

Washington Newsletter

November/December 2023 » No. 817



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As we look toward the next eight decades—or even the next five years—we wonder how to remain brave and constant amid deep partisan divides, ongoing horrors of war, racism, xenophobia, and an environment in crisis.

It is clear that we do not have all the answers. Perhaps we do not need them—yet.

Stewarding Stillness

By Bridget Moix
and Kristen Archer

Photo by Stephen Donahoe/FCNL



Attuning to leadings of Spirit amid today's chaos requires us to remain open to continuing revelation—but to do so, it first helps to be still.

For us at FCNL, right stewardship has not been about short-term “wins.” We have had to learn to play the long game and be comfortable with the unknown. We have had to learn the difference between “lobbying for” or “speaking on behalf of” an individual or community and witnessing in “solidarity with and alongside” people living the realities of the policies we seek to change.

Our Quaker faith keeps us grounded in this work, but we have not always gotten it right. We have always believed there is that of God in everyone but have had to hone the organizational practice of minding the Light in others. To do this, we often have had to step out of the fray of our work and simply be still.

Being still during some of our most trying times has enabled us to hear, recalibrate, and think deeply, instead of being strictly reactionary. We have learned that we cannot focus our policy work on climate issues around technical fixes, but instead need to start with the experiences of people impacted by climate-induced crises.

We have learned we cannot focus our advocacy for nuclear disarmament only on reducing the number of weapons when there are people already affected by nuclear fallout. Neither can we address the scourge of gun violence at the federal level without first sitting with those working directly in our communities to do the same.

We have had to practice being still as a prerequisite to good stewardship of Friends witness. Being still helps us open ourselves to the ongoing transformation required to do this work in an evolving world.

To live what we profess, we must first confront the role Friends played in harm. Stewardship of Friends' witness in solidarity with Native and Indigenous peoples requires ongoing reflection and accountability to speak truthfully about our history and open space within ourselves for healing relationships.

We hear a similar call to our work on reparative racial justice. For centuries, Quakers have been at the forefront of movements to abolish slavery, push for civil

rights, and promote social justice. Yet, Friends were also complicit in the enslavement of people for decades.

Internally, we are learning how to become an anti-racist community and how our Quaker faith can help us undo our entanglement with white supremacy. This transformation requires us to be still, to listen to the Inward Teacher, to learn from those who have been impacted, and to take new steps each day toward the beloved community we seek.


What we glean during stillness can inspire important change. We have long known that William Penn, the revered Quaker who “founded” the colony of Pennsylvania as a place of religious freedom, was also an enslaver. Until recently, we had not acted to face the complexity of this history and disentangle ourselves from its harm.

When we assumed governance and management of the historic William Penn House, our governors underwent a period of discernment—stillness—about corrective actions to take. In 2021, we renamed the building Friends Place on Capitol Hill. We also started new education and advocacy programs at Friends Place for young adults and all who desire to work for a just, peaceful, and sustainable world.

For FCNL, stewarding Friends witness in Washington is now grounded in our commitment to anti-racism, anti-bias, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. As described in our AJEDI Statement, it anchors our work to reorient U.S. policy toward peace and justice. The statement also holds us accountable for carrying out that work with integrity. It helps us be both brave and constant in advocating in a highly partisan Congress and in a politically divided country.

The AJEDI Statement is a living document, as our own understanding of what is required of us to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8) also evolves.

Our persistent stewardship toward peace and justice requires repeated periods of stillness. This stillness enables us to listen more deeply and to live into the world of the now and the not yet. It allows us to faithfully persist with both patience and practical action through times of great upheaval and ongoing transformation.

Bridget Moix is general secretary of FCNL. 



New Strategic Plan Generates Hope

By Adlai Amor and
Stephen Donahoe

Photo by Wesley Wolfbear Pinkham/FCNL

When talking about the 2024-2028 FCNL Strategic Plan: Towards the World We Seek, governors and staff often described it as exciting and hopeful. Exciting because it builds on the huge gains of the past and hopeful because it delineates a path through the world of now and the not yet.

It took more than a year of intense discernment, collaboration, and consultation with nearly 1,500 people—inside and out of FCNL—to come up with this strategic plan. Along with the accompanying five-year \$20 million capital campaign, the plan was unanimously approved by the General Committee during its November 2023 Annual Meeting.

As part of the process, we also drafted the values that undergird our work as a Quaker organization. It was also unanimously affirmed by the General Committee.

There are five bold steps in the strategic plan:

1. Strengthen FCNL's nonpartisan influence among federal policymakers in a highly partisan environment to build democracy and advance policies for the world we seek.
2. Transform FCNL's grassroots advocacy network into a powerful, diverse, strategic, and intergenerational movement to advance federal legislation in service of the world we seek.
3. Advance policy changes through prophetic narratives, using strategic communications that reach more people and shape decision-making.
4. Foster beloved community by integrating anti-racism, anti-bias, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (AJEDI) throughout all our efforts.
5. Restructure and boldly resource FCNL to support current needs and future capacities.

