



**American  
Friends  
Service  
Committee**

**Quaker action for a just world**

1501 Cherry Street, Philadelphia, PA 19102  
afsc.org

Dear Friends Everywhere,

Greetings from the American Friends Service Committee. May this epistle be received wrapped in our care for the wellness and safety of your community. With unprecedented climate destruction, the erosion of democratic principles around the world, and the loss of countless human lives due to armed conflict and economic injustice, we are mindful of how challenging it can be to maintain hope, resilience, and the pursuit of peace. AFSC's staff, governance members, and volunteers wish to express our deepest gratitude to the many Friends who courageously and persistently speak out in the name of nonviolence, stand up for justice, and care for vulnerable communities. Thank you for being the people of peace and compassion that our world needs right now.

This epistle intends to briefly describe our annual Corporation meeting and a few updates about our programs that have occurred since our last epistle was sent in 2023. Far short of being comprehensive of AFSC's work, this epistle seeks to spread awareness among Friends about AFSC's presence in the world as well as call upon Friends to act in partnership with us to promote peace and justice.

### **AFSC Annual Meeting of the Corporation**

This year, the theme of our annual Corporation meeting was "Weaving the Threads of Peace and Democracy in an Age of Conflict." We were delighted to host Jose Antonio Vargas as our keynote speaker. A Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, Emmy-nominated filmmaker, Tony-nominated theatrical producer, and a leading voice for the human rights of immigrants, Jose is also the founder of Define American. This organization empowers diverse and nuanced storytelling about immigrant experiences across many media. Our Corporation meeting received spiritual grounding through programmed worship led by Cherice Bock and Christy Randazzo with a focus on climate justice. In addition to worshipful business and a reception for AFSC alumni, workshops at the 2024 Corporation meeting presented information about our Palestine Activism Program, our efforts to stop Cop City in Atlanta (one of the largest militarized police training facilities in the world), AFSC's strategies for advocacy on public policy, and our Emerging Leaders for Liberation program, which mentors young (Quaker) adults in social change projects. We also hosted a screening of "The Movement and the Madman," a documentary about two major antiwar protests in 1969 that stopped President Nixon from escalating the U.S. war in Vietnam. The filmmaker, Robert Levering, and Friends who took a stand against war along with him, including AFSC alumni, shared their experiences and the lessons they are passing on to the next generation of peacemakers.



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### Calling for peace in Palestine and Israel

AFSC has had a historic presence in Gaza, dating back to 1948 when the United Nations commissioned AFSC to lead humanitarian work in Gaza after 750,000 Palestinians were displaced from their homes. Since then, our programs have provided agricultural development, kindergartens, midwife training, humanitarian aid, trauma healing, and intercommunal exchanges in Gaza for over seven decades. The devastating attack conducted by Hamas on Oct. 7, 2023, and Israel's subsequent assault on the people of Gaza amounting to genocide has left AFSC in a mode of constant grief and steadfast action. To meet urgent needs, AFSC has provided life-saving aid to more than 900,000 people, including hot meals, food parcels, fresh vegetables, hygiene kits, toothbrushes, women's hygiene products, blankets, mattresses, and other critical supplies.

We have joined our humanitarian work with a strong call for peace based on justice and recognition of human rights. General Secretary Joyce Ajlouny, a Palestinian-American and former head of Ramallah Friends School, has engaged the American public through national television interviews, met with Pope Francis at the Vatican, and talked with President Biden's staff to call for a cease-fire. Our Palestinian Activism Team has been hosting an Action Hour every week on Fridays at 12 p.m. ET, where they are offering guidance on how to advocate for an immediate and permanent cease-fire, unrestricted humanitarian access, and the cessation of U.S. tax dollars for the Israel military. Our Quaker Engagement office is holding space for Meeting for Worship with Attention to Peace in Israel and Palestine every Thursday at 5:30 p.m. ET to offer spiritual renewal for Friends who are committed to taking action for peace. We have also organized numerous events, including vigils in front of elected officials' offices, educational programs, soccer tournaments, and a kite-flying action on the National Mall in Washington D.C. in coordination with children flying kites on Rafah beach in Gaza. We are also providing leadership on how individuals, companies, and institutions can withdraw their support from Israel's military. We thank Friends for participating in these efforts, which have been well-attended and supported by so many. We also ask for your persistence in calling elected officials to demand a permanent cease-fire, unrestricted humanitarian access, and the cessation of U.S. tax dollars to support Israel's military. More information about our work in Gaza and our advocacy in the U.S. can be found at <https://afsc.org/crisis-gaza>.

