

## **Friends General Conference: June 2025 to June 2026**

This has been a year for big changes at Friends General Conference. For this verbal report I am highlighting a few.

### **Changes in Governance**

FGC adopted a new governance structure in October 2025 after nearly two years of discernment. A Governing Board replaces the Executive Committee and a Representatives Council replaces Central Committee. Each yearly meeting now names two representatives regardless of size, making participation simpler and more equitable. Friends may also serve on program committees without holding a representative role. Marvin Barnes of LEYM has served as Presiding Clerk for six years. Melissa Rycroft of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting has been named Rising Presiding Clerk and will assume the role later in 2026.

### **Staff Transitions and Restructuring**

Two beloved long-serving staff members retired. Vanessa Julye concluded 30 years of service and was the architect of the Ministry on Racism. In her honor, over 80 Friends raised \$20,000 for the new Vanessa Julye Fund within months of its launch. Liz Dykes, the heart of Gathering planning and coordination, also retired. These retirements coincided with a planned staff reduction as campaign-funded positions concluded.

### **The 2026 Gathering**

The in person Gathering is themed “A Window and a Door: A Prayer” and will be held July 7 through 12 2026 at the University of Vermont in Burlington. The theme is drawn from a poem by LVM Shelton who passed away in early 2025 and was a beloved Gathering workshop facilitator deeply connected to the Friends of Color community. Keynote speakers include Bryan Stevenson and Kazu Haga. Workshops this year run for four days rather than five reflecting a commitment to a simpler and more sustainable format.

### **The YAY Gathering and Budget**

The 2025 YAY Gathering was held July 2 through 6 at the Colombiere Retreat Center in Clarkston Michigan. It was understood from the start as an experiment in serving youth, young adults, and their families. It did not achieve the attendance or financial results we had hoped for in part because it fell over the July 4th holiday weekend which is a difficult time for families to travel. We are now looking at different times, locations, and formats for future intergenerational gatherings such as the one coming up this summer in Burlington Vermont.

## **Other Programs**

The Spiritual Deepening Program offers online eRetreats throughout the year. Each runs four weeks and is led by a seasoned facilitator. Topics include Silence and Light, Living into Wholeness, and Understanding and Healing White Supremacy. The suggested fee is \$35 to \$45 per participant on a pay as led basis open to Friends of all means. As a participant in these eRetreats I can say from experience that they have greatly enriched my spiritual life.

The Ministry on Racism continues its regular programming. It hosts weekly virtual worship and online retreats specifically for Friends of Color as well as separate worship spaces for white Friends confronting racism and white supremacy. In November 2025 it hosted its Fall Online Retreat for Friends of Color. A 2026 community read of *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship* was launched in honor of Vanessa Julye's retirement and is supported by the Vanessa Julye Fund. I am participating and encourage others to explore this opportunity.

QuakerPress publishes books for seekers, scholars, and everyday Friends alike. QuakerBooks is available online and in person at the Gathering.

A new Outreach and Visibility Committee was newly formed with the hope of sharing the Quaker faith more widely. We hope our communications will be clear, welcoming, and true to our values.

## **Litigation**

Friends General Conference joined an interfaith coalition challenging a federal executive order that removed protections for houses of worship from ICE enforcement. The case is ongoing and General Secretary Barry Crossno traveled to Washington in February 2026 for the appeal hearing. The legal team is taking the case for free. For more information please contact Friends General Conference at [fgcquaker.org](http://fgcquaker.org).

## **Public Witness**

In our ongoing commitment to public witness we stood with transgender, intersex, and nonbinary Friends on Transgender Day of Remembrance. In April 2026 we offered listening sessions to gather community input on a potential Lily Grant application. If received this grant would help us serve a broader and more diverse community of Friends.

## **A Note on Stewardship**

This organization depends on the generosity of meetings and individuals to sustain all of this work. Donations support our programs and the Annual Fund is the single largest source of contributions. A young person may find their spiritual home at the Gathering. A Friend may deepen their practice through an eRetreat. A meeting may learn to become more welcoming. These programs touch our lives.

If the work on anti-racism has touched your life or your meeting's life please consider a gift to the Vanessa Julye Fund. If the Gathering has ever meant something to you please consider giving in honor of Liz Dykes who devoted her career to making it a home in so

many Friends' hearts. Donations may go to specific funds or the general operating budget. We encourage all Friends to read about giving at [fgcquaker.org](http://fgcquaker.org).

Respectfully submitted,

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