While these five bold steps will be constant in the next five years, we have also listed key strategies we will use in taking these steps. Some of these strategies will change annually, depending on the challenges of that year and other changes will be made following the continuing revelations by Spirit.

Already, staff have drafted implementation plans for at least the first two years of the strategic plan. Progress will be tracked and reported regularly through a public dashboard.

In all our work in the next five years, we will be guided by FCNL's core values. They are

Radically Love: Love thy neighbor, no exceptions. Faithfully build relationships, across even deep divides. We trust that in embracing the creative potential of differences and nonviolent conflict, the world we seek can emerge.

Pursue Peace: Knowing that there is that of God in all people, we adamantly oppose war and actively work to build peace. We advocate for legislation that takes away any occasion for violence and militarism.

Uphold Justice: With a steadfast commitment to the inherent equality of all persons, we work to dismantle systems of oppression that deny people of their inherent dignity and their ability to thrive.

Embody Stewardship: Recognizing the sacredness of the earth and the interdependence of all beings inhabiting it, we seek to restore right relationship with our endangered environment and one another.

Collaborate: We invite conversation and cooperative action across a broad spectrum of knowledge and experience, with a special emphasis on the perspectives of those who are marginalized or most impacted.


Persevere: We work over an extended period of time on policies and ideas that align with the FCNL mission and vision, even if they are not popular or seem unlikely to succeed in the short term. We are faithful to the leadings of Spirit that call FCNL towards an area of work, trusting that Way will open even if we do not yet see it.

Act with Integrity: We consistently approach everyone we encounter with respect, honesty, and compassion, and follow through on any commitments we make.

These values are integrally intertwined and intended to provide focus and guidance for enacting FCNL's vision and mission. Our values also serve as reminders of the deeper spiritual principles underpinning our legislative priorities and relationship-based approach to changing the world.

This new strategic plan, and the accompanying capital campaign, will enable FCNL to fulfill its missing of living "a prophetic Quaker vision for a peaceful, just, and healthy planet through education, lobbying, and grassroots advocacy to shape national policy."

To download the 2024–2028 FCNL Strategic Plan, visit: fcnl.org/strategicplan.

Adlai Amor and Stephen Donahoe served as co-clerks of the Strategic Planning Working Group. 

Exciting because it builds on the huge gains of the past and hopeful because it delineates a path through the world of now and the not yet.



The Washington Newsletter is a publication of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) and the FCNL Education Fund, two national nonpartisan Quaker organizations working for peace, justice, and environmental stewardship.

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Design/Layout: Wesley Wolfbear Pinkham

Reprinting: Encouraged with credit
Cost: Free upon request
Frequency: Published 6 times a year

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Printed with vegetable ink on FSC-certified paper in a facility that uses renewable energy.

Cover: Three eras of FCNL leadership were on hand to celebrate our 80th anniversary at Annual Meeting: Joe Volk, Bridget Moix, and Diane Randall.
Photo by Taylor Monet/FCNL.

Our Journey to Reproductive Rights

By Kristen Archer

Photo by Wesley Wolfbear Pinkham/FCNL



Abortion, or reproductive health more broadly, has always been a sensitive issue among Friends, just as it has been with other religious groups.

FCNL was not part of the public conversation leading to the January 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution protected an individual's right to choose to end their pregnancy via abortion. Nor was FCNL vocal in the decades that followed as that decision was repeatedly challenged.

In June 2022, nearly 50 years after *Roe*, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned its 1973 ruling with the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision, allowing states to again ban abortion. At that point, Section III.2.7 of *The World We Seek: Statement of Legislative Policy* stated that since Friends are not in unity on abortion issues, "FCNL takes no position and does not act either for or against abortion legislation."

After the *Dobbs* decision, FCNL's Policy Committee heard from Friends around the country that they overwhelmingly wanted FCNL to take a position on the issue. "Our silence was deafening," said Bridget Moix, FCNL general secretary.

FCNL took a Spirit-led approach to addressing the issue. As an organization, we are committed to listening to the voices of the most impacted individuals across all our policy positions. Reproductive health would be no different. The 11-month process of discernment that followed was a bold attempt to do exactly that.

Moix described the discernment process as a faithful one, with equity and justice at the center of the process. "Though it demonstrated differences among members of the Policy and General Committees," she said, "it ultimately brought members together."

The process began during FCNL's 2022 Annual Meeting when the Policy Committee held an initial listening session to determine its direction. Then, in early 2023, the committee invited Friends to discern whether FCNL should have a policy position on abortion, and if so, what it should say.

The committee heard from more than 300 Quaker meetings, groups, and individual Friends—nearly 100 more than the typical response totals for FCNL's priorities discernment process. Committee members carefully combed through each response and underwent their own collective discernment about Spirit's leading on this difficult and emotional topic.

