Report of American Friends Service Committee Corporation Meeting
March 2-3, 2012

The Corporation of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) met in Philadelphia March 2-3, 2012. The Corporation is a group of 120 to 180 Friends who are the "members" of the AFSC as required by the organization's charter in the state of Pennsylvania. The Corporation appoints the Board of Directors and has various other functions including some measure of advice and communication with the larger Friends community. This report summarizes the events of the meeting and the actions the Corporation took at that time.

1. Attendance. From the relative numbers of acceptances and regrets during the roll call, it seemed that perhaps 2/3 of the 126 members were present, which might have been slightly fewer than in previous years.

2. Introductory remarks. Arlene Kelly, Clerk, indicated that Corporation members "are the lifeblood" of the AFSC's relationship with Friends.

3. The AFSC-Friends Relations (AFR) Committee clerk (Jeanette Raymond) summarized the committee's work during the past year, which consisted principally of working through some of the unfinished business of the Working Group on the Size of the Corporation and Role of Corporation Members. Three work products are a proposed job description for Corporation members, a bylaws revision lengthening Corporation member terms to three years, and modifications to the structure of the Corporation meeting.

4. General Secretary's report: In another memorable formulation of the AFSC's mission, Shan Cretin summarized it as "making a difference in the world's attitude towards the effectiveness of love." She invoked words of Martin Luther King, who said that power without love is reckless, and love without power is sentimental to reinforce the idea that AFSC programs, while dealing with empowerment, do so with the intent of transformation through love rather than replacing oppressors with new oppressors emerging from the previously-oppressed. She shared the booklet *Introduction to Quaker Testimonies*, which morphed from an internal document aimed at informing non-Quaker staff about the values that drive the AFSC, to something broader. It is available in hard copy through the FGC bookstore or as a free download from http://www.afsc.org/testimonies/introduction.

   Shan spoke about AFSC projects in Africa which, in partnership with local Friends, are working to bring about violence-free elections. She used that model to describe a vision of the AFSC working more in partnership with local Friends, sensitive to needs of communities. She described a need for restorative tools to heal past injustice, and AFSC's efforts to help build fair and accountable institutions (the AFSC's economic justice projects embody this). She noted the Service Committee's involvement with the Occupy movement, which has been a supportive role, not attempting to control or direct, but to offer practical help such as nonviolence and process training. She said

that the AFSC had recently been awarded a $1.5 million Kellogg Foundation grant to develop sustainable agriculture in New Mexico.

5. Seasoning sessions. New this year were "seasoning sessions," part of the AFR Committee's effort. Perhaps, these sessions were intended to make Corporation members feel a vital part of the AFSC's corporate decision making. The stated purpose was "to provide Corporation members with a worshipful seasoning of challenges/opportunities facing the AFSC." SAYMA's members were able to attend two of the three, described below.

    a. Strategic plan development. After a period of silent worship, the conveners presented the timeline for AFSC strategic plan development and an outline of the process, which is expected to be complete by year's end. There does not appear to be room in the process for seasoning or considered input by Friends meetings, as the "seasoning bodies" are the strategic planning committee, staff leadership, Board Program committee, and various other internal bodies of the organization. The "seasoning" which took place at this session consisted of a word game (suggest three "strong" words and three "action words"). The current AFSC mission statement was put forth as examples/templates. This session bore no relationship to any seasoning process in which I've ever participated. No proposal was presented for seasoning (the plan development process only having begun two days prior to the session), and it was completely unclear how the word salad that resulted from the session would influence the development of a mission statement.

    b. Quakers and AFSC. This was a very important session as it allowed me to address the SAYMA minute which asked how many Quakers worked for AFSC. The clerk of AFSC was in attendance and we were able to reach agreement that the important question was: "How can Quakers be more involved in AFSC?" There are not that many jobs in AFSC that Quakers can do besides administration as most of the program staff needs to come from the groups that are being served and few Quakers meet those so important criteria. AFSC seeks God's leadings and also strives to follow Friends process. A booklet has been published by AFSC in November 2011 entitled "Quaker Faith and Practice". This has been sent to the SAYMA list in PDF form and is available at the AFSC website: The facilitator, Jeannette Raymond said that AFSC strives to integrate the Inward Light with Outward Service. Sound like what most Quakers who do service work are dealing with.

    Many of the Corporation Members present asked for more service and less advocacy from AFSC. Others believed that Service and Advocacy need not be in opposition. AFSC is working to build stronger ties to the Monthly Meetings and Yearly Meetings. With the cutbacks in staff and in the size of the Board of the Corporation, more Quakers will be able to serve as volunteers.

6. Staff presentations. This year's staff presentations differed from previous year's in that they were more participatory and seemed engineered to draw Friends into participation in the activities presented.

   a. AFSC's Work in Israel/Palestine and Why Divestment is Important. AFSC has joined with others, including Jewish Voice for Peace to encouraging individuals and investment firms to divest their holdings stocks and bonds of corporations that profit from the Israeli Occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. TIAA-CREF, one of the world's largest retirement funds and a self-described "leader in socially responsible investing", invests nearly $600 million in corporations that profit from Israeli military occupation. Some of these corporations include Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, Veolia, Northrup Grumman, Elbit, and Hewlett-Packard.

