



Quaker action for a just world

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afsc.org

*If not now, tell me when
We may never see this moment or place in time again
If not now, if not now, tell me when
I see sorrow and trouble in this land
Although there will be struggle, we'll make the change we can
If not now, if not now, tell me when*

— Carrie Newcomer, 2019
Quaker singer-songwriter

Dear Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association,

Greetings from the American Friends Service Committee. In these devastating times, there are an uncountable number of threats to human rights, the fundamental principles which undergird democracy, and the wellbeing of vulnerable communities. AFSC is ready for this moment. Based on our century of experience as a Quaker organization, we are equipped to act boldly and take risks. We have built an agile organization that is able to pivot to respond to immediate needs, build power in communities, and resist until justice and love prevail. We also recognize individual Friends and Quaker congregations who are independently exercising their testimonies to create a better, peaceful, and more just world. Thank you for your witness and courage.

This epistle briefly provides a regional program update, describes our annual Corporation meeting and offers a few highlights about our programs and campaigns. Far short of being comprehensive of AFSC's current work, this epistle seeks to build awareness among Quakers about AFSC's current presence in the world. It also calls upon Friends to act in partnership with us to meet urgent community needs, challenge injustice, and build peace.

AFSC Annual Meeting of the Corporation

The theme for this year's annual meeting of the AFSC Corporation is *Healing Through Justice: Our Collective Journey*. Despite what politicians might say to divide us, policing and prisons do not keep communities safe. Neither does militarism. But today we see a host of new policies that seek to expand on those oppressive systems. Mass detention and deportation of immigrants are modeled after other policies which criminalize Black and Brown communities. Threats in the international arena, including in Palestine, Sudan, Myanmar, and Ukraine, also undermine the pursuit of peace and justice. As Friends, we are led to act in solidarity with communities facing violence and oppression. Our theme for this year's Corporation Meeting spotlights AFSC's Healing Justice programs, which adopt a long-term abolitionist vision as they work to reduce our society's reliance on incarceration and policing. It also responds to calls for justice and healing among immigrant communities and in regions of the world that have been devastated by recent and ongoing wars.

Defending migrant rights

AFSC believes that *everyone* deserves a chance to build a good life, regardless of where they were born or when or how they migrated. When people make the difficult choice to leave their homes, they are seeking safety, opportunities, and a chance to contribute to a new country. They should be welcomed with respect and dignity. The U.S. has the resources to ensure humane, comprehensive support for newcomers. However, the Trump administration is threatening immigrant safety by calling for mass deportations, the dismantling of longstanding rights, and policies that dehumanize immigrants.

As a Quaker organization, we affirm the divine worth of every person, and we refuse to accept these unjust policies. We will not sit back and watch as communities and families are torn apart and fundamental rights are eroded. AFSC is working to address the economic and political drivers of migration, reflecting our commitment to systemic change. One way we do this work is by amplifying the voices of people who have been most impacted by unjust immigration policies. AFSC's TRACES project aims to give light to those untold stories, providing a platform for migrants to share their powerful experiences. AFSC conducted storytelling sessions in New Jersey, Jordan, El Salvador, Mexico, and Guatemala, where we were able to help immigrants reclaim their individual power over their own stories. We also support migrants, refugees, and internally displaced people at each stage of their journey. To ensure that migrant communities are safe and protected, we offer legal services, training, human rights monitoring, and humanitarian relief. And we support immigrant-led organizing and advocacy.

We are asking Friends to familiarize themselves with our [6 principles of a welcoming, dignified, and just approach to immigration](#). These include: (1) valuing immigrant leadership, (2) welcoming people with dignity, (3) offering paths to citizenship; (4) protecting the right to seek asylum, (5) ensuring that everyone can meet their basic needs, regardless of immigration status, and (6) helping people live safely wherever they are. We call upon Friends to affirm these 6 principles through their public witness by taking action. We know that when we take action together, grounded in love, we can make a difference. Learn more at <https://afsc.org/6-principles-welcoming-dignified-and-just-immigration>.

