

A Theological Perspective on Quaker Lobbying

Margery Post Abbott



FCNL
Education Fund



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Preface: My Reading of Scripture

This publication, “A Theological Perspective on Quaker Lobbying,” is my attempt as a Friend to articulate the reading of scripture that grounds Quaker lobbying and advocacy in Washington, D.C., and in our various states around the nation. This is by no means a definitive statement, and for those who would like to pursue this question in more depth, I point to the writings of the Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder or the Quaker Lon Fendall. Their books are listed in the bibliography as well as other sources.



Margery Post Abbott. Photo by Kate Holt/FCNL

I also note that not all Quakers hold Christian scriptures as definitive, and some would articulate the grounding of their work in other ways. My hope is that this publication will give readers a place to begin both reaching deeper and exploring how integral faith is to the Quaker approach to influencing the government.

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are based on the New Revised Standard Version.

Margery Post Abbott
Portland, Oregon
July 2020

Foreword: Acting on Our Concerns



Diane Randall. FCNL photo.

Throughout our history, Friends have carried “concerns” that lead us to act. Sometime these concerns are for the Religious Society of Friends and its health and vitality. All Friends carry concerns for injustice that counters the world we seek.

These concerns may grow into leadings for people to take on direct service of the ministry of feeding people who are hungry, visiting incarcerated members of society, reducing violence, or creating a sustainable environment.

For others, the concern leads them to lobby public officials for changes in governmental policies that perpetuate all forms of injustice. These could range from the violation of human rights to endless and other wars, racial injustice, the degradation of our earth, or the unbalanced priorities of our federal budget.

In “A Theological Perspective on Quaker Lobbying,” Marge Abbott looks at the history of the Religious Society of Friends for the genesis of the Quakers’ call to lobby for peace and justice. At the same time, she also looks to the Bible, particularly in the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, his parables, and other teachings.

Her careful consideration of the spiritual and theological roots of Friends’ witness is both prophetic and pragmatic. She offers an explanation not only of how FCNL operates but also of how Friends through many generations have carried their concerns into the world.

This is the third printing and first major revision of the pamphlet. All the previous editions are out of print due to constant demand. When this was first published, it spurred much dialogue and deepened our listening and action.

As we continue to act on our concerns for peace, justice, and environmental stewardship, this pamphlet offers a theological and spiritual framework for the world we seek.

Diane Randall,
General Secretary
Friends Committee on National Legislation
July 2020



Diane Randall speaks at World Refugee Day rally in June 2018. Photo credit: FCNL.

1 » Faith and Lobbying

“A city built on a hill cannot be hid.”

– Matthew 5:14

The link between faith and lobbying is not as obvious as some like to think. After all, Jesus told us to “give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s.” (Matthew 22:21) This is one of many biblical admonitions to obey civil authority. But it is also a response to a trick question—“Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?”—that supporters of King Herod asked Jesus, hoping that his reply would be seditious enough to land him in jail (see Matthew: 22.15-22).

Jesus spoke in parables about how few people recognize who Jesus is, that his authority comes from God, and that the poor and rejected will be welcomed into the Kingdom of God.

After silencing these opponents and astonishing the crowd with the wisdom of his teachings, Jesus answered a lawyer who asked which commandment of the law was the greatest:

“‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:34-40).

These three aspects of Jesus’ message, as encapsulated in Matthew 22, leavened early Quaker approaches to government and civil authority, and are still important for many Friends today. Civil authority is to be obeyed; that’s an initial premise.

But we are not to be fools or pushed into betraying God's way. Above all, love of God, neighbor, and ourselves is the essential motivation for our interactions with one another, a motivation that welcomes in people who may be poor, disabled, or without shelter.

This publication explores dimensions of these New Testament dynamics as expressed by Friends in the 17th century and considers how they illuminate our actions today.¹

This brief overview can give only a glimpse of the link between Friends' political stance and its roots in Jesus' teachings. It offers some background on the 17th century Quaker relationship with government, followed by sections on the biblical basis of their approach and on the content of their arguments. The last chapter section relates how, in my view, the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) carries on this tradition today.

¹ For more on the New Testament call to place obedience to God above obedience to the civil government from an Evangelical Quaker perspective, see Fendall, "Citizenship."

2 » The Quaker Heritage

Quakers have worked to influence the government almost as long as there have been Friends. Their earliest activism was very much out of necessity. Friends were put in prison, their goods were confiscated, and they were beaten and sometimes executed because of their refusal to obey laws that violated their consciences—laws that they believed were not of God. They were also punished for objecting strenuously to misapplication of the law.²

An integral, but at the time highly unusual, aspect of Quaker interaction with government was an understanding that “dissent thus should be a process of persuasion and conviction, not coercion,” as the Quaker historian Jane Calvert describes it.³ Thus, Friends advocated change, not violent revolution.

But the line between religion and politics in England, Scotland, and Ireland was thin at best in the mid-17th century. The church and state were one, and the state enforced the collection of tithes to support the clergy. Nonpayment of tithes was at once a witness that Christ had come to teach his people himself (thus, clergy were not needed to mediate between God and humanity) and an assertion that tithing to the church was to be freely given, not compelled (as shown in Genesis 14:18-20). It was also a statement against a corrupt system.

