Embracing Change

2015 Annual Report

FGC

photograph by Marta Rusek
In addition, more than 300 volunteers contributed more than $55,000 in unreimbursed expenses in FY15.

FGC’s Finances Over Time ($000’s)

For more information about FGC’s finances, please visit fgcquaker.org/finances.
Dear Friends,

We are called to change.

In August of last year, we learned that FGC needed to be more clear about our core mission and tighten the focus of our programs and services in order to fulfill that mission. We needed to lay down good work in order not to be reliant on periodic special fundraising campaigns. This was not easy to hear, nor to implement.

Barry Crossno and I set about listening. We engaged in many conversations, testing ways forward, trying to understand how Spirit would have FGC serve. After we spent hours on the phone and in meetings with FGC stakeholders and Central Committee members, three areas of focus emerged. In its October meeting, Central Committee approved three fundamental organizational priorities: supporting and promoting collaboration among the Yearly and Monthly Meetings that are FGC, growth in the Religious Society of Friends, and inclusiveness in our communities. In support of these priorities, Central Committee identified a set of ministries reflecting these priorities, and a budget plan creating a path to a financially sustainable future. This required that some of the valuable work of FGC be recognized, honored, and then laid down or released.

I hope you will share my excitement about our new program, Spiritual Deepening, and my satisfaction that collaboration, growth, and inclusiveness are being well nurtured by our other ongoing programs.

You have been, and continue to be, an important part of FGC and its work as we answer the call to change. We continue to benefit from your generous gifts of service, prayers, and financial contributions. Thank you so much!

In Service,

Frank Barch, Presiding Clerk

FGC 2016 staffing is 15.5 full-time equivalents
As FGC volunteers and staff have traveled among yearly meetings, you have shared with us that seekers, individual Friends, and meetings yearn to explore how Quaker spiritual practice can transform lives and take Friends deeper in the life of the Spirit.

Spiritual Deepening

The Spiritual Deepening Program will gather Friends into small groups to encounter key aspects of Quaker faith and practice. With the assistance of trained facilitators from your meeting, groups will explore the depth of Quaker spiritual experience. Dozens of volunteers from 23 yearly meetings have contributed to the design and content of this program, and we are committed to sharing both the diversity and the commonality of our faith and practice.

Meetings will become more grounded in the fundamentals of our faith.

More Friends’ spiritual lives will be transformed through faithfulness.

Furthermore, seekers in your area will have an opportunity to substantively explore the Quaker path and participate in the life of your meeting.

What’s Next for Spiritual Deepening?

• The Spiritual Deepening Program was piloted last summer with overwhelmingly positive feedback. It will be available to your meeting this fall.
• Groups will form online and in person to explore intergenerational, adult-only, or child-only materials.
• Specific steps for welcoming and integrating newcomers are recommended as part of the overall program.
Traveling Friends

After 20 years and over 350 visits to local meetings, the FGC Traveling Ministries Program was laid down in October 2015. This decision was not an easy one. The visits conducted through Traveling Ministries not only served Friends, but informed FGC about the needs of Friends and meetings across the US and Canada.

Yet we heard from meetings that while Traveling Ministries was important, you had a greater need for programs such as Spiritual Deepening that help you share the depth and transformative power of Quaker faith and practice. We are choosing to shift our resources to programs that we can make broadly available to meet that need.

We have been blessed by the faithful service of the volunteers who guided the Traveling Ministries program, the staff who supported it, and the Friends who traveled in the ministry or as companions. This program helped meetings deepen worship and grow closer together.

What’s Next for Traveling Friends?

We know that the work of Friends traveling in the ministry is far from over. Meetings are invited to visit fgcquaker.org/visitors for a list of Friends who are willing to travel in the ministry. Other wider Quaker organizations have also started their own programs:

- Traveling Ministry Corps, Friends World Committee for Consultation: fwccamericas.org
- Living Letters Program, Friends United Meeting: fum.org

Additional resources may be available from your yearly meeting.

photograph by Colby Abazs
Beloved Community

Bringing Friends Together

Each year, the FGC Gathering is a place of growth, worship, and learning. The 2015 Gathering, Seeking Wholeness, brought together over 1,300 Friends. The week was enriched by an evening program with Parker Palmer, among others. This massive undertaking is supported by 4 staff members (2 of whom are seasonal) and over 200 volunteers.

Finding Friends at the Gathering . . .

