

Gathering Anew Focus Group 5: 9/11/22 POC

Queries (optional):

- How do we center spirit and our connection to spirit in our new reality?
- How can the Gathering be an anti-racist faith community that centers youth and people of color?
- How do we build ecological sustainability into Gathering?
- How do we financially sustain the Gathering and make it affordable?

Opening remarks by Convener:

Brainstorming about the Gathering we want—referencing previous Gatherings, but without being bound by the events of the past

- “Yes..and?” approach: Every possibility is on the table, without reference to limitations of budget or institutional constraints
- The uniqueness of POC experience in Gathering
- Range of in-person attendance for the Gathering: range of 0-25, with about half having attending only online

Discussing the virtual experience:

- One issue with doing it online: Friend stated that they hated the first year of the online Gathering, observed marked improvement afterwards, particularly between the second and third years
- What do we like about gathering virtually?
 - Being able to stay at home, sleep in one’s own bed, accessibility (particularly around physical limitations), can create other things in the environment that can both enrich and buffer in-person aspects, being able to avoid the expense of travel, still being able to work the information desk, convenience of fitting the event into one’s schedule (especially given the number of other yearly meetings at the same time), no crowds, not having to encounter alienation and possible negative response of law enforcement in unfamiliar places, home as a space that is safe from various microaggressions, allows better integration between Gathering and personal and professional obligations
- Querying about wanting more Gatherings in urban, rather than rural/small-town, locations
 - Friend: Particular challenge of getting a college campus location that works for the event, and also getting colleges willing to host
 - Really trying to get to an HBCU for a Gathering, if possible
 - What does the Gathering need for hosting: rooms available for housing on-campus, July 4th is often not available, a dining hall

that can hold up to 500 people at a time and handle a rush hour, can kids stay in the parents' rooms, space for 60 simultaneous workshops and junior gathering as well, space for plenaries that can hold at least 1000 people, offering outdoor camping, getting a commitment at least two years in advance, physical accessibility (in terms of size, topography, navigability on-campus, etc.)

- Friend: Possibility of feeling overwhelmed at a physical Gathering precisely because there's no way to avoid possible issues with white people
- Friend: Disbanding of language justice section: chicken-and-egg situation, where there are limited resources and also limited people coming
 - Also a regular meeting for Spanish-speakers, separate from FGC, entering into second year of meeting today
 - Did have a positive experience in-person at Iowa
- Friend: question about the email for this focus group, particularly about the invitation to center Friends of color—are they serious? Do they know what it would really take to center POC at this national gathering?
 - Responding to previous Friend's list of the limitations of location—to actually center POC, the Gathering may need to be smaller, particularly given that so many of the Friends of color feel overwhelmed and exhausted by being at such a huge event with so many white people
 - Referencing [QURC] training on racial justice and taking racial parity seriously—20 POC applied, 100 white people applied, therefore there were 40 participants, and no more
- Friend: did not register for FGC Gathering this year, question about whether it's possible to register for just the Friends of color pre-gathering without having to register for the whole event
 - Friend: Yes, it's a requirement to register for the Gathering because the pre-gathering is meant to prepare and build community resources in order to get through the week
 - Friend: It's a night-and-day experience going into the Gathering with the pre-gathering retreat versus without. It feels like you're already there and already have a community to lean on
 - Friend: Any affinity group pre-Gathering would likely create a net positive, but for POC, it may be life-and-death, make-or-break in terms of stakes: but let's also disabuse ourselves of the notion that *any* part of the Gathering has to be the same as it was one, five, ten, or a hundred years ago. Do we need Gathering, or do we need something else? (FGC-sponsored, of course)
- Friend: first query: any things in the Gathering that were unsettling

- At first online Gathering, did put in a report of racial wounding, was handled well, asked that in the future there should be coaching about what the issue is
 - The sequencing and impact of the plenary speakers to center Friends of color: the speakers of color tend to come in the middle or later in the week, and the responsibility of the speakers to set the tone for the rest of the Gathering should be much more forward
 - Vis a vis the virtual piece: left out of speaking and being introduced during breakout groups, an experienced by other POC
 - New England Yearly Meeting has had both assigned noticers and also called for the entire body to act as noticers of ongoing patterns
 - Plenary speakers can set the tone for the body to act as noticers as well
 - With regard to finances: consider what is possible numerically in order to keep things pay-as-led
- Considering best practices from other yearly meetings
- Friend: attending in-person in North Carolina was life-changing
 - Points for improvement, at least in-person: need more time socialize and enjoy each other's company
 - Also had the experience of being excluded and not being allowed to sit with people who were saving seats
 - Too much classroom time, not enough time to get to know people (including online)--need more time for fun and fellowship!
- Friend: anecdote from Black fraternal organizations
 - Lobby fellowship: being able to see and be seen, hang out, run into people, make new friends, eat and drink
 - Is there actually a need for so much programming at FGC, or is it being driven by a sense that people need to get their money's worth?
- Friend: North Pacific Yearly Meeting with Vaness as a plenary speaker
 - Made an agreement to have a POC-specific dorm area
 - It was life-changing just getting to hang out, laugh, share stories, and spend time with Black and brown Friends
 - During POC worship sharing, feeling free to reject the queries and just engage each other
 - Space for joy, freedom to direct and shape the experience
- Friend: everything we're naming is something that white people already have
 - Attending in 2017 was unbelievably, painfully lonely and alienating