² Quakers arose as a group, initially called “Children of the Light” or “Friends of Truth” during the English Civil War period. Many who became Quakers had supported Oliver Cromwell and the end of the monarchy; significant numbers fought in Cromwell’s New Model Army. As Cromwell’s government unfolded, Quakers found themselves at odds with him. George Fox at times confronted Cromwell directly about his governance. However, many of the problems that Friends faced during the interregnum were local rather than national. After the restoration of the monarchy, Parliament passed laws directly targeting Friends.

³ Calvert, “Political Obligation and Civil Dissent,” 73.

Quakerism was born in a period of civil strife followed by pandemic disease, during the Protectorate (1653-1659) formed by Oliver Cromwell after the defeat and beheading of King Charles I. In the writings of one of the earliest Quakers, Margaret Fell (1614-1702), we can see the desire to comply with government as well as the limits set on loyalty and above all the clarity that love is at the heart of Friends' work.

Fell consistently spoke up for Friends and traveled to London to carry her message in person to the king and to Parliament. In 1660, after the restoration of the monarchy, she delivered a message into the king's hand titled, "A Declaration and An Information from Us, the People Called Quakers, to The Present Governors, The King and Both Houses of Parliament, and All Whom It May Concern."

The declaration began by noting the suffering that Quakers experienced as they were imprisoned for worshiping outside the official church, refusing to swear oaths, and taking similar actions which arose out of Jesus' teachings and clear leadings of the Inward Light of Christ.

"Magistracy and Government we own in its Place, for while there is Transgression there must be a Law And true Government, according to the Law of God, is serviceable in its place (Romans 7:14, Romans 4:15, Romans 8:1, Galatians 5:23, Romans 8:8). And all Magistrates who fear God, and hate covetousness, and are guided by the Light of God in the Conscience, and execute the Law in its place, without partiality or respect of persons, and such are serviceable in their place, and this we own, and honour, and are subject to for Conscience sake (2 Samuel 23:3; Proverbs 28:15,16; Proverbs 25:28; Proverbs 29:10; Isaiah 14:15; James 2:9)."

– George Fox, "Some Principles of the Elect People of God in Scorn Called Quakers" (1671)

Friends similarly declared their identity and their willingness to comply with the law. But they were equally clear that it was unjust to punish anyone for worshiping God in a way other than that defined by the state. They had before them examples such as that of Paul, who in Acts 16 was wrongly beaten and imprisoned by Macedonian authorities.

That night, an earthquake damaged the prison. Paul could have walked away free. Instead, he and Silas remained. The next morning the magistrates tried to release him secretly, but when he asserted his rights as a Roman citizen, they made a public apology.

Fell articulated this dual responsibility—that of government not to hinder worship or the honest conscience and that of the individual to remain true to divine guidance:

“This [their imprisonment was] done, not for the wronging of any man, nor for the breach of any just law of the nation, nor for evil-doing, nor desiring of any evil, or wishing any hurt to any man, but for conscience’s sake towards God, because we would not bow to their worship, and because we could not maintain a ministry, which ministry we could not join with nor own...

“We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love and unity. It is our desire that others’ feet may walk in the same... [We] love and desire the good of all. For no other cause but love to the souls of all people have our sufferings been.”⁴

Despite (or perhaps because of) these assertions, the newly re-established monarchy considered Quakers to be dangerous, as evidenced in the 1661 legislation known as the “Quaker Act.”

⁴ Fell, “A Declaration and an Information from Us,” 54.

This Act stated in its preamble that “the said persons, under a pretence of religious worship, do often assemble themselves in great numbers in several parts of this realm, to the great endangering of the public peace and safety, and to the terror of the people.”⁵

As a result, many Quakers were arrested for such “dangerous” activities as gathering in worship outside the state-mandated church. The understanding that obedience to the state was secondary to obedience to God characterized early Friends.

Friends took care to their own honesty and integrity so that there were no legitimate reasons for persecuting them except in the case of those laws that Quakers actively sought to change or when laws were unjustly applied.

Their consistency in the face of unjust application of the law, public declaration of their case, and willingness to accept the consequences of standing up to brutal actions of the government meant that they were not easily controlled or intimidated.

Yet over the centuries, as Friends have petitioned governments in many nations and spoken with kings. They have largely followed the advice of Titus 3:2 to maintain a posture of respect even as they called those rulers to govern with the justice and mercy that were so central to Jesus’ way of being and so evident in God’s call to the rulers of Israel.

Respect for all persons and recognition that there is a divine spark in every heart that can be called forth applied not just to the wealthy and the ruling class. Friends’ belief in the universality of God’s grace, most often expressed today as “answering that of God in every person,” applied to people who had no status or were considered at that time to have no soul.

⁵ Moore, “The Light in Their Consciences,” 182

Most famously, this was visible in their acceptance of women as ministers and later recognition of the evils of slavery, but equally important was their understanding of Native Americans as moral beings. Thus, William Penn (1644-1718) accepted that they held valid title to their lands and, thus, made gestures (at least) toward purchase of property in the colonies and generally had peaceful relations with the local Pennsylvania tribes.

Consequently, Quakers often acted as cultural mediators and advisors, and they provided assistance to Native Americans. In 1794, President George Washington and the Six Nations asked Friends to be impartial arbitrators at the Canandaigua Treaty negotiations, the first treaty between Native Americans and the new U.S. government.



