

American Friends Service Committee Report to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting at Annual Sessions 2014

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) engages in program work throughout the United States and across the world. As its mission statement indicates: “AFSC is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice as a practical expression of faith in action.”

Two years ago, AFSC changed its organizational structure so that there are now four US regions and four International regions. Most of the PYM territory is part of the Northeast Region; Keith Harvey is the regional director, based in Cambridge, MA. (Delaware and Maryland are in the South Region.) There are seven offices scattered across the Northeast Region, with two in Massachusetts and one each in Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey (Newark) and Pennsylvania (Pittsburgh). A couple of the offices have quite a few staff, specializing in particular areas of program work – for instance, the Newark, NJ office has some 10 staff assigned to a major Immigrant Rights program. Other offices have just one or two ‘generalist’ staff: in New Hampshire there are two staff who network with grassroots organizations, do advocacy work at the state legislature on economic justice and other issues, and provide youth leadership training.

The Pennsylvania Program, based in Pittsburgh, has been ably directed by Scilla Wahrhaftig for over a decade. She has been a frequent workshop leader at previous PYM Annual Sessions, and has made occasional presentations to monthly meetings and other groups within the PYM area, especially in conjunction with the Eyes Wide Open exhibit. Scilla will be retiring at the end of September and the new director for the Pennsylvania Program is Amanda Gross, who has a strong background in the intersection of the arts and peacebuilding, including a degree in Conflict Transformation from Eastern Mennonite University.

A little over a year ago, the Northeast Region began exploring the possibility of establishing program work in the Philadelphia area. The first step in this process was to engage in listening sessions with Quaker activists, representatives from local social justice organizations, PYM Friends at last summer’s Annual Sessions, and present and former AFSC staff in the area. Some of these sessions were held with the support of Philadelphia Quarterly Meeting. The next step is to form a local program committee, which – among other things – will assist in identifying the focus for program work in the

Philadelphia area. But the listening sessions indicate strong interest in programs relating to youth leadership development and healing justice work.

Submitted by PYM representatives to the AFSC Corporation.

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