

Friends,

Your 2019 - 2020 representatives to Friends General Conference, Sally Weaver-Sommer, Valerie Groszmann and Marvin Barnes are pleased to report on events and circumstances in Friends General Conference.

For Friends who are not familiar with Friends General Conference, FGC is a North American Quaker association of 16 Quaker yearly and 12 monthly meetings in the United States, Canada and Mexico, who choose to be members. FGC was founded in 1900. A key program of FGC is the annual Gathering of Friends held at a different college campus every July. The event usually attracts attenders from around the world, but most participants come from the United States and Canada. The event features 55-60 workshop and a slate of plenary speakers. Topics covered include Quaker faith and practice, arts and crafts, multigenerational programming, and opportunities for political dialogue and action. The Gathering hosts both Quaker and non-Quaker speakers focusing on messages of interest to Quakers." FGC also supplies Friends with programming and other resources such as Quaker Books at FGC to help Friends in their spiritual journeys.

During the past year FGC has had to deal with a number events, both internal and external, that have had a profound effect on the organization. Recently, an update to the governing body of FGC, Central Committee, was published. This update will give the reader an overview of the past year including the effects of COVID-19 on the organization.

Update for Central Committee on FGC Actions & Status During the Covid -19 Crisis

FGC staff and committees seek to be of service in a myriad of ways during this Crisis. Here is a listing with links, followed by an update on our financial status.

Compiling Yearly Meeting News & Actions

Covid-19 Resources and news from monthly and yearly meetings: <https://fgcquaker.org/news/coronavirus-prevention-your-quaker-community-fgc-events>

The FGC Gathering

Gathering updates: <https://www.fgcquaker.org/connect/gathering/coronavirus-and-2020-gathering>

The 2020 in-person Gathering was cancelled for 2020 and rescheduled for 2021.

- o Sites for 2021 (Radford University) and 2022 (Western Oregon University) were approved by Long Range Conference Planning Committee and sent forward to Executive Committee.

- o Patsy and Tony Martin have agreed to serve as Gathering Co-Clerks for 2021 at Radford. FGC has received many notes of sadness, understanding, and support around the cancellation of the 2020 in-person gathering. A need for connection and community was clear so the Gathering organized 3 Worship opportunities for Friends to join together to release the 2020 Gathering. Between 25 and 55 Friends have participated at each worship.

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]Planning has begun for a Virtual 2020 Gathering

- A virtual gathering committee has met twice to discern program and schedule.
- A theme “Virtual Gathering 2020” rose organically from constituents and stakeholders. It became clear that FGC is the host and site of the Virtual Gathering.
- Virtual Gathering schedule is in development.
- There will be adult, Jr. Gathering, High School and AYF programming available.
- A young clerks training is being explored.
- Tech training and on-line facilitation training will be available to program leaders.
- The appropriate digital infrastructure is being established.

Opportunities for Friends to Worship & Share Virtual Fellowship

- Many FGC Friends were seeking workshop opportunities so a weekly Saturday meeting for worship at 9pm EDT for FGC friends was begun. Messages of gratitude come in weekly. Some Friends are attending who do not have weekly access to worship.
 - Committee for Nurturing Ministry members are taking turns hosting this worship opportunity. Register here to receive the Zoom link and phone numbers.
- Gathering staff is collaborating with various FGC groups including Quaker Earthcare Witness, FLGBTQC, Nontheist Friends, Adult Young Friends, & Friends of Color to offer worship sharing groups once a month in April, May, and June. There will also be an Open Worship Sharing Group.

QuakerBooks of FGC

- QuakerBooks is still fulfilling online orders. Spread the word!
- Publications & Distribution put together a collection of books and pamphlets to help Friends with grief and loss <https://quakerbooks.org/collections/support-in-grieving>.
- We'll be offering virtual author events through the online Gathering and at other times.

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Fund Raising Campaign Feasibility Study:

- The feasibility study has shifted to online group sessions and Zoom/phone confidential interviews.
- We decided to finish the feasibility study and are close to completion; the report will be available by spring Executive Committee meeting. Prior to the crisis, there was much positive feedback.
- At this moment, our consultant sees campaign-related planned giving work as viable in the next several months while a full campaign should not be launched until some level of economic recovery has been achieved. Some donors have independently echoed his recommendations.

Development:

- Conducting Pastoral Care of FGC donors – checking in our supporters and sharing updates. This will be ongoing. (We've been in touch with 35 of our top donors and Development Committee members are checking in with another 20 donors.)
- Applying for small grants for new online programming. We are communicating with funders about grants already received for programs that are no longer being held in person and requesting opportunities to use funds in a different manner since programs are moving online.
- Updated the annual report to reflect recent programmatic changes.
- Planning a special fundraiser focused around Gathering to help fill the gap from lack of registration income/challenges brought on by coronavirus in general.