FCNL's iconic #LoveThyNeighbor signs are regularly seen in front of meetinghouses, churches, and residences. Photo by Joe Molieri/FCNL.

3 » Respecting Government and Respectfully Dissenting

Quakers live with paradox: They are law-abiding people, but they wrote the book on civil disobedience. Both these statements have been true since the 1650s. Margaret Fell put it this way:

“We do therefore declare that our intentions and endeavors are and shall be good, true, honest, and peaceable towards them; that we do love, own, and honor the king, and these present governors, so far as they do rule for God, and His truth, and do not impose anything upon peoples’ consciences, but let the gospel have its free passage through the consciences of men.”⁶

In this short passage, Fell articulates the paradox of Quaker response to government. Civil law is essentially a good thing—although few Friends today would agree that any government rules for God.

Civil law is the mechanism whereby people agree to live with one another with respect, treat one another with justice, and solve disputes without resorting to violence against one another. It is the means by which the community sets bounds on behavior, apprehends those who break those bounds, and aspires to help them become part of the community again.

But early Friends also knew from experience that the law is not always just, nor is it applied equitably. Thus, when government acted in ways that would cause Friends to violate the guidance of Christ’s light, they acted to change the law. And early Friends also

⁶ Fell, “A Declaration and an Information from Us,” 51.

knew that, at times, change requires disobeying the law. In other words, civil law is less important than holy obedience.⁷ Acts of civil disobedience are not taken lightly.

The biblical precedents for civil disobedience that guided 17th century Friends were also used by Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. During the U.S. civil rights movement, King articulated several steps central to any act of civil disobedience.

First is the “collection of facts to determine whether injustices exist.” This is followed by “negotiation” with the government to see if the law might be changed or its enforcement made equitable. The third step is “self-purification,” that is, worshipfully examining one’s own motives and seeing that one’s own actions are not taken out of spite, greed, or a desire for fame or vengeance. Only then is “direct action” appropriate.⁸

Friends have taken the stance that any lawbreaking must be done in response to God’s call, openly, respectfully, and with a willingness to accept any punishment due under the law even as they take action meant to change that law.⁹

Early Friends lived in a society that accepted that the authority to rule came from God and, thus, reminded the king of his responsibility to set up institutions that “rule over people justly, ruling in the fear of God.”¹⁰ Yet early Friends also saw leaders as more rightly being servants of God as Solomon was, rather than arbitrary leaders in their own right.

⁷ One often told incident of 17th-century Quaker civil disobedience occurred after the passage of the Quaker Act, (1662) when it became illegal for more than five people to gather for worship outside the Church of England. Friends continued to meet at advertised times and places, and as some members of the group were arrested, others continued to worship. Finally, all the adults were arrested, and the children continued to worship together. In contrast, most other banned groups met secretly or stopped meeting at all.

⁸ Calvert, “Political Obligation and Civil Dissent,” 75ff.



Participants in FCNL's Spring Lobby Weekend lobby the late Rep. John Lewis (GA-5) in 2017. Photo credit: FCNL.

Engagement with government—both in support of government and in opposition to unjust laws through lobbying and, at times, civil disobedience—has always been part of Quaker practice. At the same time, this engagement has had limits. For example, Friends could not stand for seats in the British Parliament until the 19th century because of their refusal to take oaths. Several notable Quakers have served in Parliament since then.

The founding of the colony of Pennsylvania in 1682 marks the best-known instance of Friends' participation in government. This ended in the face of heavy political pressure to abandon the peace testimony during the French and Indian War (1754-1763). Since William Penn's founding of Pennsylvania in 1681 as a colony open to all, Friends have advocated for separation of church and state.

⁹ Skidmore, "A History of the Quaker Testimonies."

¹⁰ 2 Samuel 23.3-4, King James Version, as cited in Freiday and Roberts, "Catechism and Confession of Faith," 109.

However, they were not always quick to find the right path. For instance, having finally reached unity on the evil of slavery by the late 18th century, Quakers' actions were inhibited because some believed they should not work with non-Friends for legislative change.

Individual Quakers were among the signatories of the Declaration of Independence (1776), the Constitution (1787), and other historical documents. During the 19th century, Friends in the United States actively lobbied against slavery, then for temperance, women's rights, penal reform, enforcement of treaties with Native Americans, and other issues. In the 20th century the work to gain recognition of conscientious objection to war as well as attempts to prevent wars drew many Friends into the legislative arena.

The onset of World War II crystallized the need for an ongoing presence on Capitol Hill, and the Friends Committee on National Legislation was established in 1943. Its work also encompassed issues from civil rights to welfare reform to protection of the world's oceans.

Today we live in a nation that accepts that the government's authority to rule comes from the people. The belief that government should not interfere with an individual's relationship with God is enshrined in the U.S. Constitution.

4 » Be as Wise as Serpents and Innocent as Doves

Jesus told his followers that he was sending them out as sheep among the wolves (Matthew 10:16) and gave them the paradoxical charge to be “wise as serpents and innocent as doves.” This charge summarizes more about Jesus’ approach than is obvious at first glance. Modern scholarship opens some of the complex challenges that defined his relation to appointed and governmental authority.