      For more information see http://www.afsc.org/story/join-we-divest-campaign

   b. AFSC and Occupy/Unoccupy Together: Supporting the Movement's Commitment to Nonviolence, Economic Justice, and Inclusion. Eisha Mason and Scilla Wahrhaftig led this session, which consisted of a series of exercises related to attitudes towards economic justice and a presentation of some images of how the AFSC and Occupy had interacted. The occupy movement, in many respects, embodies economic justice principles for which the AFSC has long stood, and at its best represents populism rooted in ideas of fairness and inclusiveness. The exercises were engaging, but it's not clear whether the intent was to have Corporation members replicate them for education in their own communities That would be tricky, as one of the reasons the exercise "worked" was the skill of the facilitator.

   c. Immigrant Allies: Coloradans for Immigrant Rights and our Meeting. Jordan Garcia, a very polished AFSC staffer from Colorado, led the session, which provided an exercise in describing "allyship" (a rather ungainly neologism). The term represents a condition of being supportive of others, and developing allies is apparently the strategy of the Colorado program. The AFSC has developed a short series of video vignettes describing the history and situation of several immigrants and their families in their own words (see http://afsc.org/video/immigration-stories). An encyclopedic resource CD including topics such as "Adopt a Policy Maker," "Handouts," and "Letter writing and other media resources" are available through program staff. If Friends review the website or the blog posts from this program, they can appreciate the extent of efforts staff is making to present immigrant stories, educate, empower, counter hate speech with truth telling, and generally help the public see immigrants in appositive light. At the conclusion of the session, there was an altar call in the form of commitment to action after the meeting. Having come with the intention of learning about the program rather than adding anything else to his plate, this Friend was compelled to admit that he would probably do nothing in response to the session, undoubtedly labeling him a Bad Quaker (albeit a truthful one).

d. Religious Intolerance in Indonesia and the United States: Ways that the AFSC and your Meeting can Create More Welcoming Communities. We had a live hookup to Indonesia where the AFSC staff was up at 3 AM their time so they could participate in the workshop. They explained how Christians were the minority in Indonesia, which has the largest Moslem population in the world. The Staff explained that their work in Indonesia is a lot like the work in the Southern USA where we see hostility against the Moslem minority by the Christian majority. Fears of the "outsiders" taking jobs and of their children developing friendships and then dating are happening in Indonesia and creating violence against Christians. We were then shown a documentary "Welcome to Shelbyville" about how a small town in Tennessee overcame their hostility to the Moslem newcomers as they learned more about their new neighbors. It was interesting to see how the Moslem community had to be more open to their neighbors than they were used to in order to help them overcome the fears that can come between people with different faiths and cultures. Anne Lennon, Area Coordinator from the Greensboro NC office answered questions after the film.

7. Worship at the Corporation meeting. There were three general periods of intentional worship: an unprogrammed session prior to the start of the meeting, a second, shorter unprogrammed session at the end (which was somewhat disrupted because several of the sessions ran beyond their appointed times, so that Friends straggled in to an already-abbreviated session), and a programmed session featuring readings from Revelation emphasizing universality and the actual presence of the New Jerusalem in the existing world. To a Quaker, this was a compelling and positive interpretation of what can seem an incoherent or simply frightening vision (his message is at https://www.starcafe.org/governance/corp/Documents/Quakers%20and%20African-Americans%20Approach%20the%20New%20Jerusalem.pdf).

8. AFSC regional reorganization and communication with monthly/yearly meetings. At lunch on the Saturday, we were seated in groups by new AFSC US region. The former Southeast region has been folded into the South region, which includes some states previously in the Middle Atlantic and South Central regions. The good news is that all SAYMA states are now in a single region, with headquarters in Atlanta. The bad news is the region stretches from El Paso to Baltimore. To mitigate the impact of such dispersion, the AFSC will be strengthening/creating local and area program committees.

   Regional executive committees (RECs) will have delegated program choice responsibilities. How a committee based in a city 500 to 1000 miles from a program site will exercise effective choice and oversight remains to be demonstrated. The AFSC board will appoint RECs. Because of the large number of yearly meetings within regions, it is not certain that every YM will have appointees on a REC; the AFSC encourages YMs to nominate Friends for RECs. The RECs are advocating seats on the AFSC board for all (instead of one) REC clerks, which would in this

Friend's opinion, represent dangerous backsliding towards a larger Board, undoing the progress towards simplicity that has occurred in recent years.

Don Gann and Margaret Rowlett introduced "two way communications" between the AFSC and yearly meetings. Communication with monthly meetings is planned through a Meeting Liaison program (possibly similar to the FCNL's approach) directed by Lucy Duncan. The overlaps/interactions between those two efforts are unclear. As an initial effort for YM communication, the AFR committee has developed queries, which it would like YMs to consider in worship sharing or discussion, responding to the AFR committee by about September 15.

9. Finances. The Treasurer's report expressed the "belief" that the AFSC had stabilized its financial situation after several very difficult years. Although 2011 ended with a $6 million operating surplus, the organization is vulnerable because of the $70 million reduction in net assets since 2007 (representing over 1/3 of assets). One particular issue that is common among both for-profit and not-for-profit companies of all sizes is adequate funding of retirement programs. These are obligations to current and former employees. The AFSC is a religious organization that bases its actions on an articulated set of values. It does not have the choice of walking away from the obligations or using the subterfuge of bankruptcy. The Board has a plan to address retirement shortfalls over the next five years, but it will inevitably require assets that could be directed to program. The need to address retirement and to strengthen the balance sheet will probably put a damper on expansion of services for the foreseeable future.

10. Routine business. The Corporation is legally obligated to appoint the Board of Directors and also appoints 60 to 90 Corporation members at large each year. The Corporation approved these appointments, as well as appointments to its Standing Nomination Committee and Naming Committee. The issue of the proforma nature of these appointments and the consequent question of integrity of the process that many Friends raised during discussions of Corporation size and role remains unaddressed.

11. Proposed Corporation member job description. The AFR Committee issued a proposed Corporation job description that was provisionally adopted with little chance for discussion as the last item of business. It may be useful for the Nominating Committee, although it is functionally little different from the current statement of responsibilities in the Corporation Manual.

Submitted by SAYMA Corporation Appointees:
Charles Schade
Free Polazzo