



Friends World Committee for Consultation
Section of the Americas

Comité Mundial de Consulta de los Amigos
Sección de las Américas

STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-2023

Weaving the Tapestry



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Approved by the FWCC Section of the Americas Executive Committee, 9/20/2014 in Portland, Maine.

Extended from 5 years to 8 years in 2016. Not all references to 2020 have been changed in the document.

I. INTRODUCTION

Who we are

Created out of vision and hope almost a century ago, Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) today is a broad association of Quaker Yearly Meetings stretching across all branches of Friends—an interweaving of relationships, histories, and concerns. The Section of the Americas (SoA), one of four regional groupings in this association, extends from the Arctic to the Andes. A long term goal has been to achieve full participation from the wide diversity of Friends in the work of the Section. Broader participation by younger Friends, evangelical Friends, Friends of color, and Latin American Friends, as well as unaffiliated Friends, is a priority for the Section.

In the Section of the Americas, Yearly Meetings in North, Central, South America and the Caribbean name Representatives who meet every other year to conduct the business of the Section. This gathering approves the nominations of officers and members of standing committees, including an Executive Committee charged with managing the business and affairs of the Section in accordance with the policies and directions developed by Section Representatives. An Executive Secretary and paid staff continue to be a very small part of the overall work of the Section of the Americas, supporting and coordinating the many volunteers and Representatives who must do the bulk of the work of governance and program implementation.

One of the Executive Committee's central responsibilities is to participate in the ongoing planning of ways to advance our mission within the Section of the Americas. This includes periodically looking toward future challenges and opportunities that may impact our work within the Section. This planning calls for both spiritual and practical resources. In this work we put our hands and minds to the service of God and are drawn into a labor of love and discernment.

“Without a vision, the people perish.” Proverbs 28:18

In the fall of 2013 the Section of the Americas Executive Committee embarked upon a new cycle of strategic planning, and this has continued up to the present. The following two questions have in this process arisen to challenge us: What are the needs that FWCC is called to address for the Religious Society of Friends of the future? How can we have the most impact in advancing our mission of understanding and connection among Friends of diverse backgrounds in the Section of the Americas?

Much evaluation had already been done—an extensive review of our COAL (Comité de los Amigos Latinoamericanos/Committee of Latin American Friends) programs in 2010-2012, an online survey of all subscribers to our English and Spanish language e-newsletters in 2013, followed by a visioning exercise at the Section Meeting in Indiana. Later in 2013, the Executive Committee evaluated the perceived impact of each of our current programs compared to the cost, in time and money.

In a world stretched by divergent forces, strained by distances of many kinds, yet in great need of what our Quaker way can bring, we felt called to weave Friends into a new, more vivid tapestry of connection that could deeply serve the needs of our time. Yearning to be “knit together in love,” we imagined our rich and varied colors and shapes gathered and sustained in a common fabric. We envisioned a thriving and integrated network of Friends throughout the Americas woven together in

transformative faith, learning to *love, listen, and witness*. Moved by this vision, we began the work of listening to the different voices of our community for guidance and encouragement in the development of a five-year plan.

Listening to Friends

In 2014, the Executive Committee interviewed current and former FWCC Representatives, other committee members, Friends familiar with FWCC, and some who were not, to explore the two questions above and others, in order to discern FWCC's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and calling as an organization serving Friends today in North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean. Several overarching themes of advice, caution, and encouragement emerged from these interviews:

- Focus on the vital work that needs to be done to build connections among Friends from different branches. "If FWCC did not exist, it would need to be invented"
- Embrace the possibility that the tools and channels of connection now available may result in a very different presence and approach to our work
- Be prepared to take risks, strike out in a new direction and invite Friends to join us as we venture into new territory
- Recognize that some of the larger constituencies we currently serve may not embrace the change that is needed, and new or emerging constituencies may need to be cultivated and strengthened
- Be a catalyst in forging collaborations and networking among Friends' groups and organizations
- Focus on telling stories of ministry and lives transformed by the Light, and on strengthening relationships among Friends at the local level in new and enlivening ways

The new structures

Each of our programs will connect with and serve all the geographic regions of the Section and will be evaluated from those various perspectives.