Jesus’ life and parables show us how to confront bad laws and lawbreaking in creative ways that engage wrongdoers in their own behavior. Rather than punishment, a strong prick to their conscience might bring about change. That this aspect of Jesus’ teachings was alive among early Friends is evident in George Fox’s perhaps apocryphal instruction to Friends to answer that of God in your enemy—it will throw them into confusion.

Jesus’ exhortation to “turn the other cheek” and “go the extra mile” in the Sermon on the Mount can be read as a passive acceptance of injustice. However, Walter Wink’s research into the customs of the time shows us that these actually are very creative actions designed to change the “other.”¹¹ By turning the other cheek, people of Jesus’ place and time asserted their own dignity, forcing the aggressor to treat them as equals by punching rather than slapping them.

Jesus lived in a culture where strict rules mandated that a person could only hit others with the right hand. Custom dictated that a person could slap inferiors with the back of the hand but could only punch their equals.

¹¹ Wink has written extensively on nonviolence, faith, and governance. See “The Powers that Be” and “Jesus and Non-violence.”

Carrying a burden an extra mile when commanded to do so by a soldier puts the soldier in jeopardy when Roman law restricted this kind of enforced servitude to one mile. Thus, Jesus teaches us in the Sermon on the Mount to know the legal system and culture, as well as to be sensitive to injustice. These are solid principles to bring to any interaction with the government.

Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday shows the support for his ministry among the people and the love they had for him. The Palm Sunday story shows the humility of Jesus and tells us much about the Kingdom of God: it will not come through violent revolution or be adorned in the glorious regalia of empire. Instead, it arrives with a man riding a donkey, the traditional mount of Jewish rulers traveling in peace, and with a man willing to face death on the cross rather than deny truth.



Advocates gathered for the 2019 American Friends Service Committee Palestine Symposium in Washington D.C., to learn, discuss, and consider solutions. Photo by Matthew Paul D'Agostino.

This entrance is also a politically sophisticated commentary on Roman rule. Jesus entered the east gate of Jerusalem on the same day that the Roman governor entered through the opposite gate on a war horse in a massive military procession. As I read this story, I see a creative response to the tension between acceptance of governmental authority and the need to witness against injustice and violence.

One further example of Jesus' response to governmental authority comes at the very end of his life when he is faced with a death sentence and stands first before Caiaphas, the high priest, and then before Pontius Pilate, who represented the Roman occupation authority.

Matthew 26 tells us that the chief priests had to look for people to bear false witness against Jesus, as he had done nothing to merit the punishment they wanted to impose.

When accused, Jesus answers calmly and does not deny his message or get angry. He does not try to bribe someone or call on his supporters to take up arms. Steady reliance on truth and the hope — the knowledge — that truth will win are both central to his response. Fear is not. He is not intimidated.

Again, before Pilate, he evidences this demeanor and reliance on truth and the knowledge that his witness will hold no matter what the immediate outcome and consequences to his own life. In Mark 11, the chief priests attempt to trick him with their questions, but Jesus puts their question back to them and will not be trapped.

Jesus' way of being and responding to authority can be alive within each human heart and shape individual actions to make visible the call to honesty and integrity in deeds as well as in the message being brought.

Lon Fendall, a modern Quaker who served as legislative director to Oregon Sen. Mark Hatfield, spoke of the interweaving of public and private stances: “To use one’s influence to direct public resources toward those individuals and communities with the greatest needs,” and “to conduct one’s self publicly and privately in a way that honors God and encourages citizens to live uprightly.”¹²

Believing that their lives reflected the growth of Christ within, early Friends sought to be free of hypocrisy. Knowing the kingdom within, they called for truth and justice in their government. They knew that if they were two-faced, this would be discovered, their credibility destroyed, and their witness defeated, no matter the merits of their goals.

This is the context in which I see the emergence of the Friends Committee on National Legislation and the practice of our community to lobby our own government. Personal concerns for individuals in our local communities, from engagement with war veterans to efforts to limit climate change, are often the triggers that engage Friends in efforts to change national legislation as the need becomes obvious for wider action.

¹² Lon Fendall, “Citizenship: A Christian Calling” (Newberg, OR: Barclay Press, 2003) p.9

5 » Lobbying from a Place of Faith

The opening of this publication highlights a teaching from Jesus: while not to be taken for fools, individuals and communities are called to be faithful to God's way. Ironically, this obedience may lead us to take actions that seem foolish to others. Quaker lobbying sometimes may seem to others as voices crying in the wilderness. But often, FCNL priorities and lobbying lay the groundwork for change in the wider society.

In choosing its legislative priorities and agenda, FCNL relies on a process of worshipful seeking of divine guidance by Friends around the nation and by its governing body of Friends. Only time reveals whether any given FCNL stance is a lone voice crying in the wilderness or an essential condition for change.

The Start of FCNL

In the 20th century, Friends began one of their most intensive and coordinated lobbying efforts since the early days of persecution. Once again, Friends faced imprisonment, this time because they took a stance of conscience—arguing for the right of individuals to refuse to participate in war.

