

# AFSC Representative Report to Yearly Meeting

Submitted by Bill Warters (Birmingham), May 2025

I have served as an LEYM Representative to the AFSC Corporation since 2019, and have entered my final year of my second 3-year term in the position. In this report I provide some reflections on the state of AFSC and some highlights from this year's Annual Corporation Meeting held April 24-26, 2025 at Friends Center in Philadelphia. Also in attendance from LEYM was Chelsea Middlemiss (Red Cedar) who has just joined the AFSC Corporation representing LEYM this year and John Deikis (Ann Arbor) and Claire Cohen (Pittsburgh), serving as at-large members.

Overall, AFSC seems to be in good shape, having made its way through an extended and sometimes challenging strategic planning process to a point where it appears to now be well-positioned to respond to the current crisis created by the second Trump administration, particularly as it impacts humanitarian relief work, diversity and equity work, immigration, supporters of peace in Gaza, and the role of non-profits more generally. A recurring theme was *AFSC was built for times like these...* The 2025 Epistle from AFSC can be reviewed online:

<https://afsc.org/sites/default/files/2025-05/2025-afsc-epistle-final-1.pdf> Quaker Meetings interested in getting more involved with AFSC are invited to visit the Friends Engage page to get started: <https://afsc.org/friends-engage>

Financially, AFSC is on solid ground, with notable new donor growth in funds earmarked for support in specific areas of need (Gaza, Immigration Rights, etc) and level or slightly declining donations from long-time supporters to the general fund. In response to the change in the Federal administration and all the policy challenges ahead, early this year the AFSC Board released \$750,000 in an emergency response fund to enable various AFSC programs to nimbly respond to new risks and challenges. AFSC is also watching for the anticipated release of an executive order that may ask the IRS to revoke the tax-exempt status of certain nonprofits, either by name or through their areas of focus. AFSC believes these actions represent intimidation tactics and an attack on free speech. In the name of safety and security, physical and digital risk assessments are being carried out across the U.S. and International programs to better secure AFSC staff and program participants. It is a stressful time for frontline staff and across the leadership team. Crisis counseling is available for AFSC staff and their families as part of the AFSC benefits package, and staff are encouraged to make use of it.

## 2025 Annual Meeting of the Corporation

The **Annual Meeting** had the theme *Healing Through Justice: Our Collective Journey* and, in addition to the business sessions, it featured a number of powerful events highlighting AFSC's

work around healing and justice. The Thursday evening plenary featured Susan Abulhawa, a Palestinian author made famous by her debut novel *Mornings in Jenin*, translated into 30 languages, with over a million copies sold. She was born to refugees of the Six-Day War of 1967, when her family's land was seized and Israel captured what remained of Palestine. She shared painful details about the atrocities happening in Gaza, as well as some of the broader history of injustice in the region. The talk was frank, not holding back on the issue of United States complicity in the tragedy, and was a call to conscience for Friends in the audience.

On Friday a panel presentation highlighted the way that AFSC is positioned to work at many levels simultaneously, with the panel exploring AFSC Responses to new federal policy on detention and deportation. The session included a look at impactful on the ground work done by the local AFSC office in New Jersey, as well as across the United States with Know Your Rights trainings, and internationally in cooperation with the Quaker UN Program and the international peacemaking hub AFSC is part of.

On Friday evening, participants traveled to the Eastern State Penitentiary (a museum) where we had a tour, then dinner inside the prison, followed by programmed worship led by Francisco Burgos, executive Director of Pendle Hill. Eastern State Penitentiary was once the world's first true "penitentiary," a prison designed by Quakers to inspire penitence, or true regret, in the hearts of prisoners through experimental approaches to prisoner rehabilitation, such as solitary confinement. It was a remarkably powerful experience and a call for criminal justice reform in the United States.

The report from AFSC General Secretary Joyce Ajlouny was also quite moving, especially given that Joyce is a Palestinian and AFSC has staff inside Gaza that are at risk every day. Friends in attendance gathered in spirit to pray for the support of our staff, and Light and Love was felt strongly in the room. We learned about many notable actions by AFSC across a wide spectrum of areas of concern, such as pro-immigrant billboards in Colorado, New Jersey, New Hampshire and San Diego, successful work in North Carolina preventing evictions and promoting housing security, a big win to keep clean water affordable for Atlanta area poor, Third Tuesday activism trainings, and more.

On Saturday evening, a special program was organized entitled *Courage to Resist: Commemorating 50 Years Since Vietnam* that featured many AFSC alumni and a special display of materials from the AFSC Archives. The event featured a conversation with Claudia Krich, who with her husband, Keith Brinton, was co-director of the AFSC Quang Ngai program from March 1973 until July 1975. Drawing on her new book *Those Who Stayed* Krich offered a personal firsthand account of the collapse of the South Vietnamese government and the beginning of the new Provisional Revolutionary Government. Her vivid descriptions of those days emerged

primarily from readings from her journal, which captured the uncertainty, fear, and excitement as the North Vietnamese soldiers arrived.

## Workshops Highlighting AFSC Work

As part of the Annual Meeting, attendees were able to choose to attend several workshops, some of which were also offered online via Zoom.

**Me+We = Stalwart Solidarity: Prudence Crandall, Sarah Harris, & audacious allyship-- then and now**, exploring the transformative power of audacious allyship, using the historic relationship between Quaker activist Prudence Crandall and her student, Sarah Harris, hosted by the St. Louis Peacebuilding Program.

**From the Inside Out: AFSC Strategies Towards Abolition** by the New York/New Jersey Healing Justice program exploring the Prison Watch Program and the youth-centered Liberation Academy and Liberation Summer Camp.