- Being on the plenary committee that year, there was so much box-checking going on that it felt like nothing was Spirit-led
 - People were not helpful, didn't share resources, did not extend hospitality
 - Feeling like both a spectacle and also invisible in the dorms and dining hall
 - Since the Gathering has gone virtual, it's become much more accessible for POC
 - Feeling that cliquishness, exclusion, and alienation has the force of intention behind it: the whiteness of it is harmful: we need financial parity as well as numerical parity
 - This was both the most lonely time and the most loving time, only felt affirmed as a Quaker with Vanessa and Regina Renee
- Friend:
 - Went in the early 90s and had to take a break, only came back when the pre-Gathering was planned
 - Recommended that FGC needs to look at how Friends of color handle conflict and intentionality—we don't need to be like them, they need to learn from us
- Friend: Suggesting that we have a Gathering that starts with the pre-Gathering and goes just a few days after. We need time for pre-Gathering and that should be given priority
- Friend: If FGC truly wants to be a POC-centered institution, why not make it free for all POC without putting the pressure of pay-as-led
- Friend: Strike! It feels like people really want something radical, some kind of radical formation that can't be so easily co-opted by white people or easily ignored by white people, either: something that's part of FGC and part of Gathering—something that the larger FGC community has to learn from, instead of learning being optional
- Friend: Anecdote from a lesbian community: you need to pay for us to have events and community-building of our own, very much in favor of Brenda's idea that FGC has to make the Gathering free for POC. If they can do it for young Quakers, they can do it for POC
- Friend: A strike actually did happen at Quaker Spring, in collective agreement among POC Friends
 - Wholly unprogrammed, for Christ-centered Friends
 - There's no reason why FGC couldn't have smaller regional gatherings at different times of year to accommodate people's schedules and finances
 - Putting an end to the work grants and the structure of people having to pay to present and lead workshops

- Friend: It's true that there are things we're not satisfied with—both in terms of pacing and process—but FGC does belong to all of us, not just white people of means. It belongs to all of us to build, re-build, or boycott

Chat:

16:32:24 From Convener

How do we center spirit and our connection to spirit in our new reality?

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Question was asked verbally: How many in-person gatherings have you attended?

- Most friends said zero, either verbally or in chat
- Two friends attended one
- One friend said two
- One friend attended five
- One friend said 25

Question was asked verbally: What are benefits to virtual gathering?

16:43:41 From Friend to Everyone:

I can sleep in my own bed

16:44:47 From Friend to Everyone:

No plane tickets or plane experience with people and their cooties

For that matter no cooties period

16:45:12 From Friend to Everyone:

I'm still able to work the information desk

16:46:01 From Two friends to Everyone:

No crowds.

After a discussion of best practices of Yearly Meetings:

16:59:01 From Friend to Everyone:

I attended New England Yearly Mtg in person at Castleton State College, not an HBCU but it was a comfortable experience. there is now an Amtrak station that comes from NYC. Note that BIPOC gatherings during the year virtually have occurred to build community and give feedback, There was a BIPOC space given during sessions. Good tech, food choices and for families.

On Quaker hospitality:

17:57:33 From Friend to Everyone:

Question: So, I have spoken to several FOC who said that white folks at gathering were not friendly & sometimes hostile. It makes me wonder if thiis gathering has become a cliquish (sp) social thing for white folks. If so, maybe it all needs to be broken down and rebuilt.

18:00:54 From Friend to Everyone:

Everyone I've spoke to who has gone to inperson gathering says the same thing. How are quakers not hospitable??

On multiracial families and families of diverse income:

18:04:33 From Friend to Everyone:

This also brings up those who are part of multiracial families . I have a nephew who is "white "who as a young friend was a group leader ,who came with a group of families from the Midwest., his own parents couldn't take off from work.He has not wanted to come in more recent years however.

Other comments:

18:24:00 From Friend (she/her) to Everyone:

I definitely resonate with the comments re more social time generally and more BIPOC spaces throughout the Gathering.

18:26:57 From Friend to Everyone:

If smaller retreat centers like Pendle Hill offered a program where the focus could be to experience the gathering as a group virtually, hybrid and could have a commuter option for those nearby.

18:29:25 From Friend to Everyone:

We don't have to be limited to college campuses. Need to find more fun places to gather

18:30:04 From Friend to Everyone:

Between grants from my yearly meeting, monthly meeting and a work grant and [Bayard] Rustin travel assistance I and my caregiver have attended Gathering at no cost to me, the cost for my non Quaker caregiver has been covered.

I agree that there needs to be some changes made, but am not sure what they should be.

Post group email:

The first is that I have never felt in anyway unwelcome at Gatherings. When we met in rural Iowa I expected that there might be some issues with some of the town folks I thought there might be some issues but I didn't run into any on the several trips my caregiver and I made off campus. I asked why that campus was chosen and I learned that Marvin our clerk had gone to school there (not the only reason, but I found it interesting). I wasn't at the gathering when we were warned about going into town alone (when I heard that had happened I had to wonder why that location was chosen).

The other thing is I wonder how many white Friends have a negative reaction to Friends of Color feeling the need to have separate activities and if it might not be best if it was better explained. I tend not to go to things for Friends of Color only because I don't support segregation under any name or guise.

Rather than strike why not work at opening better communications. Having people work together on things might help.