Once the legal right to conscientious objection was established, Friends became deeply involved in creating alternative service programs for those who refused to take up arms. In 1943, amid World War II, American Quakers formed the Friends Committee on National Legislation in response to “the sweeping role which government is playing in shaping life, both national and international.”¹³

¹³ Cooper, “The FCNL Story,” 5

The first FCNL Statement of Legislative Policy (1944) stated that “in approaching the task [of lobbying] we should seek both prophetic vision and practical wisdom.”¹⁴ Much of the organization’s early effort went to the problems associated with the millions of people who were left starving or who became refugees following World War II. The awareness that we are to love our neighbor as we are loved is clear in the words of the first executive secretary of FCNL, E. Raymond Wilson, who said, “government should be challenged to view humanity as one human family under God.”

He went on to say,

“In a world which worships military, political and economic power, justice is often forgotten or overridden. During the Second World War, children were being used as weapons against Hitler through a hunger blockade, and Friends were among those who spoke out strongly against such a policy.

“At a time in history when so much blood and treasure is poured out in war, there need to be insistent voices for peace. When there is so much fear and suspicion and hatred, the Church should be seeking paths of reconciliation, understanding, cooperation, and forgiveness.

“At its best a religious lobby can cultivate a kind of pastoral relationship with members of Congress that includes warm friendship and encouragement and loving criticism. It is hard to be both pastoral and prophetic at the same time.

“There is nothing in the Gospels that promises the followers of Christ either an easy or a comfortable time. John C. Bennett, in writing about the prophetic ministry of the church, said: ‘The life of the Church must be lived in a constant tension between this world and the coming age.’ I have frequently said that it is the job of the churches to be from one to fifty years ahead of the Congress in their aims and goals.”¹⁵

In recent years, Friends frequently quote a passage from William Penn, the Quaker founder of Pennsylvania and primary author of its first constitution:

“True Godliness does not turn men out of the world, but enables them to live better in it, and excites their endeavours to mend it; not hide their candles under a bushel, but set it upon a table in a candlestick... Christians should keep the helm and guide the vessel to its port; not meanly steal out at the stern of the world and leave those that are in it without a pilot to be driven by the fury of evil times upon the rock or sand of ruin.”¹⁶

This sense of engagement with the world and desire to change institutions, including policies of government, has become a high priority as well as a source of tension for some Friends. The dynamic tension between obedience to the nation and obedience to God is sometimes seen as a matter of conflicting values.

When does criticism of an elected government become a betrayal of society’s will? This is one of the modern questions that Friends answer in different ways. It requires prayer and often the involvement of the community to discern when criticism or refusal to obey the elected government grows out of a true leading to follow the Inward Light.

From its beginning, FCNL has focused on addressing the root causes of war and moving closer to a vision of a world free of war, a stance that often leads it to be critical of government actions. The degree of vigor and wording of its opposition requires careful reflection again and again.

¹⁴ Wilson, “Uphill for Peace,” 14. 5-11.

¹⁵ Ibid., 25.

¹⁶ Penn, “No Cross, No Crown,” 36.

If lobbying from a place of faith starts with the premises that civil authority is established to serve the people and that the people are not to be naive or pushed into betraying God's way, it must always keep in the forefront the love of God, neighbor, and ourselves. People living in poverty or whom society seem to value less are to be lifted and treated justly. Opposing violent solutions to the world's problems; fostering more equitable distribution of water, food, and medical aid; and ending nuclear proliferation all follow from Jesus' words.

These precepts ground the personal interactions that are the direct face of lobbying as well as the broader policies that guide the positions taken by Friends. Friends at FCNL are led to believe that the Quaker activist is respectful of those who govern and, therefore, engages members of Congress as individuals who wish to govern well. FCNL seeks to hear from members of Congress and to learn from them as well as inform them of its position. It approaches the building of relationships with elected officials with honesty and integrity, using resources and materials that are solid and well researched. FCNL's word is its greatest asset.

The work at FCNL affirms the right of each person to be heard. All FCNL policies on legislative issues and priorities are the result of reaching out to Friends across the nation.

Their discernment informs the work of the FCNL General Committee as they seek the guidance of the Spirit in setting direction for the organization's lobbying.¹⁷

¹⁷ Yoder, "For the Nations," 46. The right of all to be heard and the openness of decision making are important characteristics of Christian heritage that John Howard Yoder identifies in his discussion of the relation of religion and state, along with forgiveness and reconciliation, freely chosen suffering and sharing of gifts. Yoder points to Paul's letter to the Corinthians describing how to hold a meeting in the power of the Spirit.

Meeting with members of Congress to discuss the policies approved by the General Committee and their impact on specific legislation is at the heart of FCNL's mission. In addition, staff work to provide solid, accurate, substantive information to people around the country that will enable them to encourage Congress to move federal government policies in the direction of the world we seek.

Without large amounts of money, blocs of votes, or a partisan political agenda, FCNL's influence in Washington is established by the integrity and truthfulness of its arguments and the strength of its network around the country. Staff members regularly visit face to face with Friends at meetings and churches across the country to hear concerns and to explain the dynamics of Congress and the current focus of FCNL. They encourage them to actively lobby their senators and representatives.

This dynamic relationship between the staff working in Washington and activists—both Quakers and others who share their approach to lobbying—engaged in local communities keeps the organization aware of what is important to Friends



A gathering of the FCNL General Committee in 1964. Photo credit: FCNL.

as they determine the positions they should take on issues and how to prioritize their efforts. It also provides the broader FCNL community an influence in Washington disproportionate to its numbers. Significant volumes of letters, telephone calls, and in-person lobby visits to Congress can be generated when the need arises.