The proposed programs are Visitation, Connections and Funding Innovation. Paid staff continue to be a very small part of the overall work of the Section of the Americas, supporting and coordinating volunteers and Representatives who do the bulk of the work of governance and program implementation.

The Visitation Program will be the central focus of work of the Section of the Americas. It will primarily serve to organize a corps of Spanish- and English-speaking (but not necessarily bilingual) Friends, particularly FWCC reps and volunteers, to send as traveling ministers* throughout the Section, crossing Yearly Meeting lines and other divisions among Friends. Working groups within this program will take on greater responsibility for the preparation of the Section meetings in 2017 and 2019 and the International Representatives Meeting to be held in the Section of the Americas in

*Friends recognize the ministry gifts and callings of all Friends as ministers; regardless of age, gender, education, occupation, or status as "recorded ministers." References to "traveling ministers" refer to Friends who are recognized by their local church, monthly meeting or yearly meeting and called to travel in ministry among Friends.

2016. This Program Group will also prepare regional gatherings for the training of Representatives and other interested Friends in 2018.

The Connections Program will manage communications for the Section, including directory updates, the Voices of Friends Website and other social and electronic media, and responding to Friends and seekers who inquire about the Religious Society of Friends locally or internationally. Working Groups in this program will train and support Representatives to do this work.

The Funding Innovation Program will explore new ideas and experiment with alternative funding possibilities using models from other faith-based non-profit organizations.

Weaving the tapestry: a work in progress

Stories of ministry, lives transformed, strengthened relationships: the work of Friends has always been a mix of practicality and vision; these two are themselves interwoven, becoming part of the tapestry of our process. As the Executive Committee moved through 2014, this vision, and the conviction that a new direction of work was before us, grew in strength and clarity. The “portrait” upon which the tapestry was to be patterned began to take shape. Indeed, this strategic plan is an outline of that work—its rationale, its direction, its demands. It describes what we believe our FWCC Section must undertake to accomplish its mission. The plan provides guidance in fulfilling our mission with maximum efficiency and impact, articulating specific goals and the action steps and resources needed to accomplish them. It is a guide and an invitation, for the labors of many will be needed in this transformative work. The way ahead will bring unanticipated challenges. With Divine assistance and the help and engagement of many Friends, we will move to face these. Our weaving is a work in progress.

II. Vision, Mission, Values, Practices

This five-year plan does not change the mission, values, stakeholders or core practices of the Friends World Committee. It does invite us to clarify our vision. It will change the ways we organize this work in the world. These changes do not reflect or require any revisions to the bylaws of the Section of the Americas as last amended in 2011.

Vision

We envision a thriving and integrated network of Friends from the Arctic to the Andes woven together in transformative faith, learning to love, listen, and witness.

Mission Statement

Answering God's call to universal love, FWCC brings Friends of varying religious traditions and cultural experiences together in worship, communication and consultation to express our common spiritual heritage and Quaker message to the world.

Core Values

- Work under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, seeking God's will and assistance
- Be peacemakers and reconcilers among Friends
- Act on the testimony on equality as we seek to cross barriers of geographic distance, language, culture, racism, theology, gender, age and access to power and material wealth

Core Practices

- Build trust and fellowship among Friends from different traditions
- Promote cross-cultural understanding by bringing together Friends of different ages, genders, nationalities, spiritual practices, and theological beliefs at gatherings and on committees
- Provide opportunities for Friends to identify and work on common concerns, service, and action
- Provide travel and other arrangements assistance for these encounters
- Maintain a website, electronic newsletter, and print newsletter
- Collect and disseminate information about Friends' churches, Monthly and Yearly Meetings, and groups
- Provide Spanish and English translations and interpretation
- Maintain diverse representation on governing committees and program groups, and transparent stewardship of organizational resources

What traits and approaches make FWCC an effective player among Friends in the Americas?

