

My report of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) annual Corporation Meeting held in Philadelphia from Thursday, 24 to Saturday, 26 April 2024 as representative of Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association (SAYMA).

Hugh Thomforde, member of Cookeville Monthly Meeting. cell: (931) 287-2826, email: hthomforde2@yahoo.com or hthomforde@gmail.com 31 June 2024

Traditionally, the highpoint to the AFSC annual Corporation meeting occurs toward the end, but this year the keynote speaker started things off on Thursday 24 April with resounding effect. [Jose Antonio Vargas](#), an openly-gay, openly-undocumented celebrity figure, provided a heart-wrenching, yet humorous, optimistic and defiant extemporaneous account of his [experiences](#), of how he established his place as “[an American without papers](#).” I felt as if he spoke to me, personally, in several ways. He spoke of his childhood in the Philippines. (During 7 years in the Philippines, I adopted 3 Filipino siblings, aged 6, 10 and 11.) He described how he learned that he was “illegal”: When he first applied for a driver’s license, he was told that his Green Card, given to him by his grandfather, was fake! (My middle child, Helen, had a similar experience in 1988, although her trauma was caused by an uninformed, rogue Alabama official who recanted as soon as I involved the ACLU.) Jose Antonio Vargas described how he successfully shelters himself from well-intentioned government bureaucrats, from the IRS to Homeland Security, by creating his own company, *Undocumented LLC*, which operates within Federal and State law. (This again spoke to me because my wife and I have been providing a lot of support for a young, undocumented person who set up her own licensed business in our covertly white-supremacist Tennessee County. [Here](#) is an un-vetted example of the approach.) The link to Jose Antonio Vargas’ address to AFSC was taken off the website after a month due to contractual agreement. However, this [Radiolab podcast](#) of 24 November 2023 reflects a similar content.

On Friday morning, 25 April, in the historic Race Street Meeting House, Álvaro Alvarado, AFSC Board Clerk, led the roll-call of Yearly Meetings. (This led to my acquaintance with Dianne Raleigh of Atlanta Meeting. She was there as a member at-large of the AFSC board.) A number of routine matters were covered, including approval of the minutes of the 2023 annual meeting, and my appointment as 1 of 5 to the Ad Hoc Committee to Name the Standing Nominating Committee.

Joyce Ajlouny, AFSC General Secretary, then presented her [annual report](#), starting with a review of AFSC’s mission: commitment to the principles of nonviolence

and restorative justice, seeking through work and witness to draw on the power of love, serving the most marginalized peoples by standing respectfully and knowledgeably with them. She reviewed AFSC's work: peace-building, human immigration, economic justice, prison reform, relief during disasters, quiet international diplomacy as well as similar work domestically, material aid for refugees and displaced families, and to feed and clothe victims of war.

Joyce Ajlouny spoke most passionately of her Palestinian heritage, of trauma on all sides of the Middle Eastern conflict, particularly since the Hamas attack on Israeli civilians, and longstanding systematic apartheid inflicted by the government of Israel on her people. She also invited all in attendance (some 60 of us!) to please approach her during the course of the gathering. She is about 10 years younger than me (I am 69), she grew up in the West Bank under Israeli occupation since she was 2. She told me that she currently finds her bed-rock-support from an informal group of Palestinian women activists in the DC area. She attended, and eventually served 13 years as head of, Ramallah Friends School. She also was Country Director for Oxfam in Israel and Palestine. In a small-group setting, she answered questions: The recent Gaza war has brought a surge of more than 7,000 first-time donors to AFSC. About 60% of Corporation members and 100% of board members donate regularly to AFSC. AFSC's current annual operating budget is \$48 million. AFSC maintains relations with people and communities in "pariah" states, such as North Korea, Myanmar and Somalia, and supports human rights work among immigrant communities. Blaming immigrants has long been a way to sow seeds of violence. Everywhere, immigrants need more support. AFSC works for peace and justice "from the inside" to reduce prison violence through conflict resolution training, mentoring and arts programs.

Back in plenary session, we reviewed AFSC's financial position. The Treasurer reported, in detail, that AFSC remains in very good financial standing. I regret I didn't take notes during this presentation. I think I was having difficulty staying awake during this early afternoon session. To balance my lack of notes, I looked up this current review of AFSC by the [Better Business Bureau](#).

I had several in-depth conversations with Susan Cozzens, formerly of Atlanta Meeting. I recall asking someone, probably her, what was *not* being addressed at the Corporation meetings, and I was directed to [this news article](#) from the Philadelphia Inquirer of 10 September 2023.

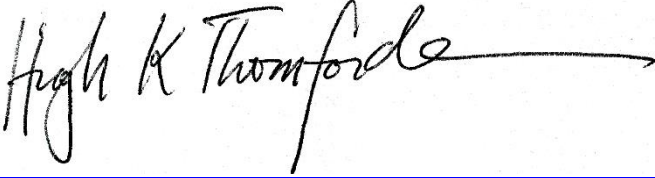
A couple of years ago AFSC hired Brian Blackmore as *Director of Quaker Engagement* to strengthened relationships with Monthly and Yearly Meetings and

Churches, to connect more intentionally with Friends. They invite anyone interested in fostering and supporting a relationship with AFSC to join their liaison program. Anyone interested may do so [here](#).

The 2025 AFSC Corporation meeting dates will be 24 to 26 April, 2025, by teleconferencing and in-person at Friends Center, Philadelphia.

The annual AFSC Corporation meeting is a special time for communication between AFSC and Yearly Meetings. The meeting provided me opportunity for spiritual, practical, and legal counsel on a broad range of policy and issues. I was honored and grateful to represent SAYMA at the AFSC Corporation. My time was well spent. I welcome suggestions of how I could better facilitate communication between AFSC and our Yearly Meeting during the coming year.

I invite anyone to explore the many other issues, campaigns, and programs on which AFSC focuses: <http://afsc.org/our-work>.



Additional notes:

[This podcast](#) describes how AFSC, FCNL, and the Quaker UN Office promote non-violence in times of crisis. It was produced by AFSC a year ago, but I am only providing it now to SAYMA. I was working for Catholic Relief Services in East Timor a year ago, did not attend the 2023 Corporation meetings, and only recently learned of this podcast.

AFSC always provides brief break-out sessions during the annual meetings for Corporation members to learn more about the work. I attended one led by Jacob Flowers and colleagues about [Cop City](#). As with most AFSC programs, the general format was to provide information, and invitations to [advocacy](#).

I attended another break out session led by Jennifer Bing regarding AFSC's educational campaigns to inform Americans of the stark injustices in Gaza: <https://gazaunlocked.org/author/jennifer-bing>. AFSC also calls us to oppose Israeli apartheid: <https://apartheid-free.org/>

AFSC provides [comprehensive data](#) on how to divest from companies complicit in Israeli violence in Gaza. [This Al Jazeera podcast](#) of 4 days ago, 27 May 2024, reports that my alma mater, Earlham College, a Quaker seminary and school of higher education with strong ties to Ramallah Friends School, has not divested from these companies.

Posting on the AFSC website seeking support for Gaza, 23 May 2024:
<https://afsc.org/news/6-ways-you-can-support-palestinians-gaza>

AFSC promoting quality of life for children in Gaza, 5 April 2024:
<https://afsc.org/news/bringing-moments-joy-children-gaza>

AFSC's curated [webpage](#) to engage constituents with our elected leaders in Congress, to urge them to support a cease fire, and humanitarian access to Gaza

AFSC General Secretary was interviewed on *Democracy Now* regarding violence targeting Palestinian students in the US, 28 November 2023:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8W0qhJP5VQ>