This network also provides FCNL with the experience from which its priorities grow. Friends along the Mexican border raised immigration issues in the FCNL community long before this became big news. Individual Friends across the nation continue to have a deep concern for ending the death penalty and people who are in mass incarceration.

Out of its consultative and worshipful process, the FCNL General Committee seeks to discern a narrower set of priority issues on which the organization can be effective in any given session of Congress.

Quaker lobbying is a form of ministry to the nation. It is also a service to individual members of Congress and their staff.

“A good end cannot sanctify evil means; nor must we ever do evil, that good may come of it [I]t is as great presumption to send our passions upon God’s errands, as it is to palliate them with God’s name

We are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive, or gain by love and information. And yet we could hurt no man that we believe loves us. Let us then try what Love will do: for if men did nonce see we love them; we should soon find they would not harm us. Force may subdue, but Love gains: and he that forgives first, wins the laurel.”

– William Penn, 1693

By treating elected officials with integrity, FCNL seeks to open their hearts to other perspectives and encourage them to reach beyond self-interest.

At the same time, FCNL approaches these conversations with a sense that it, too, may be changed and lead to new understanding of complex issues. Out of these conversations and engagements, FCNL has sometimes identified resources, built coalitions, and discerned paths that members of Congress may not have seen before, such as ways to build peace before conflict begins.

FCNL is mindful that the challenges of time, money, the almost constant electoral cycle, and simple differences of opinion, sometimes lead public servants to oppose legislation that FCNL supports and support legislation it opposes. FCNL remains committed to continuing conversations and building relationships even with members of Congress who disagree or vote against its recommendations.

FCNL's ability to speak truth to power and develop coalitions and networks in communities across the United States can create change in the federal government.

Any religious lobby faces dilemmas, including budgeting time for both short- and long-term strategies and determining the extent to which it should compromise. Believing that "neutrality toward evil is to encourage it,"¹⁸ FCNL aspires to speak clearly against racism, killing, injustice, poverty, and many other issues.

At the same time, its lobbyists understand that they must work with legislators and their staff to develop bills that move the country in the direction of FCNL's goals. Hard-line stances rarely accomplish this, particularly when taken on behalf of people

¹⁸ Wilson, "Uphill for Peace," 33.

without financial and political power. Compromise is part of effective work on the Hill, and FCNL staff usually hear back very quickly if Friends feel a compromise has violated principles.

Lobbying from a place of faith is about remaining steady and not being riled or thrown off track by the response of the government official. It is not about twisting the facts or about elaborate arguments.

This work is the practice of presenting accurate information as fully as possible to give the public as well as government officials access to information not otherwise readily available to them. It is not about promoting self-interest but about advancing government policy to move toward a more powerful, just, and whole world; in other words, to be more in line with what we understand of God's kingdom on Earth.



Protesting in front of the Supreme Court. Photo credit: FCNL.

6 » Government and the Law of Love

Addressing root causes of injustice are integral to any vision of what a world at peace might look like. Civic engagement also empowers individuals with a greater sense of agency. FCNL specifically trains people to practice hope and counter cynicism through its emphasis on strategic advocacy.

“The World We Seek,” in use since 1977, is FCNL’s modern vision of the Peaceable Kingdom. It serves as guidance for considering Quaker position on national legislation:

“We seek a world free of war and the threat of war.
We seek a society with equity and justice for all.
We seek a community where every person’s potential may be fulfilled.
We seek an earth restored.”¹⁹

In these lines, FCNL states concisely how the Friends engaged with FCNL, not all of whom are Christians, understand Jesus’ message in a way applicable to the governance of our nation. Faithfulness to God’s will, including love of God, neighbor, and ourselves, is the essential motivation for Friends’ work, including lobbying in our nation’s capital.

FCNL is led to advocate for ways to solve problems without the use of violence, to love our enemies, and to act in ways that welcome in those who are vulnerable, marginalized, or destitute. Entwined in all these actions is consciousness of the need to restore the earth.

¹⁹ FCNL, “The World We Seek: Statement of Legislative Policy,” 2019

These goals are inseparable and complement other actions of Friends who “offer the crust of bread and the cup of cool water to those in need.”²⁰ FCNL’s work is consciously nonpartisan and seeks to make our nation a place where justice restores people’s right relations with one another, where problems are solved without violence, where children are not left to starve, and where we are good stewards of the earth.

FCNL’s work is only one aspect of Friends’ witness.²¹ Friends seek to establish a way of being in the world that grows out of and embodies prayer, worshipful listening for the whisper of divine guidance, and seasoning in the community of faith. Thus, Friends are concerned to minister directly to people in pain and to act to transform the policies that generate harm.²²

Interweaving Peace and Justice

In one of George Fox’s early statements of his work in 1649, he was “sorely exercised in going to their [the King’s] courts to cry for justice” and went to the markets to “declare against their deceitful merchandise and cheating ... warning all to deal justly, to speak the truth.”²³

This passion for justice arose two years before Fox famously said, “But I told them I was come into the covenant of peace which was before wars and strife were.”²⁴ Fox’s knowledge of both the Old Testament call to act justly and the Peaceable Kingdom promised by Jesus to all who would honestly seek it have informed many

²⁰ Volk, “Stillness.”