. . . Friends to help you feel at home.
The Gathering is a place to meet Friends who share your concerns, gifts, theology, and stage of life. Whether you’re 6, 13, 35, or 90, you can find Friends like you at the Gathering.

. . . Friends to help you grow.
The Gathering is a place to meet Friends who have different perspectives, ideas, and concerns. You can find Friends to help you stretch, explore, and discover new ways of being Quaker.

. . . Friends called to ministry.
The Gathering is an opportunity for Friends to develop and share their gifts and leadings, whether as leaders of workshops and other events or in conversation and community.

Financing our Meeting Houses

In the last 60 years, Friends Meeting House Fund (FMHF) has loaned or granted more than $4,600,000 to more than 200 Quaker meetings in 18 yearly meetings. FMHF provides support and expertise for renovating, building, purchasing, and updating meeting spaces. You can apply for a loan from the FMHF at fgcquaker.org/fmhf.
Friends Addressing Racism

“In order to know God, we have to know all the faces of God.”
— Jean-Marie Prestwidge Barch, Central Committee

This sentiment has become one of the rallying cries of FGC’s Ministry on Racism program, which works with individual Friends and Quaker meetings to challenge white privilege and oppression. The Ministry on Racism holds retreats for Friends of Color, and supports individual Friends and yearly meetings as they seek to challenge racism. FGC-facilitated Quaker attendance at the White Privilege Conference has increased every year since 2011.

Enriching Relationships in Community

Since 1968, Couple Enrichment has been a program of Friends General Conference. Following a successful training at the 2015 Gathering, there are now 21 active leader couples providing couple enrichment programs to Friends across the US and Canada. In January 2016, Friends Couple Enrichment became an independent organization to coordinate the work of the leader couples. The new organization will offer couple enrichment workshops throughout North America in 2016. Also, two workshops will be offered at the 2016 FGC Gathering.

Learn more about Friends Couple Enrichment at friendscoupleenrichment.org

Representing Friends

FGC strives to build greater understanding across religious divisions, with both Christian and other faith traditions. Christian Interfaith Relations Committee (CIRC) represents FGC in large ecumenical and interfaith events, such as the Parliament of World Religions and the World Council of Churches. CIRC also represents us to other branches of the broader Quaker community.
Epistle from Central Committee

Central Committee is FGC’s governing board. Following are excerpts from the epistle written at the end of Central Committee’s Annual Meeting.

To Friends Everywhere:

This weekend, over 130 Friends from fifteen yearly meetings and several directly affiliated monthly meetings gathered at the Pearlstone Retreat Center in Reisterstown, Maryland, to discern the future direction of Friends General Conference. We had hard choices to make. We had hoped to be talking about extending and expanding our programs. . . .

We have come to realize that Friends General Conference cannot continue to rely on infusions of wealth from periodic fundraising campaigns, and must learn to make do with what comes in each year to our annual fund, supplemented by prudent spending from our reserves. Although this lesson has been a painful one, we feel confident in moving forward that we are approaching solid ground. We have agreed on program cuts that will bring us closer to a balanced budget, and are committed to living into a long-term sustainable budget. We know that the process of periodically pruning programs and refining goals is normal and natural, and we have seen other Quaker organizations go through a similar process in the past few years.

We have chosen to focus on three main goals:

• Fostering and nourishing collaboration among yearly and monthly meetings
• Growing and strengthening the Religious Society of Friends, and
• Fostering more inclusive community. . . .

We have approved these changes [to FGC’s programs] with a heavy heart, understanding the impact they will have on our committees and our beloved staff. Nevertheless, we face the future with faith and hope. . . .

As the governing body of Friends General Conference, we are committed to shepherding FGC to a sustainable future, so that it can serve the Religious Society of Friends for years to come. We might think of FGC as a blanket of many colors, knitted by many hands. Though some colors of yarn are added over time, and others dropped, the work is never lost, and the blanket warms us all. We have been humbled and strengthened by our experience this weekend, and look forward to faithfully carrying forward the work and ministry of Friends General Conference.

Approved October 25, 2015 at the Annual Meeting of Friends General Conference’s Central Committee.
Collaborating with Local Friends

Friends General Conference creates opportunities for *yearly meetings to collaborate* and nurture a vital and growing Religious Society of Friends. It is our goal to complement and supplement the programming of the yearly and monthly meetings that together create FGC. Your voice matters, and we are exploring ways to move into a more robust relationship with Friends in our affiliated yearly and monthly meetings.