- We understand and respect the range of theological and cultural differences among Friends in the Americas.
- We recognize and facilitate opportunities for Friends of diverse backgrounds to work together toward common objectives.
- We convene disparate groups effectively.
- We remain non-partisan on divisive issues; we do not state positions.
- We network effectively.
- We communicate well and put Friends in touch with one another.
- We are flexible and open to new directions.
- We honor and uphold the interests of all Friends, rather than favoring the needs of one group over another.

III. Strategic Issues, Goals and Activities

Strategic Issues

In the simplest of terms, strategic planning is the process by which an organization envisions its future and asks, “what challenges and opportunities must we embrace in order to achieve that vision?” The Executive Committee found inspiration for this endeavor in the words of Rufus Jones, from an address to Baltimore YM Young Friends in 1944, titled, *What Will Get Us Ready?*, and from Parker Palmer’s 2009 article, *The Broken-Open Heart: Living with Faith and Hope in the Tragic Gap*.

The face of the Religious Society of Friends is changing. The way in which we deliver and receive information is changing. The demographics and economies of both North and South America are changing. In the midst of these and so many other changes, what must we do now to get ready? What are the issues we must address in order to continue to weave a tapestry of cooperation and understanding among Friends in the Americas over the coming decade? The Executive Committee identified three challenges it considers to be organizational priorities:

1. How can FWCC increase understanding within and between Friends’ groups? How can FWCC create and strengthen connections among all Quakers in the Americas, no matter their group identity or tradition?

These are polarizing times—politically, socially, economically, and theologically—and Friends are not immune to the internal tensions created by our differences. The dissension that sometimes results from polarization around issues of theology, practice and authority, and by divisions of age and geography, is causing fresh wounds within and between branches of Friends in the Section of the Americas.

The heart of FWCC’s mission calls us to serve as an instrument of healing and inspiration in the midst of polarizing tensions among Friends. Our core competency is in promoting communal understanding by bringing Friends of diverse backgrounds, practices and theologies together in worship, communication and consultation. Our vision of a tapestry of Quakers from all traditions, woven together by transformative faith, calls us to play a more active role in leading the willing toward a blessed community inspired by divine guidance and understanding.

Our activities and work as an organization should be directly oriented toward the goal of strengthening connections among Friends, and we should commit to this endeavor with more intention and leadership than ever before. The fact, for example, that many Friends from the same city or area but different Quaker traditions have never or rarely ever talked to each other is something FWCC can and should attempt to remedy. In the words of Rufus Jones, “we can very well have a moratorium of divisive theological doctrines and focus our minds on a religion of life, vitally, lovingly, constructively grasped and expressed in life and character.” We must look for new opportunities to call for that moratorium and invite Friends to walk new paths of loving kindness and truth.

2. How can FWCC Section of the Americas clearly transmit the inspiring power of our work so that Friends will understand, support and participate in our ministry of transforming lives and faith communities?

“Persons are set on fire by someone who is already aflame.” - Rufus Jones

We must find new ways to bring the vision—of a thriving and integrated network of Friends woven together in transformative faith—into the lives of those who might be led to be a part of it. In the words of Rufus Jones, “we labor in vain unless we discover how to... transport the kindling power”

of our work to Friends in their local meetings “where the actual vitality and power and future potency of Quakerism is being settled and determined.”

Those of us who have been involved with FWCC know that the encounters FWCC facilitates have that “kindling power” to change lives and enhance the vibrancy of the Religious Society of Friends. But we need to help others see the value of our work and the invitation to share in it. We need to build an active and compelling communications strategy to help Friends at all levels of involvement understand what opportunities, experiences and outcomes FWCC helps make possible through the movement of the Spirit among us. We must move our visibility forward from “trying to help people know we exist” to being a trusted source of dynamic visitors and news from the growing edges of the Quaker movement: sharing new ministries, helping Friends understand complex issues, and bringing Friends together around shared challenges.