After the listening sessions, the Policy Committee met in September 2023 to revise the position they drafted based on the feedback. They reflected on several queries to ensure all voices were incorporated in the next draft. When they presented the statement during this year's Annual Meeting, Policy Committee members reminded the General Committee and staff, that they had sought to "honor the Spirit of all this input and to honor the trust you have placed in us" in the process.

General committee members voiced appreciation for the process and the statement itself, offered wording and content suggestions, and at times, respectfully disagreed. The final statement that emerged, Moix says, "is not perfect, but it calls us to chart a different path beyond what it means to be 'pro-choice' or 'pro-life.' It is about our government's duty to ensure equitable access to services and to support individual discernment."

Here is the new section in the *World We Seek: Statement of Legislative Priorities*:

III.2.7. Reproductive health and abortion. Quakers recognize that human life is sacred, and that Spirit can guide us individually and collectively. Based on these beliefs, members of the Religious Society of Friends have come to different conclusions regarding abortion. FCNL supports individual discernment in a spirit of love and truth in making reproductive healthcare decisions, as we do in other areas of conscientious moral choice. Government must ensure that people have the legal right to make these decisions. We oppose the criminalization of people seeking, undergoing, or involved in abortion services. We support equitable access to abortion services. FCNL also supports policies that reduce unwanted pregnancies by ensuring equitable access to contraception, sex education, family planning, fertility and adoption services, and support for all who decide to have children.

While this update represents an important chapter in FCNL's evolution, it will not shift our legislative priorities during the 118th or 119th Congress. It offers staff and governors guidance in discussing matters of reproductive health.

Kristen Archer is FCNL's editorial and social media director. 

Q&A: A Jew and a Muslim Walk into a Quaker Office

Hadiya Afzal and Odeliya Matter are colleagues and friends at the Friends Committee on National Legislation. Hadiya, diaspora engagement and partnership organizer, is a Muslim American living in Chicago, IL. Odeliya, program assistant for Middle East policy, is an Israeli Jew residing in Washington, D.C. Recently, they sat down for a conversation about how they are each experiencing this moment of increased Islamophobia and antisemitism. The following interview is an excerpt of their lengthy conversation.

Odeliya: Hadiya, how are you feeling right now?

Hadiya: I'm holding a lot of grief and pain for the violent ripples that occupation and perpetual displacement cause across the world.

Those ripples travel far—from the murder of 6-year-old Wadea al-Fayoume in Chicago to the recent shooting of three Palestinian students in Vermont to crackdowns in Germany and France.

The dehumanization driving violence against Palestinians abroad invariably affects anyone racialized as Palestinian, Arab, or Muslim. The dehumanization that is killing Palestinians in Gaza is also killing Palestinians here.

Hadiya: How do you think your background informed how you see the current situation in Gaza and Israel?

Odeliya: I was born in Jerusalem, my parents are from Florida, and my great-grandparents fled pogroms in Eastern Europe. The story of fleeing persecution runs deep in my family, and I think a genetic memory in Jews everywhere has been triggered—we don't truly feel safe anywhere.

My family's history has also informed me through education about pogroms, genocide, and

genocidal language. In the last year, I've witnessed pogroms far too similar to what my family endured in Europe happening in the West Bank. There's also an evident popularization of genocidal language among Israeli officials and the public. The sheer irony of a so-called "Jewish" state instilling such hatred toward Palestinians is why pushing back against this rhetoric is so important to me.

Odeliya: How do you think your community in Chicago is coping with Wadea's murder?

Hadiya: I was born and raised in Cook County, IL. The area is home to the largest Palestinian diaspora in the United States.

In the early weeks after Oct. 7, the Chicago City Council debated support for an inflammatory pro-Israel resolution that explicitly invoked 9/11-era anti-Arab rhetoric. It failed to acknowledge the Palestinian deaths in Gaza or call for an end to violence.

The council was warned that the resolution's language would lead to further division and violence here, and it was absolutely devastating to see that realized just days after it passed over our objections.

Hadiya: What is your vision for future solidarity?

Odeliya: My vision for future solidarity is the amplification of what I'm already seeing on the ground. It's not a coincidence that there's such a large movement of Jewish voices calling to end the war in Gaza alongside Muslim brothers and sisters. It's not a coincidence that the vast majority of the first 25 members of Congress calling for a ceasefire are people of color.

We carry our ancestors' experiences and our own experiences as a monument to how painful oppression is, and that violence is not the answer. With this in our minds and hearts, we are breaking boundaries that have never been broken.

Odeliya: What gives you hope?

Hadiya: This current work for a ceasefire would not be possible without the organizing that came before Oct. 7. I believe the peace we seek will come from the strength of our communities.

Everyone has a role to play, no matter where they are, in building a community that rejects Islamophobia, antisemitism, and anti-Palestinian racism. Palestinians and other organizers have shown us repeatedly how hate here and violence abroad are connected.

The full interview can be found at fcnl.org/muslimandajew 