Summary of March 20th Program Hour

Query 1: What is the spiritual essence of our Meeting?

Participants variously described BFM as:
- A family
- A community
    - In service to others in our faith community and the broader communities/world in which we live
- A safe haven, a place of rest and respite
- Being like a corporate body
    - All the parts need to work for the whole to work for all

Regarding what our spiritual essence is, participants brought up:
- Corporate worship
    - Waiting together in silence with a patient, open, loving heart
    - For messages from the Divine, which we all have the potential to access
    - The silence can nourish and renew us, so we can bring a little more clarity and perspective into the coming week
- Our Faith and Practice
    - Believing there is that of good/God in everyone
    - Trying to live the Testimonies individually and as a community
    - The whole is greater than the sum of its parts: worship and the work of the community that help us connect, and connection helps us to open to others, to grow, and to work on the challenge of responding to that of God in others in Meeting and in the world
- Being seekers in community
    - Also seeking community
    - We support and challenge each other in our seeking/spiritual journeys
    - We don't have a creed and we don't all believe the same thing. But we have an appreciation and respect for one another as we seek and as we speak and hear one another. There is a collective humility, an acknowledgement of a deeper mystery together in humility
- Interconnectedness, the God in all of us. That is the essence.

Query 2: What are the practices and processes that get us closer to - or detract from - our sense of connection within the Meeting

Participants shared the things that bring a closer sense of connection include:
- Meeting for worship provides a sense of personal and spiritual connection
- Sharing joys and sorrows at rise of meeting for worship
- Worship sharing
- Spiritual journeys
- Potlucks

- Participation in extended families
- Quaker studies
- SNAG participation
- Letter writing (PSJ sponsored)
- Workdays
- Committee work
    - Quaker committee structure is valuable, allows friends to season information, ideas, leadings before they come to the full Meeting
    - A way to get to know a smaller group of people in meeting and feel more connected
- Participating in Business Meeting
    - When we allow silence between speakers, are able to listen to each other and set aside ego
- Activism in the community and the world (harder as we age)
- Wedding and memorial services
- Choosing where and how to serve: where does your deep joy meet needs?

Things that participants report detract from a sense of connection:
- Families tend to fall away, perhaps because First Day School is somewhat isolated from the rest of the Meeting, and families are focused on kids' needs?
- Quakers are a well kept secret - if we don't let people know we are here, we will continue to dwindle… how do we attract more younger people?
- Too many committees exhaust, stifle and overwhelm, can also lead to divisiveness, detract from our sense of being one whole community
    - Replace with interest groups? Individuals performing tasks?
- Worrying about money
- Business Meetings
    - When there is a lack of respect, impatience, not listening to each other
    - A few participants tried Business Meeting and did not find the process was open hearted or people were kind
- COVID has splintered our community into several smaller communities
    - Though some participants enjoy Zoom breakout room social groups after worship, and many appreciate the convenience of holding committee and Business Meetings on Zoom versus gathering in person
    - Some are enjoying being back in the Meeting House for worship and socializing, others have tried coming back and have found they are not comfortable
- Keep groups more open and inviting to all (extended families etc can feel exclusionary)
- One participant is baffled by the amount of time spent writing Minutes as our statements to the world….we are not an evangelical church!