

Central Committee 2016 Highlights

As our governing board, Central Committee members have the joyous and demanding responsibility of gathering with other Friends from across the US and Canada to discern how FGC faithfully can serve its member yearly and monthly meetings with vitality and spiritual depth.

FGC has been through two years of contraction in response to budgetary challenges. Having done significant work to make FGC more financially sustainable, Central Committee celebrated the opportunity to turn our attention in the year ahead to strengthening ongoing programs, and to preparing for an institutional assessment focused on addressing systemic racism and fostering faithful inclusion.

Here are some highlights of the governing board's time together in worship, fellowship, and discernment.

Institutional Assessment

Central Committee united around the need to undertake institutional assessment to uncover structural racism within our organization – and to prepare plans for dismantling such structures. We heard from many yearly and monthly meetings about the importance of taking this step. As part of our commitment to collaborate with our affiliated yearly and monthly meetings, we will be sharing our learnings from this assessment with Friends across the USA and Canada.

Although structural oppression doesn't diminish the presence of the Spirit in us or the vision of a “great people to be gathered,” it does create barriers that are stumbling blocks to full participation by many in our faith community. In dismantling these stumbling blocks, we must tap into the power of the Spirit while acknowledging the truth that structural oppression and systemic racism does spiritual violence to us all. To be faithful in this time we must do more than admit that such oppression and attitudes of privilege exist. We must act to eliminate them if we wish to be fully inclusive in ways that are more than mere words.

After getting bids from anti-racism consulting firms and building a draft budget, it's become clear that this assessment may cost as much as \$60,000. We will need financial support from meetings and individual Friends on top of their regular support for the FGC's ongoing programs and services. We do have some pledges in hand for this work, but we need many more.

Governance

FGC is exploring a new governance structure that maintains a dual board structure, but allocates responsibilities differently between the larger body that meets once per year and the smaller body that meets multiple times per year. The smaller body would be the primary governing body having the ability to lay down programs and responsibility for approving the budget. The larger

board (called the General Assembly and similar to our current Central Committee) would meet once a year and have responsibility for approving members of the Governing Board. It would also season major proposals to be considered for final decision by the Governing Board. This new structure has been proposed to give FGC the ability to make more timely decisions.

The working group who developed this proposed new governing structure will be informed by the feedback it received at Central Committee. We look forward to hearing about the next version of the proposal from the working group.

More information about this proposed restructuring will be going to our affiliated yearly meetings and directly affiliated monthly meetings in the near future for their consideration and input.

Spiritual Deepening

After careful planning and preparation, our long anticipated Spiritual Deepening Program launched on October 24. The first eight week online Spiritual Deepening group is underway and the next will begin in December. A number of local meetings have embarked on the small group portion of the program. Three topics comprising the first set of the program are available for use of Friends of all ages. Meetings are invited to engage with the Spiritual Deepening Program, which is a pay-as-led program with a suggested donation of \$20 per participant per set. We look forward to additional sets of topics becoming available on a quarterly or semi-annual basis throughout 2017 and beyond.

Those of us attending Central Committee enjoyed a taste of the Spiritual Deepening Program through an exercise using a Pennington quote as springboard into reflections about the seed(s) God is sowing in our hearts at this moment. We were excited about FGC sharing this type of spiritual reflection and community building with other Friends. We encourage meetings who are looking to reinvigorate their religious education efforts to explore whether the Spiritual Deepening program would speak to their needs.

FGC Gathering

The 2017 Gathering will be in Niagara, NY, with the theme “Ripples Start Where Spirit Moves.” Plenary speakers have been chosen and their names and topics will be available online before the end of the year. We were reminded that People of Color have often experienced the Gathering sites as unwelcoming or hostile. Because of that, the Gathering Sites Selection Committee has been reconstituted to include a majority of Friends of Color in hopes of addressing this issue.

Budget

We have made tremendous strides toward cutting our expenses. As we move forward, we are focusing on communicating with Friends about the quality and impact our programs. We expect that this will increase engagement with FGC, and will also increase financial support. We need

that increased financial support so that we can further reduce the amount we are drawing from reserves each year.

Other Programs

QuakerBooks FGC continues to operate a walk-in bookstore at Pendle Hill and an online bookstore, www.quakerbooks.org. Over the past year, we have improved our inventory control and customer service systems. We depend on Friends patronage to provide this important service.

Quaker Press is actively soliciting proposals for new books and pamphlets related to FGC's major goals and programs.

Our **Christian and Interfaith Relations Committee** brings Quaker perspectives to ecumenical and interfaith events. It also connects us with faith-based conversations about truth, justice, and reconciliation.

The **Quaker Cloud** has recently undergone a number of technical improvements and a new way of providing customer support as we seek to provide meetings with an easy to maintain, low cost, and feature rich website that includes a minute manager and member directory.

Our **Ministry on Racism** offers assistance and support to meetings and yearly meetings that want to develop their racial and ethnic awareness, increase their diversity, and strive to address the impact of racism on our Society. Specific projects include the Pre-Gathering Retreat for People of Color and their Families, and organizing Friends to attend the annual White Privilege Conference (WPC). Last spring more than 400 people from Friends meetings and institutions attended WPC.

Faith & Play[™] volunteers continue to create new curricula to explore Quaker practice and faith via the powerful Faith & Play methodology. This group works autonomously with support from FGC.

Friends Meeting House Fund provides loans for meetinghouse purchases and remodels, and some limited grants as well.

These programs and projects are only possible due to the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donors across the United States and Canada. We are grateful for this support. Together we nurture the spiritual vitality of the Religious Society of Friends and nourish one another's lives.