

## **Epistle from the 2015 Annual Meeting of the FGC Central Committee**

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. Instead, we spent the weekend deciding how to strengthen our fiscal foundations in the wake of a feasibility study that lifted up questions about how we use our resources.

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 are regretfully laying down our traveling ministries program, and will be unable to continue Quaker Quest and New Meetings, which were funded by grants that have now run out. We will be discontinuing our self-publishing program, QuakerBridge. Couple Enrichment, which has been under FGC's care for 47 years, will continue as a largely independent project. We have approved these changes 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. Most of the services offered by FGC are still available to Friends, as are the resources developed by past programs. QuakerBooks required less of a subsidy than expected this year and seems to be going strong in its new premises at Pendle Hill. In addition to the traditional book tables, it is partnering with Quaker and Fair Trade vendors to offer new kinds of merchandise. Our new Spiritual Deepening program will soon be available to monthly meetings everywhere. The Quaker Cloud is beginning to reach its potential as a Quaker web collaborative, responsive to Quaker needs, and is providing services to a growing number of meetings. The FGC Gathering this past summer attracted far more Friends than expected, and our 2016 Gathering in St. Joseph, Minnesota promises to be just as wonderful. Our diversity work also continues, and we are actively preparing for the White Privilege Conference in Philadelphia in 2016 as part of the hosting team. This year at Central Committee, we devoted an evening to exploring and reflecting on the continuing destructive impact of the Doctrine of Discovery, and the efforts that are being

made by people of faith, including a number of our yearly and monthly meetings, to have it renounced.

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.

In the Spirit,

Frank Barch, Presiding Clerk

Barry Crossno, General Secretary

Approved October 25, 2015

at the Annual Meeting of Friends General Conference's Central Committee