3. How will FWCC SoA find adequate financial resources to support staff and programs necessary to advance its mission in the coming decade?

Like many faith-based organizations headquartered in North America, FWCC has experienced a steady, year-over-year decline in the size and numbers of contributions from individuals and meetings. Over the past 10 years our total number of donors has declined by 25%. Traditional patterns of giving are changing, and competition for the attention of a diminishing donor base has increased among all organizations, even within the Religious Society of Friends.

If we are to sustain our current level of operations we must explore alternate revenue-generating opportunities to supplement our traditional North American donor-dependent funding base. The form such activities might take should be consistent with our mission, values, and core practices, but will represent something new among our traditional services and programs. Some faith-based organizations have turned to social enterprise as a solution, structuring activities to simultaneously increase their visibility, build important relationships, and generate revenue by offering goods or services for sale to the larger community. We seek God’s grace and direction as we explore new ways to stabilize our income in order to carry out our mission in the Section of the Americas.

Strategic Goals

Goal 1: To increase understanding among Friends from different traditions, connecting Quakers of all traditions in the Americas

Goal 2: To communicate and transmit the inspiring power of our work in order to involve more Friends in FWCC’s ministry – transforming lives and faith communities through cross-branch understanding

Goal 3: To find new sources of funding to sustain the staffing and programs necessary to advance our mission

Strategic Activities

Goal 1: To increase understanding among Friends from different traditions, connecting Quakers of all traditions in the Americas

Objective 1.1: Build a reserve corps of traveling ministers* for inter-visitation at the local meeting/church level

Activities

- 1.1.1 Work with Yearly Meetings to recruit and select diverse, qualified and Spirit-led Friends as traveling ministers
- 1.1.2 Produce training materials for traveling ministers and host meetings
- 1.1.3 Work with Yearly Meetings to coordinate travel to local meetings and churches
- 1.1.4 Organize training and support at regional, Section-wide and world-wide meetings of Representatives

Objective 1.2: Organize spiritual leadership development program specifically for young Friends

Activities

- 1.2.1 Consider what young Friends (YFs) in the Americas need from FWCC in the 21st century
- 1.2.2 Balance the need with what FWCC can offer to YFs besides the traditional Quaker Youth Pilgrimage (QYP) model

Goal 2: To communicate and transmit the inspiring power of our work in order to involve more Friends in FWCC's ministry – transforming lives and faith communities through cross-branch understanding

Objective 2.1: Prepare and assist Representatives in communicating the FWCC “story” to Friends at the Monthly Meeting/church level

Activities

- 2.1.1 Improve recruitment of Friends to serve as Yearly Meeting Representatives to FWCC
- 2.1.2 Assist and encourage FWCC regional clerks in their leadership roles, especially as mentors for Representatives
- 2.1.3 Create web-based tools and resources in English and Spanish for Representatives to use to generate local interest in cross-branch encounters.
- 2.1.4 Organize Representative training and support at regional, Section-wide and world-wide meetings of Representatives for their role in connecting Friends and responding to inquiries—electronically, in person, by phone, and in print

Objective 2.2: Enhance tools and opportunities to assist all interested Friends in understanding the value of cross-branch encounters

Activities

- 2.2.1 Produce bilingual religious education materials for all ages about the wider family of Friends
- 2.2.2 Gather and publish testimonials in English and Spanish of the traveling ministers, Friends whose faith and practice has been enhanced through cross-branch and cross-cultural encounters

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- 2.2.3 Offer technical assistance, including contact information about convergent or cross-branch activities in order to help individual Friends or meetings or churches throughout the Americas interested in such encounters in their local area
- 2.2.4 Coordinate World Quaker Day in the Americas

Goal 3: To find new sources of funding to sustain the staffing and programs necessary to advance our mission

Objective 3.1: Expand development efforts for planned giving outreach among FWCC donor base Activities

- 3.1.1 Partner with a like-minded financial services organization such as Everence in order to access “turn-key” resources for planned giving development and management
- 3.1.2 Improve cultivation, solicitation and stewardship of donors to increase prospects for significant planned gifts

Objective 3.2: Explore feasibility of social enterprise as means of generating revenue for operations Activities

- 3.2.1 Create an ad hoc committee to generate and research ideas for one or more alternative funding possibilities informed by models from other faith-based non-profit organizations
- 3.2.2 Experiment over three years to test the strategy.