²¹ The Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) and the American and Canadian Friends Service Committees (AFSC and CFSC) are other North American bodies that work in the public policy arena.

²² Volk, “Stillness,” 6.

²³ Nickalls, “Journal of George Fox,” 37, 38.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.



Advocates lobby Con. Jim Himes (CT-4) during Spring Lobby Weekend in 2019. Photo by Joe Molieri/FCNL.

Friends' views today. The statement that peace is not possible without justice and without care for the world in which we live has echoes of this statement.

FCNL is well known for its work to prevent and stop wars, as well as its efforts to work for justice. The lawn signs and bumper stickers proclaiming "War Is Not the Answer" lead people to reflect on and act in ways that remove the causes of war. Another sign, "Love Thy Neighbor (No Exceptions), exhorts people of the need for concern for each person. In the 2019 "The World We Seek: Statement of Legislative Policy," FCNL says, "Our focus throughout is to understand and address the root causes and long-term consequences of injustice, inequality, economic disparity, forced migration, environmental degradation, disproportionate power, and violence.

While working against specific wars, Friends also place a high priority on creating a framework for building peace before conflicts escalate into war. Friends raise up questions of justice in the federal budgeting process as well.

Edward F. Snyder, the second executive secretary of FCNL (1962-1991) writes, "Love, compassion and justice must be part of any equation which policymakers consider when making decisions. They must also factor in the interests of the unrepresented, at home and abroad, and be responsible to future generations as well as those now living."²⁵ Snyder saw several continuing themes in FCNL's work, "peace through opposition to militarism ... peace through nonintervention ... peace through better understanding; breaking down the barriers between 'enemies' ... peace through world disarmament ... [and] peace through narrowing the gap between the haves and the have nots."²⁶

Change: Not Solely Legislative

A central underlying assumption of FCNL's work is that fundamental change in government cannot occur if Friends and others in the United States are not willing to accept responsibility to reorient their behavior.

Government works best with the consent and cooperation of the people. Government is a facilitator that allows individuals to live together with respect, treat each other with justice, and resolve disputes without recourse to violence. In pursuing paths toward the world we seek, we must remain aware that if our individual actions have not been reshaped in response to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we cannot expect others to act as FCNL advocates.

Connecting Individual and Community Practice

Individual practice is grounded in faith and leads to actions as part of the FCNL community. It is difficult for an individual to advocate convincingly against violence in a violent society without

²⁵ Snyder, "On the Occasion of 35 Years as a Quaker Lobbyist in Washington," 14

²⁶ Ibid., 5-11.

first examining one's own life. The strength of the community is both informed and enhanced by individual commitment.

In addressing the climate change crisis and society's dangerous dependence on fossil fuels, the government has not only resisted taking leadership under the Trump administration, but it has sought to dismantle previous advances. Congress is only taking slow steps towards filling this void in leadership. Individual action, as well as policy change, is needed.

Friends once testified to the inequities of the social class system by wearing plain dress, refusing to call others *Lord* and *Lady* or otherwise recognize social class distinctions. Such actions struck a chord that triggered angry response from those in power. Today, Friends lack a single defining practice, but express their conviction of care for the earth by pressing for public transport, riding bikes to work, eating vegan or vegetarian, building low-energy homes, or taking up any of a wide range of possible creative actions consistent with Jesus' parables and care for the whole of humanity. More is needed from individuals across the spectrum.

Similarly, FCNL's witness in Washington today is magnified and given added credibility to the degree the lives of individual Quakers and Friends meetings and churches reflect the principles espoused in their legislative agenda.

“They were changed men themselves before they went about to change others. Their hearts were rent as well as their garments, and they knew the power and the work of God upon them ... and as they freely received what they had to say from the Lord, so they freely administered it to others.”

– William Penn, “Preface to the Journal of George Fox” (1694)

Conflicting Moral Testimonies

The “law of love” in Jesus’ words includes loving one’s enemies as well as one’s friends. To live that way as an individual is difficult and, at times, dangerous. To live that way as a community is complex and raises hard questions: Can I protect myself from being seriously harmed or killed? Can I protect a small child? What is the role of the police? What is the proper response of nations that perceive a threat? What if they are attacked? Does the international community have a responsibility to stop genocide? Should abortion be legal?

Quakers have faced many hard moral choices. In the 19th century, many men had to weigh in their hearts the imperative to free slaves and their long-standing witness against taking up arms to fight in the U.S. Civil War.

Similarly, in the 20th century their peace witness was tested by the need to confront the evils of Adolf Hitler. Some did fight. Others acted to save lives, such as through the underground railroad to help slaves reach freedom or the Kindertransport program which rescued 10,000 Jewish children.

A community that seeks to live close to the kingdom of God must ask itself what it means to say “Blessed are you who are poor” and “Woe to you who are rich” (Luke 6:20, 24) and ask itself what a society shaped by these statements might look like. Yet Christians interpret these and other statements by Jesus in a variety of ways.

One example is in the reading of Jesus’ initial description of his ministry: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18,19).

Some people read this statement as being about individual salvation and freedom from the imprisonment of sin and, thus, a call to go forth and bring people into acceptance of Jesus as their savior. Others think Jesus is calling on us to end poverty and aid the oppressed, no matter who they are. Is the “good news” solely about an inward and personal process? Does it point to an upheaval of society and a redistribution of wealth and power?