**We hope that you will be a part of this unfolding conversation . . .**

. . . *With your representatives*

Each yearly meeting sends representatives to FGC’s Central Committee and Executive Committee. Currently, FGC’s Central Committee is comprised of 136 Friends from 17 yearly meetings. They guide and participate in our work year-round, and they meet once a year to discern major work for the coming year.

Executive Committee meets quarterly to season proposals about programming and our organizational direction. *The Friends in the sidebar represent you at Executive Committee meetings.* If you’d like to serve Friends as a member of Executive or Central Committee, please start a conversation with your yearly meeting’s nominating committee.

Who Represents You on Executive Committee?

- **Alaska YM**
  - David Bantz
- **Baltimore YM**
  - Linda Goldstein
- **Canadian YM**
  - Linda Foy
- **Illinois YM**
  - Janice Domanik
- **Intermountain YM**
  - Martha Roberts
- **Lake Erie YM**
  - Helen Hebben
- **New England YM**
  - Chelle Rendeau
- **New York YM**
  - Anne Pomeroy
- **Northern YM**
  - Stephen Lyrene
- **Ohio Valley YM**
  - Paul Kriese
- **Philadelphia YM**
  - Carl Stanton
- **Piedmont Friends YM/PFF**
  - John Hunter
- **SAYMA**
  - Sharon Annis
- **Southeastern YM**
  - Ed Lesnick
- **South Central YM**
  - Gretchen Haynes
- **At Large**
  - Elizabeth Piersol Schmidt (PhYM)
  - Arthur Meyer Boyd (BYM)
  - Karen Snare (NYYM)

*photograph by Marta Rusek*
Embracing Change

“The underlying key to our renewal, I believe, is not in reinventing or repackaging or rebranding ourselves. It’s naming and claiming and sharing with others the spiritual treasures we’ve always possessed—treasures sometimes hidden from us by our familiarity with them, and too often hidden from others by our reluctance, even inability, to talk about them.”

— Parker Palmer, at the 2015 FGC Gathering

Parker Palmer spoke at the 2015 FGC Gathering.

Online Outreach

FGC’s online presence continues to be a source of information for spiritual seekers. Over 80,000 visitors to the FGC website last year went directly to the “FAQs About Quakers” page or QuakerFinder. For these newcomers, FGC’s website is a gateway into the wider world of Friends.

Quaker communities find the resources they need online, as well. The Grow Our Meetings Toolkit (fgcquaker.org/grow) offers guidance and tools for Friends who want to welcome new life into their meetings and do outreach.

More than 120 meetings use Quaker Cloud Services for their websites. FGC Quaker Cloud has a dedicated staff who work diligently to support the website, and engage with Quaker Cloud users around tech questions and development of their Meeting pages. Meeting participants are supportive and many are enthusiastic. This service is now two years old. We’ve received a great deal of constructive feedback, and we’re looking at future directions for the Quaker Cloud.

What’s Next for Outreach?

• Online groups of the Spiritual Deepening Program will be tailored to newcomers and seekers.
• The Spiritual Deepening Program will support Friends who are enthusiastic about welcoming newcomers into the life of their meetings.
• The Grow Our Meetings Toolkit (fgcquaker.org/grow) will continue to help meetings grow in health and numbers.
Gratitude for QuakerQuest

In 2007, FGC and a number of yearly meetings brought QuakerQuest across the Atlantic from Britain Yearly Meeting. After eight years of growth and having served 89 meetings, FGC's QuakerQuest program has concluded. QuakerQuest was formally laid down as a program of FGC in October 2015. Based on our experience with QuakerQuest, we are moving our resources towards helping monthly and yearly meetings create deep religious education experiences. We want to help meetings feel a strong grounding in our faith and practice so they can confidently do outreach.

QuakerQuest contributed to the revitalization of Friends meetings by:

• Helping monthly meetings welcome more than 1,000 seekers
• Creating opportunities for deepening the spiritual connections among meeting members and attenders
• Energizing the conversation about outreach in the Religious Society of Friends
• Training traveling facilitators who grew in their knowledge of and passion for the Religious Society of Friends

We're grateful to the Shoemaker Foundation and many individual donors and volunteers like you who made this transformative work possible. Having both served the majority of the meetings that were interested in QuakerQuest programming and spent the special funds raised specifically for the program, we are turning our attention towards other programs.

