AFSC Corporation report

The AFSC Corporation met in early March in Philadelphia. Representatives from NPYM attending were Caroline Wildflower, Patty Lyman and Kirby Urner. Allen Stockbridge and Carol Urner from NPYM were also present as at-large members of the corporation.

The unifying theme of this year's corporation meeting was Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions or BDS, a response to a call issued by over 170 Palestinian organizations in 2005 asking that the international community implement "broad boycotts and... divestment initiatives against Israel simoar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era." Boycott and divestment actions target institutions and companies (Israeli and International) that profit from or are complicit in the violation of Palestinian rights with the goal of changing corporate/institutional and Israeli actions. AFSC urges Friends Meetings support boycotts of companies that are providing support to Israeli military actions. Saturday evening was a moving experience with the showing of 5 Broken Cameras. A small village in Palestine has continued eight years of non violent resistance to the takeover of their land and olive trees. One of the villagers was present to answer questions about their efforts to save their land. These tools of non-violent resistance / influence go far back into history and our dining area was decorated with posters in this tradition, some 53 specimens culled from over 10,000, with the curator somewhere in the Bay Area.

NPYM reps attended the meeting on our region, the Western region. We were pleased to see a map which delineated where the different current AFSC regions are and get some sense of how the Western region is now organized. Regional Director Sonya Tuma gave us some highlights, with the right of migration versus the concept of citizenship, both in Israel / Palestine and in North America.

In the immigration workshop we played a board game / simulation of the immigration process. Kirby played a Polish short order cook with no family in the US and no prospect of living here legally. Caroline and Patty attended the workshop on youth, where they participated in an exercise which showed us some of our white and class privilege and we were able to see a couple of the “If I had a trillion dollars” movies created by youth.

The corporation did not take action on one of the pending agenda items: resizing Yearly Meeting and At Large members such that yearly meetings would send at most two reps, versus at least two (the status quo). Kirby clarified with the General Secretary, Shan Cretin, that the fear of falling below quorum had not been realized in practice, but this was a danger if the bar was set too high, in terms of how many Friends would show up in person for a three day experience. Friends who do show up tend to come away impressed with all the work AFSC is doing and energized by its committed and professional staff. In addition, we found it valuable to have three representatives there. It gave the three of us a chance to experience different workshops and collaborate on planning for an interactive interest group to be offered at NPYM Annual Session.

A lot of emphasis has been put on the AFSC's Meeting / Church Liaison Program, which is regarded as a catalyst for furthering Quaker participation in the regional programs more generally. Every Meeting in NPYM is invited to select a liaison with AFSC.

We were pleased to hear that after the significant financial losses and downsizing which occurred during 2009, AFSC is now in good shape economically with reserves rebuilt and pension obligations again fully funded. AFSC is now working on building an endowment, which would help AFSC to continue doing its good work into the future and help weather future downturns.

-Kirby Urner, Caroline Wildflower, Patty Lyman