee hive overwintering in the garden. In April, another nucleus colony was added which placed 5,000-10,000 bees with a queen into another hive, and the queen started laying her eggs immediately with a range of 1,000-2,000 eggs daily. The hive filled and over time came to match the existing colony in size and activity. Both hives have nice stores of honey and will soon be wrapped for protection over the winter.

Finance

Our Treasurer was pleased to report that Birmingham's budget showed a positive balance at the end of 2025, thanks to the generous contributions of the Meeting's members and attenders – yet another sign of the health of our community.

Alternatives to Violence

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is a series of experiential workshops offering nonviolent conflict resolution practices in prisons, schools, and community organizations worldwide. Two Birmingham Friends facilitate AVP workshops at the Howard R. Young Correctional Institution in Wilmington, Delaware.

Right Relationship with Lenape People

In 2025, the Right Relationship with Lenape People Working Group moved from learning and individual discernment into shared action, deepening both its impact and its connections with Native communities. The group was delighted to receive the Meeting's support for a corporate relationship with the Delaware Tribe of Indians through the Rose Pavluk Memorial Scholarship. We also made meaningful progress on projects such as a Peace Stone and native plantings for the Peace Garden and the donation of *This Very Ground, This Crooked Affair* to Birmingham's library. The group also engaged the wider Meeting through our much-loved opening exercise on the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address, hosted refreshments one Sunday as a way to invite others to learn about the working group, and marked the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women with a red color themed flower ministry arrangement. Individual leadings among group members continue to drive personal connections with various indigenous communities and like-minded Friends. The group enters 2026 with a growing sense of outward-focused service and deepening community.

West Chester Area Refugee Resettlement Project

The West Chester Area Refugee Resettlement Project (WCARRP) was formed in 2015, building upon a decades-long tradition within Birmingham Meeting of helping refugees as they resettle in this country. The group expanded to include volunteers from other faith communities and non-religiously affiliated volunteers in addition to Birmingham members.

The Colombian couple we welcomed in November of 2023 is now well-established. Both are employed and fully self-supporting. In January, WCARRP subsidized the couple's purchase of a second-hand car. Learning English is challenging, but both our friends continue taking ESL classes and are making progress. The couple submitted their applications for permanent residency in September.

WCARRP continues to serve as a support network for a Ugandan asylum seeker who arrived in this country in February of 2022. He has been employed as a home health care aide for some time and was promoted to a position evaluating program compliance in addition to his direct service hours. He has obtained his home care agency license from the Department of Health and approval to receive Medicare/Medicaid payment, and he is now in the process of establishing his own home care company.

Sadly, after being postponed twice already, his November 2025 asylum hearing has been postponed again and is now scheduled for January of 2026. Frustration with the system and the grief of prolonged separation from his family are weighing heavily on him. We continue to hold him in the Light as he perseveres through the asylum-seeking process and pursues his business dream.

Conclusion

We invite you to visit the Meeting's website at www.birminghamfriends.org for updates and additional information of interest. If you have any questions or would like to share any comments about this newsletter, we welcome you to contact any one of us listed below. May the new year 2026 bring peace and purpose to all in the days ahead.

In Love and Friendship,

Oversight and Pastoral Care Committee

Serita Spadoni, clerk

Lauren Buckalew

Stephanie Kirk

Barbara Knickerbocker

Ted Moon

Julie Senko

Marty Boston, *ex officio*