During in the QuakerQuest experience, many meetings expressed aspirations for deeper worship and stronger fellowship, which can be served through the Spiritual Deepening Program.
Experiments with Forming New Meetings

The New Meetings Project supported 23 new Quaker communities with consultations, resources, and mentorship, and fielded inquiries from at least 80 groups. We are grateful to the Shoemaker Foundation and a number of individual donors for making this three-year experiment possible. While we will not be taking any new meetings under the care of the New Meetings Project, the New Meetings Toolbox is still available online at fgcquaker.org/newmeetings.

Even though the project has been laid down, we honor the mentors who continue to walk alongside their assigned new meetings. The New Meetings Project refined a model of mentorship that we hope to use in training local Spiritual Deepening facilitators.

Grow Our Meetings Toolkit

Many Quakers deeply long to see our meetings grow—to experience deep and grounded worship, to participate in a thriving and active community life, and to share the gift of Quaker practice and faith with the wider world.

Rather than a fixed sequence of activities, the Toolkit provides for each topic a collection of resources, facilitation guides for activities, and ideas to spark creativity and momentum. The toolkit is available for free at fgcquaker.org/grow.
Ministry of the Word

Publishing

For more than fifty years, QuakerPress of FGC has published books, pamphlets, and curricula. Many of these titles are still in print or are now available as e-books.

In late 2014, QuakerPress published the award-winning Bayard Rustin: The Invisible Activist. Illustrated with over sixty photos, this book for middle-schoolers shares a well-rounded biography of Bayard Rustin as a gay man, African American, pacifist, civil rights organizer, and Quaker.

A Bookstore for the Spiritually Curious

Online and in-person, QuakerBooks helps Friends and seekers explore spirituality, Quaker history, and the practice of our faith.

This was a year of changes for QuakerBooks. In September of 2014, we launched a new version of the QuakerBooks.org website. We heard that the user experience was not as smooth as our customers would like. We listened, and we’ve already started to make improvements to the checkout process. We will be rolling out additional changes in the coming months.

FGC also experimentally relocated the QuakerBooks walk-in bookstore to Pendle Hill, a Quaker study, retreat, and conference center just outside of Philadelphia. The experiment has gone well in its first year. We have heard from many Friends that QuakerBooks is an important ministry of FGC and they are glad to see us partner with Pendle Hill. We are committed to serving Friends’ need for spiritual writings, and we hope that this new location will allow us to continue this ministry well into the future.

photograph by Marta Rusek
Nurturing Young Friends

Children’s Religious Education

Religious Education has been a part of FGC since its inception in 1900. This work continues through Sparkling Still, an RE curriculum for young people ages 3-8, and the thread of intergenerational activities in the Spiritual Deepening Program.

In 2015, FGC created activity pages to print and use with children who come to meeting for worship. They are available at fgcquaker.org/children.

FGC also sponsors the Faith & Play program used by First Day School teachers throughout the US and Canada.

The first Godly Play® training with Quakers was hosted by Philadelphia Yearly Meeting ten years ago. Two years later, FGC, in partnership with PhYM, published a Quaker supplement to Godly Play® called Faith & Play™: Quaker Stories for Friends Trained in the Godly Play® Method. In the fall of 2015, 42 new storytellers from 20 monthly meetings and Friends school communities attended FGC-sponsored Faith & Play™ trainings.

In 2016, we expect to add two or three new stories to the Faith & Play™ collection.

Empowering Youth Leaders

High school and young adult Friends practice self-governed Quaker business process at the FGC Gathering. Each year, the groups nominate clerking teams to serve at the following Gathering.

In 2015, 11 young clerks gathered for a weekend-long clerking workshop. In the past decade, we’ve seen many of these former youth clerks go on to assume positions of leadership in their home Quaker communities and within FGC.
Message from the General Secretary

Dear Friends,

This is an important time for FGC. We are called to change—to let go of some ministries as we simultaneously embrace new ones. I am grateful to you and so many Friends whose discernment, support, and dedication make it possible for FGC to evolve and serve.

From QuakerBooks to Faith & Play™, and from Spiritual Deepening to the Ministry on Racism, we are embracing change to foster new growth among Friends. Together, we are supporting collaboration among yearly meetings, growth in the Religious Society of Friends, and inclusiveness in our local communities.

FGC needs your support to do this ministry. Please consider giving generously to FGC today. You can use the enclosed envelope or donate online at fgcquaker.org/give.

Thank you for everything that you do in service of the Religious Society of Friends. It is a blessing to share this journey with you.

In the Spirit,

Barry Crossno, General Secretary