AFSC is also proud to help amplify Quaker voices for peace in response to the devastation in Gaza. On Oct. 17, AFSC and six other Quaker organizations released a statement, which said: "As Quaker organizations, we mourn all lives lost and lament



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with everyone who is suffering. We grieve for those in Israel and Palestine who have lost precious lives. We pray with those waiting for the return of loved ones and those living under siege and bombardment.” In April 2024, these same Quaker organizations released an updated statement *A different future is possible: Quaker organizations share a vision for peace in Palestine and Israel*, and AFSC started to collect signatures of endorsement for this statement from Quaker meetings, churches, and other Quaker organizations. To date, we have received over 120 signatures from Quaker communities! Friends can read the statement, see the list of signatories, and add their support here: <https://afsc.org/newsroom/different-future-possible-quaker-organizations-share-vision-peace-palestine-and-israel>.

### **Ending child hunger**

In the fall of 2023, AFSC celebrated the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s policy change that would allow 3,000 more school districts to provide free school meals to all their students. As many as 5 million more students now have access to free lunch and breakfast. However, many kids don’t get enough food when school is out for summer. Congress created the SUN Bucks program (also known as Summer EBT) to fill that gap. The new program provides \$120 in grocery-buying benefits to low-income families with school-age children. While most states opted into the SUN Bucks program in 2024 and others plan to the following year, 11 states have chosen not to implement the program by the summer of 2025. Those states include Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming. In addition, Tennessee is participating in 2024 but has announced that it will not continue the program after this summer. In response to the failure of our elected officials to responsibly distribute funding for low-income families, AFSC has launched a No Hunger Summer campaign. We are organizing Friends and other community partners into action teams to encourage state governors to accept federal dollars to feed kids. Friends are encouraged to get involved, and they can express interest in doing so by writing to [nohungersummer@afsc.org](mailto:nohungersummer@afsc.org).

### **Defending migrant rights**

AFSC deplores the Biden Administration’s many cruel anti-immigrant and anti-asylum policies, which have mobilized record levels of funding for inhumane detention, immoral deportations, and deadly and ineffective border walls. We need Friends to spread positive messages about immigrant communities and to take action for legislative change. Based on AFSC’s experience at borders, in several countries, and in communities helping to welcome migrants, AFSC’s staff offered a webinar series in 2024 on a variety



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of migration justice issues, including the processes used for detention and deportation, U.S. border policies, and how to engage with friends and family about the experiences of migrants. We ask that Friends become more informed about the U.S. migration system and watch our past webinars at <https://afsc.org/migration-justice-webinar-series>.

### **And more . . .**

There is so much more news from AFSC to share. For example, last December, AFSC organized a delegation of peacebuilders from Africa in Washington, D.C., who met with members of Congress and the State Department to discuss nonviolent and inclusive approaches to peacebuilding. Our Emerging Leaders for Liberation program is in its third year of operation with young adult Friends from many Quaker meetings and Quaker colleges. Brian Blackmore has also completed one year as AFSC's director of Quaker Engagement. Among many other projects and initiatives, Brian conducted a speaking tour in early 2024. He visited over 20 Quaker meetings, schools, and colleges in over 10 states throughout the South and Midwest. We encourage Friends to sign up for our weekly newsletter and our monthly "Acting in Faith" newsletter to learn more about AFSC's work and how Friends 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 we will be present at the FGC Gathering and the FWCC World Plenary of Friends, hoping to talk with as many Quakers as possible about ways we can work together.

From AFSC to all Friends worldwide, we send peace, a call for justice, and our solidarity. Striving forth together, we will build the beloved community that this wounded world needs now.