

NPYM Considerations for FGC Affiliation

The following questions are posed by NPYM and found in Faith and Practice under: When considering affiliation with another organization.

The answers were compiled from “Process and Procedures for a Yearly Meeting to Affiliate with Friends General Conference” (found on the FGC website) and from direct inquiry to FGC’s General Secretary, Barry Crossno.

1. What is the organization and its purpose? Is this a Friends organization?

Friends General Conference is a Quaker organization whose purpose is to serve the needs of Friends and meetings by providing and helping to disseminate resources that educate, inspire and empower Friends in living their faith.

Its Vision Statement reads: “We envision a vital and growing Religious Society of Friends – a faith that deepens spiritually, welcomes newcomers, builds supportive and inclusive community, and provides loving service and witness to the world. Through Friends General Conference, we see Quakers led by the Spirit joining together in ministry to offer services that help Friends, meetings and seekers explore, deepen, connect, serve and witness within the context of our living faith.”

2. If it is a Friends organization, is this organization welcoming of all Friends or is it oriented to a particular group?

It originated in the unprogrammed tradition of the Religious Society of Friends and primarily serves these Friends. However, FGC resources and programs are available to all Friends.. Through its Christian and Interfaith Relations Committee, it ministers to the wider faith community. All Friends and other people of faith avail themselves of the wide range of books and materials available through Quakerbooks of FGC.

3. Is affiliation open only to Friends meetings? If not, what other individuals or organizations are affiliated?

Affiliation is open to Friends meetings, both Yearly meetings and Monthly meetings. A total of 16 yearly meetings and 12 monthly meetings are affiliated with FGC. They are listed on the FGC website. Intermountain Yearly Meeting affiliated in 2012, Pacific Yearly Meeting affiliated in 2019. Affiliation enables meetings to help set priorities for the organization and to plan and implement FGC programs through their appointees. Appointees experience the wider circle of Friends and bring back knowledge of resources available and ways that other Friends are meeting common challenges.

4. What are its mission and its goals?

Friends General Conference, with Divine guidance, nurtures the spiritual vitality of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) by providing programs and services for Friends, meetings and seekers. Major Goals include:

- 1. Nurture meetings and worship groups*
- 2. Provide resources and opportunities for meetings, Friends, and seekers to experience the Light, the living presence of God.*
- 3. Help meetings guide Friends to discern the leadings of the Inward Teacher and to grow in ministry.*
- 4. Transform our awareness so that our corporate and individual attitudes and actions fully value and encompass the blessed diversity of our human family.*
- 5. Work to grow and sustain a vital, diverse, and loving community of Friends based on a shared search for unity in the Spirit.*
- 6. Articulate, communicate, and exemplify Friends' practices, core experiences, and the call to live and witness to our faith.*
- 7. Promote dialogue with others, sharing with them our corporate experience of Divine Truth and listening to and learning from their experience of the same.*

5. What is the decision-making process of the organization? How are affiliated meetings/organizations part of that decision making?

Appointees from affiliated meetings serve on Central Committee which considers the business, budgets and new leadings for the organization. Central Committee is the governing body of FGC, FGC endeavors to be faithful in its Quaker practice believing that in worship and openness to God, right order will emerge. Friends work together across yearly meeting lines and are thus aware of current and emerging issues and concerns of Friends. Central Committee is responsible only for the programs and policies of FGC and not for those of the affiliated meetings.

6. What do we know about the financial and institutional health of this organization?

The financial health post pandemic is mixed. Current total liabilities and equity is \$78,158,000. FGC has adequate unrestricted reserves to spend at levels spent in 2023 for five more years. However Central Committee agreed in October 2024 to a five-year process to reduce spending each year from reserves, mostly in FY26-28 due to commitments already in place for FY25. The long-term goal is to not draw down more than 5% of unrestricted and restricted reserves each year, ensuring that FGC has long-term financial viability. By way of background there was unity

at the onset of the pandemic to pull significantly from reserves to maintain existing programs and shift also to online events. This drew down a previous unrestricted \$3.4 million dollar gift from 20 years ago at a faster rate than had previous been used though there is still nearly \$2.9 in that fund at this time. Complicating this picture for all non-profits is that activities have not returned to pre pandemic levels and inflation is affecting everyone. Thus the buying power of the Annual Fund donations is decreased while expenses increase. In addition, both the 2023 FGC Gathering in Oregon and the 2024 Gathering in Pennsylvania lost money, in part due to lower than pre-pandemic attendance. FGC is working on redesigning the Gathering to be sustainable at lower registration numbers. Extraordinary stock market gains this particular year have made up for these losses resulting in a better balance sheet than a year ago. Audited financial reports for 2023 can be found at: <https://www.fgcquaker.org/governance-stewardship-and-finance/>

7. Is there anything about the financial or legal status of this organization (e.g. tax-exempt status, political lobbying status) that would have a negative impact on NPYM's financial or legal status?