IV. Proposed Organizational Structure

The system of Representatives named by Yearly Meetings will continue to be the warp threads of the tapestry of the Friends World Committee. For many people, this is their initial involvement with FWCC. Representatives are the active communicative strands of this work, carrying information and service from the Section to the Yearly Meetings and from the Yearly Meetings to the Section. This living fabric is sustained and strengthened by caring Friends in the larger community who serve the FWCC in many other ways.

The standing committees of Executive, Finance, Nominating and Naming will continue uninterrupted. The function of fundraising will be under the care of Executive, but also distributed through each program. The proposed programs, or the weft threads of the tapestry, are Visitation, Connections and Funding Innovation.

The Visitation Program will be the central focus of work of the Section of the Americas. It will primarily serve to organize a corps of Friends to send as traveling ministers* throughout the Section, crossing Yearly Meeting lines and other divisions among Friends. This program will be responsible for publicity, clearness and training, and accountability, for the traveling ministers and the receiving groups of Friends. Working Groups within this program will take on greater responsibility for the preparation of the Section meetings in 2017 and 2019, regional training conferences in 2018 and the International Representatives Meeting to be held in the Section of the Americas in 2016. This Program will also be responsible for managing applications for funds to support travel in the ministry/visitation.

The Connections Program will serve Friends and Seekers who inquire about the Religious Society of Friends locally or internationally, communicating in all relevant media, and providing information about local Friends meetings and churches in the Americas. This program will coordinate with Visitation to promote all programs of the Section. The mission-critical elements of the work and the members of the Wider Quaker Fellowship program will be merged into this program. Working Groups in this program will manage the directory, the Voices of Friends website, the newsletter and social media accounts. This program will coordinate the observance of World Quaker Day with the World Office and other Sections.

The Funding Innovation Program will explore new ideas for one or more alternative funding possibilities using models from other faith-based non-profit organizations. This program will benefit from skills and relationships that we already have, building on our competencies, and aim to return some portion of revenues to support the Friends World Committee. This work will be done with transparency and fair trade ethics. It will experiment with at least one model in this five-year period.

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V. Guidelines for Program Choices and Evaluation

Gateway criteria

1. Will the proposed activity move the Section of the Americas towards our goals?
2. Will this work benefit from what we do best? (our core practices)
3. Do we have (or can we get) the staff capacity and resources to take on this activity?
4. Is the result we hope to derive from the activity the best we can get from the resources we commit?
5. Can we effectively evaluate the effects of this activity?
6. Is FWCC Section of the Americas the best choice for this activity? Or would this work be better taken on by another organization?
7. Will this activity have a positive impact on our stakeholders and on public perceptions?

Theory of Change

In a time of worldwide challenge and change, Quaker practices provide profoundly relevant tools to nurture and nourish deep faith, enduring hope and resilience in the face of uncertainty, conflict and fear. If FWCC brings Friends from across our tradition together for transformative encounters, then they will be challenged and encouraged in living their particular part of Friends witness. If FWCC sends Friends gifted in ministry to Quaker communities from the Arctic to the Andes, then they will build the life of those local meetings and churches, and enrich and strengthen their connections to the wider work and ministry of Friends. If FWCC provides resources online and in print to support this work, then we will lift up compelling, dynamic and relevant Friends' voices to a wider audience, and help those attracted to the Quaker message become more fully a part of Friends' experience and service in the world. By weaving together the separate strands of the Quaker tradition, the Friends World Committee creates the conditions for increased vitality and fullness of the work of the Holy Spirit through Friends in our time.

How will FWCC know its mission is being accomplished?