AFSC has [resources](#) designed to equip individuals and communities with the tools they need to make effective change which can be found at <https://afsc.org/issue/migration-immigrant-rights>. These resources intend to support Friends and others when they talk with family and friends, write letters to the editor, comment on local media websites, meet with editorial boards, and host community conversations. A list of [five tips](#) on how to advocate for migration justice well can be found on our website: <https://afsc.org/news/how-talk-about-immigration-divisive-times>. Additionally, we are offering yard signs with the message "QUAKERS WELCOME IMMIGRANTS WITH DIGNITY" to meetings and churches that are ready to stand in public witness with migrant communities. Order a sign for your meeting or church at <https://afsc.org/migration-justice-yard-signs>.

Peace and Justice in Palestine

AFSC has had a historic presence in Palestine, dating back to 1948, when the United Nations commissioned AFSC to lead humanitarian work in Gaza after 750,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced from their homes. Since

then, our programs have provided agricultural development, kindergartens, midwife training, humanitarian aid, and trauma healing for over seven decades. We also work with civil society organizations in Israel to support their work countering militarism, building awareness among the Israeli public about injustices, and advocating for the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees. We also have staff working in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Jordan who deliver humanitarian aid, advocate for Palestinian self determination and freedom.

In Gaza, tens of thousands of Palestinians have been killed and many more injured since Israel began the genocide in October 2023. People continue to die of starvation, disease and military action. Most hospitals are shuttered, and 90% of homes and buildings are uninhabitable. Nearly all of Gaza's population—2 million people—has been displaced, including AFSC staff, while still under siege, and its people urgently need food, water, medical supplies, fuel, and other essentials. More information about AFSC's humanitarian aid, educational materials, and opportunities for shared advocacy and action can be found at <https://afsc.org/crisis-gaza>.

AFSC's emergency relief effort has helped to alleviate suffering in the short term and reduce inequality and oppression in the long term. Despite facing grave personal losses themselves, AFSC staff in Gaza have provided lifesaving assistance to hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians, including hot meals, food parcels, and fresh vegetables. We have also distributed hygiene kits with soap, toothbrushes, women's hygiene products, and other critical supplies, and offered recreational activities for children and counseling to help people process the impact of the violence. Friends can see the challenges our aid workers face on a daily basis and the courageous action they are taking to save lives in AFSC's short documentary titled "[Lifelines](https://afsc.org/lifelines)." Watch the film at <https://afsc.org/lifelines>.

Quaker testimonies teach that injustices must be eliminated for peace to prevail. In 2022, AFSC joined the international human rights community, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, in amplifying calls to end the apartheid system -- which for decades have been oppressing, suffocating and humiliating Palestinians. Today, AFSC is calling upon Quaker meetings and churches to join our interfaith coalition of over 500 congregations known as the [Apartheid-Free communities](https://apartheid-free.org/). Over 40 Quaker Apartheid-Free communities have joined this coalition and they are demonstrating their commitments to dismantling Israel's apartheid laws and practices through education programs, interfaith engagement, boycott, divestment, and advocacy. Learn more at <https://apartheid-free.org/>.

In the past year, the number of Quaker meetings and churches who have joined the Apartheid-Free coalition has more than doubled! We ask that other meetings and churches take our invitation and when led to do so, sign the Apartheid-Free pledge and take action against racism, militarism, and denial of human rights in Palestine and wherever found. Quaker communities in the Apartheid-Free communities coalition have demonstrated their commitment to the Apartheid-Free movement in various ways, including (but certainly not limited to) outreach to other faith communities, hosting education programs for Friends about apartheid in Palestine, moving their assets and money to divest from supporting Israel's military occupation, and demanding that elected officials address apartheid in their policy decisions and public speaking appearances.

