

Proposal to Affiliate with Friends General Conference

Pacific Yearly Meeting has been actively considering the possibility of affiliating with Friends General Conference since at least 2014 when this question was already referred to as a “recurrent issue.” (See [FGC Affiliation Issue as Recorded in PYM Minutes and Reports 2014-2019.docx](#).) Over the past three years, monthly meetings have been considering whether we are led to affiliate. At the Annual Session in 2017, Friends asked for additional information. This was provided and the trend among monthly meetings seemed to favor affiliation. However, estimates of the costs of affiliating were not available until just before the Annual Session in 2018. A large volume of information, including estimated costs, is catalogued in the request ([link here](#)) made to monthly meetings this year to again consider the question of affiliation in preparation for 2019 Annual Session.

At this point five meetings have independently affiliated with FGC. All meetings reporting back acknowledge that FGC has been a valuable resource. The cost of affiliation was a concern to some Friends at two meetings with suggestions that the number of representatives might be reduced to two and that Zoom or videoconferencing might reduce the costs. One other financially better off meeting suggested that if PYM decides to affiliate their meeting could pay more than their share to underwrite the costs for less financially secure meetings. Most Friends agree that costs are not the overriding factor.

While many meetings and individual Friends continue to favor affiliation, some Friends have expressed reservations. Friends asked about the financial status of FGC. A document on the FGC website ([link](#)) summarizes FGC’s journey from 2004 to the present to reach a balance budget. The financial situation does appear to have stabilized. Some Friends have noted that yearly meetings such as Pacific Yearly Meeting that use FGC resources without fully bearing the cost have contributed to that organization’s financial difficulties.

The two primary questions remain:

1. Why are we considering affiliation with FGC?
2. Is affiliation with FGC consistent with the history of Pacific Yearly Meeting as an independent yearly meeting?

Why Affiliate?

The principal force moving Friends to favor affiliation is the recognition that nearly all Pacific Yearly Meeting monthly meetings and many individual Friends make use of Friends General Conference resources and find them valuable. As a matter of integrity, PYM should affiliate and contribute both financially and to the governance of this organization.

Many Friends see FGC resources as very relevant to the issues we are facing as a yearly meeting. As Pacific Yearly Meeting seeks to become more welcoming and inclusive to those

from diverse backgrounds, as we seek to understand systemic racism and oppression within our meetings, the resources offered by FGC will be even more important.

Pacific Yearly Meeting has been shrinking in size. Affiliating with FGC will give PYM officers and committees ready access to a network of other yearly meetings and opportunities to learn from their experiences.

Is Affiliation Consistent with Being an Independent Yearly Meeting?

Some Friends fear that affiliation with FGC will close doors to relationships with Friends from more Christo-centric or conservative meetings and churches. To understand the basis for this concern, it will be useful to have a shared understanding of the foundation of Pacific Yearly Meeting as an independent yearly meeting. Below is a brief summary based on research George Mills conducted on the beginnings of PYM at the *Western Friend* archive.

Pacific Yearly Meeting was formed under the umbrella of Pacific Coast Association of Friends, an independent association founded in 1935 when the larger Society of Friends in the United States was still in the grip of the Hicksite/Orthodox split. Pacific Coast Association of Friends invited membership from meetings, churches, individuals Friends and “friends of Friends” without any formal theological statement that would seem to align with one side or another in the Hicksite/Orthodox split. The conference marking the founding of this independent group was reported in *Friends Bulletin* in October 1935, including the statement by William Lawrence: “The Pacific Coast Association of Friends affords an opportunity to promote the sense of unity throughout all Friends.”

By 1946, West coast meetings were ready to form their own Yearly Meeting. In an article in *Friends Bulletin* in August 1947, Phillip H. Wells noted:

Most of the meetings have reported themselves ready to join in the adventure of a new yearly meeting, so, according to our minute of last year, we will be meeting as the first annual session of the Pacific Yearly Meeting, within, and conjointly with the Pacific Coast Association of Friends. Many details of our organization will need to be worked out through the years ahead. We can develop only as we grow in unity. Whatever we do must be done in seeking and in love. What does not work can be changed.

At its founding Pacific Yearly Meeting declared its intention to remain in contact with all branches of Friends and to remain independent of any bodies associated with any one “branch” of Friends.

The Pacific Yearly Meeting will seek to enter into correspondence with Yearly Meetings in the Society of Friends and humbly hopes to be recognized by these Meetings. It will seek affiliation with the various Friends Councils, and will assist in their work as the way opens.

The Yearly Meeting does not belong to a "branch" of the Society, and therefore is not associated with the Five Year's Meetings, the Friends General Conference, or the Conservative body, although welcoming fellowship with all Friends.

--Taken from the Organization Committee Report
Adopted at First Formal Meeting of PYM, 1947

How should this history affect a decision to affiliate with FGC in 2019? In some ways the splits among Friends are even more profound than they were in 1947. Pacific Yearly Meeting efforts to send liaisons to the annual session of Evangelical Friends International-Southwest were rebuffed because only pastors were invited. Several more conservative yearly meetings are dividing over the acceptance of LGBTQ members or whether a Quaker church could administer sacraments.

Pacific Yearly Meeting remains active with Friends World Committee on Consultation as a way to stay in spiritual communion with Friends from different traditions. At the same time, Pacific Yearly Meeting is actually less diverse theologically than yearly meetings like New England, New York, Baltimore and Canada Yearly Meeting. These yearly meetings all affiliate with both FGC and Friends United Meeting and include semi-programmed, even pastoral meetings. Is that an option for Pacific Yearly Meeting? Do PYM monthly meetings feel drawn to Friends United Meeting gatherings? Do we use FUM resources?

Perhaps our calling is to come to this annual session open to the Spirit, in the same way that Phillip Wells approached the very first annual session of PYM in 1947:

Whatever we do must be done in seeking and in love. What does not work can be changed.

Respectfully submitted,
Shan Cretin, Co-Clerk
Ministry & Oversight.