



**American
Friends
Service
Committee**

Quaker action for a just world

1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102
afsc.org

2023 Epistle

Dear Friends Everywhere,

Warm greetings from the American Friends Service Committee and our staff and volunteers all around the world. This year, the theme of our annual gathering of Friends, our Corporation meeting, is “Connecting for Lasting Change.” And we are writing to Friends worldwide to do just that... connect. We’d like to reintroduce AFSC and explore new opportunities for mutual work.

Quakers created AFSC at a time of “war fever” in World War I, as a way to help Quakers and allies live the Peace Testimony. This was dangerous work at the time, conscientious objectors were jailed, threatened, fired, and ostracized. In the face of public hostility and in a time of mounting humanitarian need, AFSC was designed to be a bold and vibrant display of Quaker faith in action.

Over the last 106 years, the Quaker experiment that is the AFSC evolved to be a unique organization. We now have real, authentic, deep relationships with communities across the US and around the world. It is our honor to serve alongside these communities – Quaker and not. We connect them. We help advocate and conduct research to promote their insights and experiences into global and policy conversations. We foster safe spaces for healing and reconciliation. And together, we speak truth to power.

Today, we share some important ways that Quakers are connecting with AFSC for lasting change. Around the world, many have had concerns for those fleeing the needless war in Ukraine and fleeing violence, repression, and poverty around the world. AFSC is working with European Quakers to help displaced people from Ukraine and has programs around the world caring for refugees and migrants in places as far apart as Denver, Colorado, and the Dadaab camp, near the Kenya-Somalia border. We send out our deepest gratitude for Friends’ support for these efforts to help displaced people heal, seek safe homes, integrate into new communities, and rebuild their lives.

We heard from Friends that AFSC should engage more on climate justice, and we have responded. One way to focus on improving our climate and economic justice is by building food justice. Where we get our food and how corporations profit from it affects our health, the health of our planet, our economies, and the lives of farmers, migrants, and many others. As Congress is considering a new farm bill, we are sharing the insights from affected communities. Friends can join our efforts for food justice by visiting our website and adding your voice to our petition.

Over the past year, some of our staff and several people from Gaza published a book, *Light in Gaza: Writings Born of Fire*. This anthology imagines a future for Gaza beyond the current cruelties of occupation, embargo, and apartheid. We encourage Friends meetings to read and share the book in discussion and to join our monthly series of author chats from different authors featured in the book. We would love to see you and discuss this critical issue together. No background knowledge necessary, just a sense of curiosity and an openness to learning. If you are moved, you can visit the Gaza Unlocked website (gazaunlocked.org) for more about the book, the webinars, and how you and your meeting or church can take action with us.

We are delighted to report that the first year of Emerging Leaders for Liberation, a nonviolent social justice activism program for young adults connected to Friends institutions and AFSC communities, was a huge success. Young people, many of them from Quaker colleges and schools, learned vital organizing skills and then put them to work on a project in their communities. You can see more about the projects at the ELL section (afsc.org/ell) of afsc.org.

Last year, we published the North Star (afsc.org/northstar), a framework for healing justice beyond militarized policing and prisons. Since then, staff have had the pleasure of talking with many meetings about prison abolition and alternatives that promote real community safety. We have had many Friends attend our Community Safety Beyond Policing discussions, which have been held monthly online. We are revamping and continuing those webinars and have launched our Think Twice Pledge. (afsc.org/action/think-twice-calling-police) This pledge reminds people of things they can do instead of calling the police.

These are just a few of the efforts where AFSC and Friends are making a difference. We want this year to be a year of renewal with our Quaker connections. We have liaisons now in more than 260 meetings and churches and want to make sure we have connections and communications with more. And we are talking with Friends schools and organizations about partnerships to promote our mutual peace and justice concerns.

You can see these activities and more ways to get involved on our Friends Engage section of our website (afsc.org/friends-engage). Our staff and volunteers will be visiting meetings and be present at FGC Gathering and the FUM Triennial, hoping to talk with as many Quakers as possible about ways we can work together.

Wishing everyone peace, health, and our solidarity. We are looking forward to being in community with all of you.