South Region Program Updates

Across the U.S. South, AFSC programs continue to build power, foster community resilience, and challenge systems of oppression through grassroots organizing, advocacy, and collaboration. From food justice and housing rights to immigrant protections and youth empowerment, our teams are advancing AFSC's vision of a just, peaceful, and sustainable world. Here are highlights from each of our regional programs:

AFSC Florida

AFSC Florida has been active in the state legislative session, mobilizing against anti-immigrant bills and advocating for protections against Notario fraud. The team continues its environmental justice work with Earth Justice and is updating its "Toxic Truth" report while preparing to publish findings on the Glades Detention Center. The Miramar Protection Circle remains a vital presence for immigrants reporting to ICE. Youth engagement flourished through the Seeds of Resistance Academy and a joint conference with West Virginia's ACE program, with plans for a national youth gathering in summer 2025.

AFSC North Carolina

The NC team launched a weekly Eviction Court Watch, training 40+ volunteers to support tenants and collect data on eviction trends. Their advocacy secured county funding for legal aid and rental assistance. With support from AFSC's Strategy Learning and Impact team, they're building a data-driven campaign for a county-wide right to counsel. Toolkits and town halls are in development to expand this model across the state.

Appalachian Center for Equality (ACE)

ACE continues to lead in food justice through Voices for Hunger and the West Virginia Food For All Coalition. Their Nourishing Networks workshops have sparked the formation of local Food Security Teams in multiple counties. A revamped Right to Food curriculum and a planned train-the-trainer initiative aim to expand this work statewide.

Atlanta Economic Justice Program

After years of organizing, AFSC Atlanta celebrated a major legislative win in DeKalb County: water affordability protections and debt relief. The team also supports the People's Campaign to Stop Cop City, recently hosting a 200-person assembly to reimagine public safety. In response to the tragic death of Cornelius Taylor, they are advancing a pilot housing project that will pilot a systems change to Atlanta's approach to homelessness.

Peace by Piece New Orleans (PXP)

PXP deepened its work in Hollygrove through urban farming, youth leadership development, and community land trust planning. Their quarterly Community Kitchen events and monthly food pantry support food security and neighborhood cohesion. The Eye on Surveillance Coalition launched "Sawt," an AI-powered civic engagement tool, with the long-term goal of building a community-controlled transparency model. PXP also seeks to expand into adjacent neighborhoods with solar and composting initiatives.

[West Virginia Economic Justice Program](#)

Amid a challenging legislative session, the WV team has been a strong voice for harm reduction and restorative justice. They co-led the WV Restorative Justice Project's first statewide gathering and continue to support youth and community leadership through the Leading for Justice Conference. Upcoming initiatives include a summer skills-building institute and continued advocacy for criminal legal reform and second chance legislation.

And more . . .

There are so many more ways to take action with AFSC.

Our [Emerging Leaders for Liberation](#) program, now in its fourth year, equips young adult Friends and other young adults with the skills they need to effectively enact social change. We encourage more young adult Friends to consider applying for this program so they too can receive mentorship from our staff.

Anyone can learn from the esteemed social change leaders on our staff by joining our [Third Tuesdays: Protect, Resist, and Rebuild](#) webinars, hosted every third Tuesday of the month at 8pm EST / 7pm CST / 5pm PST. Join us for [Meeting for Worship with Attention to Peace](#) every Thursday at 5:30pm EST / 3:30pm CT / 2:30pm PST.

We encourage Friends to sign up for our weekly newsletter called "Weekend Reading" and our monthly "Acting in Faith" newsletter, specifically tailored for Friends, for the latest updates about AFSC's work and how you can get involved. More information can also be found at <https://afsc.org/friends-engage>.

There are so many ways for Friends to partner with AFSC towards creating a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world. Our staff will be visiting over 20 Yearly Meetings this year and over 80 events at Quaker meetings, churches, schools, and retirement communities. You can submit a request for a speaker to attend your meeting here: <https://afsc.org/host-event>.

From AFSC to all Friends worldwide, we send peace, prayers for resilience, and our solidarity. In the words of the Quaker refugee rights activist Jim Corbett: "Asking not 'what can I do?' but 'what can we do?' we open the way for each individual offering to be incorporated into a cathedral of love and service that our life as people builds for the Kingdom in human history." Striving forth together, we will build the beloved community that this wounded world needs now.