

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

<https://www.bethesdafriends.org/Newsletters>

<https://www.bethesdafriends.org/ad-hoc-committees#threshing>

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, from 1:00-2:30 p.m., 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.

Our session will be hybrid: you can choose to join us via Zoom or in-person at the Sidwell Friends Lower School campus. (Please RSVP for the in-person group, which will have limited capacity to meet Covid requirements. RSVP to forum@bethesdafriends.org.)

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?

Please use our [Contact Us form](#) to obtain the Zoom link, to RSVP, and/or to ask questions. You can also contact Gale T. (see the BFM Directory).