- Improved quality and quantity of communication between branches of Friends, leading to increased mutual respect, intervisitation, and understanding across Quaker worship traditions
- Increased capacity to work and worship together across differences of culture, race, class and language as well as theology, while respecting and valuing differences
- More Yearly Meetings affiliating with and supporting FWCC, putting increased value on being part of the world family of Friends
- Increased attendance/participation in FWCC gatherings, meetings, and consultations
- Deeper, broader understanding of Quakerism as a whole among all kinds of Friends (including Latin American, Caribbean and convinced Friends)
- Increased financial support, as well as increased in-kind support (facilities, volunteer labor, etc.)

What can we measure in the kind of work we do?

Our evaluation should look at whether our hypothesis (the theory of change) was accurate as well as whether we provided the right inputs or catalysts in order to achieve the outcomes we intended. Because this work is ultimately done by God through our hands, we can only measure the work of our hands and the visible and audible changes in the Religious Society of Friends. More specific outcomes and means of evaluation will be articulated along with the program plans.

Who needs to be consulted?

- Yearly meeting leaders in all regions of the Section
- Representatives
- Leaders of other Sections
- Donors
- Event participants
- A diverse sampling of the Religious Society of Friends, including Spanish and English speakers, evangelical, younger Friends and Friends of color, from all regions of the Section

VI. Timeline for Planning, Implementation, and Review

Strategic Plan 2015-2020

Approval by EC in September 2014

Approval by Representatives in March 2015

Work Plan and Budget for Fiscal Years 2016 & 2017

Approval by EC in January 2015

Approval by Representatives in March 2015

Review of the workplan implementation and revisions for FY 2017

EC in September 2015

Mid-course Evaluation of the 5 year Strategic Plan and 2 year work plan implementation

EC in September 2016

Work Plan and Budget for Fiscal Years 2018 & 2019

Approval by EC in January 2017

Approval by Representatives in March 2017

Mid-course Evaluation of the 5 year Strategic Plan

EC in March 2018

Review of the workplan implementation and revisions for FY 2019

EC in September 2018

Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2021-2025

Approval by EC in September 2018

Approval by Representatives in March 2019

Work Plan and Budget for Fiscal Years 2020 & 2021

Approval by EC in January 2019

Approval by Representatives in March 2019

Evaluation of Strategic Plan concept, process and implementation

EC in March 2020

VII. Prayers for faithful and fruitful service

Dear God, Spirit of transparent love:
Grant us courageous attention,
Help us accept the mystery of your will.
Teach us to be helpful, gentle and persistent,
Help us awaken to your patience.
Keep us open, honest and adjustable,
Help us be flexible instruments, humbly
altruistic.
Forgive our immodest pretensions,
Help us let go of harmful judgments.
With Christ Jesus as our guide,
Help us in our relationship to others.
Release us from desire to control,
Help us create harmony as agents of your
design.
You are the awe inspiring power of good,
Help us work in mirthful serenity, a selfless
joy.
Serving aware of your call for Peace among
us,
Help us listen to each other, seeking your
voice.

Como el suave resplandor de la mañana,
como brote de renuevo en el jardín,
como lluvia fresca que nos baña,
es tu presencia Señor,
la podemos sentir.

Hoy esperamos tu guianza,
rogamos por tu dirección,
también te damos las gracias,
por ser nuestra inspiración.

Sé tú la puerta,
que nos invita a pasar,
Sé cómo el faro
Que ilumina para no naufragar.

Enséñanos a ser uno en ti,
a amarnos de forma incondicional
Enséñanos a ser hilo fuerte
que ata y enlaza,
en el tapiz que tejemos hoy.

Somos herramientas tuyas.
Con tus manos y las nuestras,
podemos construir un futuro mejor
en paciencia, persistencia y devoción.

Ayúdanos a escucharte
Y ser ecos de tu voz
Ayúdanos también a brindarte
Un servicio fiel y verdadero, Señor.

These poems/prayers are not translations, but two meditations on the same theme.