CNM/Religious Education

- With many Yearly Meetings planning virtual instead of in-person annual session events, the Yearly Meeting Visitors Program is coordinating with FGC staff and Central Committee members to serve as "virtual visitors" to our affiliated yearly meetings. In addition to reporting about the technology and strategies that worked (or didn't work) in offering a virtual annual session, these visitors will prepare the traditional visitor report detailing the successes and challenges facing each yearly meeting. The YMVP serves a key role in helping yearly meetings learn from each other during this time of innovation.
- To serve the spiritual needs of Friends and newcomers experiencing social and spiritual isolation, the Spiritual Deepening eRetreat program quickly organized a Quarantine Calendar of online offerings, including an eRetreat, a weekly worship sharing group, and a book discussion group.

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The Ministry on Racism Program has responded to the COVID-19 Pandemic by:

- Added to our monthly worship for Friends of Color a weekly one held Wednesday afternoon.
- Providing a virtual retreat for Friends of Color in Intermountain, North Pacific and Pacific Yearly Meetings on April 18th
- Organizing weekly worship sharing, an open house for Friends of Color and events for the summer virtual Gathering.

The State of FGC Finances During the Crisis

- Like non-profits all over North America, Covid-19 is financially impacting FGC. There are steps we're taking to try to mitigate the damage. Here is where we are, the actions already taken and next steps.
- With the cancellation of the in-person Gathering and the fact that Gathering registration fees would have covered costs already expended such as some staff salaries, the total net loss on the Gathering for 2020 could be as high as \$275k. We are seeking ways to bring that number down.
- The bookstore usually sells \$20-25k worth of books at the Gathering and more through Yearly Meeting annual sessions consignments. While online sales have been a little better than usual, the bookstore will likely require a larger than projected ministerial subsidy this year.
- The \$275k Gathering net loss and additional bookstore subsidies are extra budgetary. The 2020 budget was approved to be \$67k beyond sustainable. Theoretically, we could therefore have to make draws beyond sustainable of almost \$350k this fiscal year on what was originally a \$2M budget.
- In terms of fundraising, we have not seen an appreciable decline in giving to this point. So we're not lowering our expected fundraising total very much for the remainder of this year unless giving changes in the coming months. We are having discussions about what fundraising goals we should have for 2021. This may take time to see whether Friends continue to give in order to come to a good estimate for 2021.
- Like everyone, our investments have lost value. Fortunately, Finance Committee pre-crisis recommended that we move \$300k from investments to a cash position. This means we do not have to liquidate depreciated stock at this time. However, the value of our portfolio in mid-July determines the amount of our recommended sustainable draw for 2021. We do not expect the stock market to have fully recovered by then and therefore, we will likely have a lower draw available to us in 2021 vs 2020. This will negatively impact our budget projections.
- The Friends Pension Fund has also been negatively affected by the stock market decline. We will therefore likely have to pay more to the pension fund in the coming year vs this fiscal year (last year we had to pay \$0.20 on each dollar of salary into the pension which was the highest ever). We will know more later in the year. This will also make the 2021 budget more challenging. The Pension Board will meet in June to talk options.

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What are we trying to do about all this?

- We applied for a \$200,200 loan from the federal relief CARES act, the maximum allowed based on our documentation. We were just approved to receive \$200,200 to help cover payroll and keep staff employed. Expecting the loan to be later forgiven, this could help us significantly lower this year's deficit and be close to the original projections approved by Central Committee in October 2019.
- Development staff is planning a special fundraiser to run in late April and early May in an attempt to help cover some of the Gathering losses. Please encourage Friends to be generous if they still have the resources to do so.
- We are in the process of determining a recommended (pay as led) attendance fee for the Virtual Gathering that we hope will make it accessible while providing some needed income.
- We continue to look closely at our expenses.
- Finance Committee had a video meeting this week and agreed FGC should stay the course on the FY 2020 budget for the moment. We should wait to see if loan forgiveness is approved and how fundraising and Gathering fees turn out before shifting course. Finance Committee's full spring meeting will be April 25th . They will then make recommendations to the May Executive Committee meeting on how best to steward our resources during this crisis and for the 2021 budget.

Authors: Barry Crossno, FGC General Secretary And Frank Barch, FGC Clerk

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In addition:

The Institutional Assessment Implementation Committee is now staffed with a diverse team of volunteers and beginning the tasks of implementing recommendations of the FGC Institutional Assessment on Structural Racism.

During the 2019 Central Committee sessions, the IAIC asked and Central Committee approved

1. An extension of the minute passed last year resolving that in all FGC decision-making processes each body shall answer the following query with respect to each decision, "How does this decision support FGC in its goal to transform into an actively anti-racist faith community?"
 2. A minute to collect demographic information regarding race and age of Friends in FGC affiliated Yearly and Monthly Meetings.
- In preparation of the completion of the second term of service for the current Presiding Clerk, Frank Barch, the Nominations Committee's made the recommendation that Marvin Barnes, the current Assistant Clerk, be the Rising Presiding Clerk. This nomination was approved.
 - FGC is evaluating and planning to improve its "Connector" function. This function is key keeping Friends informed to the many diverse activities and resources within the association and the Quaker community at large.

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- To help in the support of the various programs of FGC, the FGC Nominations Committee has begun consultations with Yearly Meeting Nominations Committees to keep each Yearly Meeting informed of the volunteer needs of the organization.

Respectfully Submitted by:

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LEYM FGC Representatives