Barry Crossno, General Secretary of FGC is unaware of any circumstance where affiliating with FGC could endanger the financial well-being or legal status of the yearly meeting. FGC does almost no direct political lobbying. Once in the last 13 years he delivered affiliate yearly meetings' Minutes of Conscience on Climate Change to a Senator. Rare public statements have been made (regarding 9/11, George Floyd, and the Ukraine War) because Friends requested them. In addition FGC, after consultation and discernment with affiliated Meetings, signed on to a lawsuit endorsed by many religious groups challenging Trump's executive order concerning ICE access to churches. Public statements are rare and fall well below IRS thresholds posing no danger to FGC's or affiliates legal status.

8. Does NPYM Legal and Finance Committee have any specific concerns about this affiliation? NPYM Legal and Finance Committee has considered the information provided here and reports: "We see no reason why NPYM should not affiliate with FGC, as long as there is the enthusiasm at the meeting level and amongst the members to do this. If there is the desire to do this, we could increase the assessments to provide money to support the expenses of the reps for FGC and for the amount need to pay our share to FGC."

9. What are the organization's criteria/expectations for affiliation? Number of representatives? Responsibilities of representatives? Will representatives be expected to attend meetings? Where? How often?

Affiliated yearly meetings are asked to name two appointees to Central Committee for every 500 members. Groups with fewer than 1000 members are asked to name up to three representatives. Members of Central Committee are asked to serve on at least one program or administrative committee. Central Committee meets once yearly, most recently at Mother Boniface Spirituality Center in Philadelphia and usually at a retreat center between New York and Maryland. This is a hybrid meeting with 50 Friends in person and 30 on-line at the most recent meeting. It would be beneficial if a representative's first meeting were to be attended in-person, a practice that fosters relationships that facilitate better online interactions later. One appointee from a yearly meeting serves as the yearly meeting's representative to FGC's executive committee that meets three times a year; twice online and once hybrid.

Are there funds available from the organization to defray the representatives' expenses? Does the organization expect a financial contribution from NPYM? If so, how much? Are there other obligations or expectations, e.g. Hosting an annual meeting or sharing our directory database?

The yearly meeting is expected to name an appropriate number of appointees and to support their participation in the functions of Central Committee to the extent possible. Yearly meetings are expected to cover the costs of representatives' attendance (as needed). Though there is some fee for online participation, costs can be contained substantially by online attendance. Program and administrative committees of Central Committee meet online and as such participation here does not require financial assistance.

Affiliated meetings are expected to contribute financially to the support of FGC programs to the extent possible. There is no set amount expected and contributions vary widely according to the size and financial resources of the yearly meeting. In a recent year, yearly meeting giving ranged from \$300 to \$20,000 (a range of \$.25/member to \$8.43/member with an average of \$2.45/member). In lean years, some have suspended their financial support for a time. There is no legal framework that requires financial support. The majority of FGC's funding comes from individual donors, foundations, reserves and income from investments.

Affiliated meetings do provide the FGC office with an updated mailing list twice yearly. FGC sends up to three mailings per year to all Friends on the yearly meeting list to invite participation in and support of its programs and services. FGC does not share its mailing list with other organizations.

10. Who has brought the request to NPYM? What is the level of interest in NPYM?

The request to consider affiliation was brought to the floor of NPYM's annual session in 2024 by Carol Bellin on behalf of Missoula Friends Meeting. The level of interest is being explored through each Monthly Meeting and Worship Group considering the question with the assistance of background material from the ad hoc committee and reporting feedback to the committee.

11. How are Friends in NPYM currently involved in this organization?

Three monthly meetings of NPYM are already directly affiliated. Olympia, Lopez and Multnomah. As a result, Friends from NPYM are serving on FGC's Central Committee. NPYM was heavily involved with planning of the 2023 Gathering in Monmouth OR that was under the care of Pacific Yearly Meeting and 72 people from NPYM attended, most of these in-person. Friends from NPYM monthly meetings led workshops at this gathering and have done so over the years. Co-clerks of the 2023 Gathering Committee were from Bridge City Monthly Meeting and many Gathering Committee members came from NPYM meetings. Six members of NPYM meetings (South Seattle, Bridge City, Port Townsend, Whidbey Island and Missoula) stepped forward to serve on the ad hoc committee considering affiliation at this time. Many Friends are longtime donors.

12. Does NPYM have any previous history with this organization?

NPYM has been utilizing services and programs of FGC for many years. Examples include educational materials for adults and youth. Meetings and individuals utilize QuakerBooks to supply our libraries. Some Meetings have borrowed money from the Friends Meeting House Fund to finance building projects. We sing from Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal. NPYM invited the Gathering to meet for the first time in the pacific northwest in 2006 and registration exceeded all expectations, requiring expansion of lodging and dining beyond the confines of the campus. Individual Friends have served by invitation on FGC's Central Committee over the years.

Addendum: NEW NEWS from FGC: Exciting new initiatives being pursued by FGC at this time include the redesign of the Gathering for sustainability with fewer attendees. FGC plans to retain major events but do more to help local meetings grow their local attendance. This is in addition to the Spiritual Deepening, anti-racism and other programs that are already underway. Central Committee just approved a standing committee for Visibility and Outreach with Invitational Outreach a priority that will be established in 2025. The decision to limit reserve spending to 5% will certainly require a reduction in overall staffing and shifting staff to new areas of focus but major fundraising to try to grow the RSoF will be undertaken. A tour through the FGC website offers insight into the programs and offerings of Friends General Conference.

<https://www.fgcquaker.org/>