

Pacific Yearly Meeting Representative to Friends General Conference Central Committee Report to Annual Session 2020

In this historical moment, when our country seems nearly at the point of being torn part by the anger and fear that's been released, most immediately by the murder of George Floyd, I know that many of us are looking for ways to dislodge the racist ways of being we're immersed in. Remembering that I needed to think about a report about what Friends General Conference has been doing in the last year, and working through all of the material I have received, I am taken again by Friends' willingness to try to change our attitudes about race.

I wouldn't say that we're making strides, because we have had a great deal of trouble moving beyond being an exclusively white religious body, and any good intent we may claim doesn't do much in this regard. Friends General Conference did agree to set up an Institutional Assessment on Systemic Racism for itself in late 2016. Since that time, the assessment has been performed and published, and FGC now has an Institutional Assessment Implementation Committee, which has begun to create ways that Friends can try to live into being anti-racists. The committee is also [actively supporting](#) Friends of Color through regular online Meetings for Worship, virtual open houses, and gatherings during non-pandemic seasons.

FGC's website has a page called "[Becoming an Anti-Racist Faith Community](#)," with all sorts of resources for friends wanting to work on this issue in community. Updates about the assessment, from the time it was undertaken through work being done in light of its results are on that page. Right now, for example, there is a list up of related events that will be taking place at the [FGC virtual gathering](#), which will be held between June 28 and July 4.

Attending the Zoom gathering is quite inexpensive, and there are a number of workshops and evening programs related to this topic, as well as many others. Those of us who attend the Gathering regularly will be missing the workshops in the university classrooms, and evening programs in the gym, and even the cafeteria food. But there are a large number of workshops available during the week, and they've been scheduled to make them accessible for us on the West Coast. Next year, FGC hopes to have the Gathering in Radford, Virginia, where it was supposed to be this year.

Another big topic for FGC for some time has been their budget; they (no, now it's we) have been needing to dip into our reserves every year to cover expenses. Last Fall, they told us at Central Committee that our investments had been doing well, but it seems unlikely that they still are. The result, almost certainly, is that FGC is running financially behind, like a number of our Quaker institutions. There was a plan to begin a major fund raising campaign this year, but that will probably be postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis. Here is another place where [your donations](#) can make a difference. A number of programs were already cut in the last few years due to the budget situation, and you can look at the FGC website to see which programs are still running with staff.

I'll close this report with a quotation from the Institutional Assessments Working Group after they had been asked by the FGC Central Committee to leave the session and change the wording of their proposed minute:

Pacific Yearly Meeting
Representative to Friends General Conference Central Committee
Report to Annual Session 2020

We ask, that as the committee doing this work, that you will continue leaning into discomfort by trusting that we have done due process on what we are bringing to you to approve. Wordsmithing and an unwillingness to answer the question are symptoms of the discomfort and uneasiness experienced when doing anti-racism work that this body is experiencing.

We're offering a metaphor to provide a positive way to think about discomfort.

Imagine you're standing on the edge of a cliff looking over at the view below. Living in discomfort is standing on that edge. Safety and "the way things have always been done" is at your back, and the unknown future is at the bottom of the cliff. We're not asking you to jump off the edge. We're simply asking you to stand, look at the view, and not turn your back on it, no matter how beautiful and terrifying you find what you're faced with. Lean into that discomfort...

Faithfully submitted,

Heather Levien, Berkeley Friends Meeting, PacYM Representative to FGC Central Committee