**Sowing the Seeds of Justice** with the AFSC Peace by Piece New Orleans program using farming and urban gardening to build food sovereignty and security and support community organizing.

**Ending Life and Long Sentences in Michigan** with the Michigan Criminal Justice program exploring the work to end the state's over-reliance on excessive punishment.

**Peace Games Simulation** hosted by the Quaker UN Office put participants into country-based teams exploring regional issues in Northeast Asia, and the unique challenges and opportunities of negotiating and peacemaking in the twenty-first century.

Some AFSC highlights from the year just past include:

- In June 2024, after three years' effort, AFSC was able to support former AFSC Afghanistan staff and their families to relocate, given the danger they faced in their home country.
- A pilot Reparative Justice grant program completed its first year, extending \$5,000 grants to each of six community groups in the US focused on support for indigenous and African-American people, in local areas where AFSC works.
- Completion of negotiations with the five US staff unions representing AFSC staff and signing the final collective bargaining agreements in February.
- AFSC aligned with an international campaign targeting Vanguard's environmental practices being led by Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT), with a public endorsement released on Earth Day. Details at <https://eqat.org/campaign/>
- Migration Justice staff in the US are offering *Know Your Rights* training for immigrants. As enforcement actions become increasingly severe, these sessions have helped thousands

of educators and students, employers and workers, faith congregations, social service providers, health care workers and others to prepare for interactions with ICE or Border Patrol agents – and to share their training in the community. From January through March 2025, Just Migration Programs at the US Mexico Border, Colorado, Oregon and Florida conducted 75 Know Your Rights presentations, reaching over 2,250 people.

- This April, Joyce Ajlouny connected with the Nobel Women's Initiative (NWI) in Palestine and Jordan, visiting local women activists and supporters alongside Nobel Peace laureates Jody Williams, Dr. Shirin Ebadi, and Tawakkol Karman.
- Along with other members of the Washington Interfaith Staff Community, AFSC is sponsoring a series of Faithful Witness Wednesdays with Christian, Jewish and secular organizations gathering on Capitol Hill to call on Congress to show the moral courage to resist and reverse autocratic repression.
- AFSC also joined the steering committee of the upcoming 10% for All campaign, launching May 23rd which calls for global reductions in military budgets and reinvestment in peacebuilding. <https://10percentforall.org>
- Youth programming at international level has been revitalized. A key milestone was the co-created relaunch of the AFSC Youth Network with 120+ youth members from 13 countries, and 26 country focal points engaged. Internally, AFSC conducted five foundational youth work training workshops, involving nearly all youth-engaged staff.
- Quaker Engagement team produced yard signs in support of immigrant justice work, which AFSC is inviting Quaker meetings to display in front of their meetinghouses; so far, more than 100 free signs have been shipped in response to requests.
- *Lifelines: Aid workers in Gaza* is a new short film that provides a window into the lives and work of aid workers in Gaza in late 2024. The film follows Firas and Serena – two staff members from the American Friends Service Committee – as they provide humanitarian relief to Palestinians in Gaza who have been displaced due to relentless attacks from the Israeli military. Despite being displaced themselves and losing dozens of family members and loved ones, AFSC staff in Gaza have provided lifesaving aid to over 1.5 million internally displaced people. See it online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qGxVZrnOU2I>

## Five Recommended Ways to Engage with AFSC

### 1. JOIN AFSC's MEETING FOR WORSHIP.

Every week, AFSC hosts a virtual Meeting for Worship for Friends from across the globe. Embracing the practice of Quaker unprogrammed worship, we gather to bring our attention to witnessing injustice in our world and bolstering our solidarity with people facing oppression.

Come join AFSC to explore and experience the spiritual dimensions of activism and social justice. Join AFSC staff and Friends for worship: [afsc.org/meeting-worship](https://afsc.org/meeting-worship)

## **2. ENGAGE IN PUBLIC WITNESS FOR MIGRATION JUSTICE.**

Everyone deserves a chance to build a good life, regardless of where they were born or when and how they migrate. But right now, migrants are often subjected to harm and suffering. In the spirit of public witness, AFSC has yard signs with the message "QUAKERS WELCOME MIGRANTS WITH DIGNITY". Support migrant communities by requesting a sign for your meeting to display: [afsc.org/migration-signs](https://afsc.org/migration-signs)

## **3. HOST AN AFSC SPEAKER IN YOUR COMMUNITY.**

Around the world, AFSC staff are respected for their knowledge and commitment to addressing root causes of war and injustice. Whether you want to hear about an issue you're already passionate about or learn more about the work of AFSC, staff are excited to share their experiences and analysis with Friends. Learn more about AFSC's work by hosting an event: [afsc.org/host-event](https://afsc.org/host-event)

## **4. BECOME AN APARTHEID-FREE COMMUNITY.**

For decades, the Palestinian people have faced Israeli occupation and systematic human rights abuses that constitute apartheid. AFSC is working with Quaker meetings, other faith groups, and communities of conscience to cut all ties with Israeli apartheid and build an apartheid-free world. Join our movement by writing a minute to identify your meeting or church as an Apartheid-Free Community: [apartheid-free.org](https://apartheid-free.org)

## **5. BECOME AN AFSC LIAISON AND ENGAGE IN SPIRIT-LED ACTIVISM.**

Friends liaisons help organize Quaker communities to advocate for peace and justice at the grassroots level. Become a liaison and receive regular updates from AFSC to share with Friends in your community -- and mobilize them to action. Sign up to build peace with justice in your community: [afsc.org/liaison](https://afsc.org/liaison)