Quaker visitors in Washington often drop by FCNL's Quaker Welcome Center, which opened in 2017. Photo credit: FCNL.

Many Friends understand Jesus' work to embrace both an inward and an outward movement. Early Friends had no doubt about the inward work of Christ's Light. They experienced liberating personal transformations, and they preached freedom from sin. At the same time, they witnessed against the accumulation of wealth and power that oppressed their nation and drew people away from doing God's will.

In some ways, Friends are biblical literalists. Most famously, they took the charge to “swear not at all” quite literally, despite being fined or thrown in prison as a consequence. To do otherwise was to violate God's law. Similarly, many Friends take literally the injunction against killing and will not do violence to another person no matter what the provocation or the immediate consequences.

Yet these different interpretations or emphases among Friends have resulted in challenges—such as the issue of abortion—for FCNL as an organization that seeks to work among all manner of Friends.



Sen. Amy Klobuchar (MN) meets with advocates from the Minnesota Peace Project. Photo credit: FCNL.

The FCNL Statement of Legislative Policy, which guides all the organization’s actions, recognizes where Friends have significant disagreements and, therefore, where integrity and respect for the different leadings of Friends demands that FCNL continue to seek for truth.

The 2019 Statement of Legislative Policy Statement includes this admonition:

CHALLENGE: III.2.7. NOTE: Members of the Society of Friends are not in unity on abortion issues. Therefore, FCNL takes no position and does not act either for or against abortion legislation. On occasion, FCNL may appeal to lawmakers not to use the abortion debate to paralyze action on other legislation.²⁷

²⁷ FCNL, “The World We Seek: Statement of Legislative Policy,” 2019

Individual Friends, meetings, and churches may be led to act on issues of reproductive rights, but the Friends community that governs FCNL does not have enough unity to engage Congress on them.

In the 2003 Statement of Legislative Policy, the General Committee posed another question to itself and Friends: “In situations of genocide or intense conflict, how should Friends respond to the use of United Nations or other multilateral forces to impose order or settlement?”

By 2019, they felt clear to state, “In these and all situations, FCNL supports constructive, nonviolent responses that are consistent with Quaker values and testimonies.”

Just as the FCNL community is clear that it does not speak for all Friends, it recognizes that Friends have variations in their views on many FCNL priorities. The weight of FCNL’s words is proportional to the integrity of the people who compose it—in the wide array of educational materials the organization distributes, on its website, and in the messages it sends directly to Congress.

7 » Being Noticed

The down will be up.

You are supposed to be effective.

You are supposed to be noticed.

Don't do it to be noticed.

Perfection = inside and out the same

Trust—It is the anxiety killer.

Pray—simply and often

Act on what you know.

Don't judge—It makes you look stupid and hypocritical.

Love without limits.

Make peace.

Give without limits.

Tell the truth—all the time.

This is simple but not easy.

You may have to do it alone.

It is the foundation that will not fail.

– Peggy Senger Parsons, Berkeley Friends Church, March 2006

The Sermon on the Mount, summarized as “Being Noticed” by a modern Friend, articulates one foundation for Quaker lobbyists. Jesus never separated his outward stance from his inward, spiritual well-being. Prayer and preparation of the individual heart are prerequisites of work for peace and for transforming society to bring it closer to a vision of the Peaceable Kingdom. Personal transformation often leads one into the world, doing work that will raise up the poor and the meek, work that will be noticed.

This tension between the call to be a prophetic voice and the desire to be effective is constantly present, never easy, at FCNL. The varied ways in which Friends understand and express their faith sometimes carry into the legislative realm.

Such disagreements must be articulated with integrity, the energy turned toward seeking further guidance so that FCNL can speak with clarity and unity on federal legislation.

FCNL's General Committee seeks an organization that can be a voice for many Friends, and it has a long history both of holding forth the vision of a world without war and of finding steps toward this goal.

As it works to fulfill this vision and a vision of a nation where the ethics Jesus espoused take priority, FCNL relies on the power of God's love in its witness against the forces of excessive wealth, nationalism, and fear.

"We are firmly grounded and actively present within a policy arena that has become deeply divided and a political system that has become estranged from the real needs of communities in our country and the world.

"FCNL's vibrant presence on Capitol Hill and through our grassroots advocacy is a vital source of truth-seeking and hope at a time when the foundations of our democracy and the U.S. role in the world are being shaken. I look forward to trusting the Spirit to continue leading us where we need to go."

– Bridget Moix, Clerk, FCNL Executive Committee (2017-2019)
"Prophetic, Persistent, Powerful: Working for the World We Seek."
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THE WORLD WE SEEK

We seek a world

free of war and the threat of war.

We seek a society

with equity and justice for all.

We seek a community

where every person's potential may be fulfilled.

We seek an earth restored.

Study Guide

1. A Quaker Lobby in the Public Interest

Suggested Reading: Edward F. Snyder, *On the Occasion of 35 Years as a Quaker Lobbyist in Washington*.

Questions for Reflection:

How does the call to act “for conscience sake towards God” (in the words of Margaret Fell) affect how you see our government and your responsibility as a citizen?

How might you approach a legislator who has taken a stance you strongly disagree with or find unconscionable? Have you ever experienced being “wise as serpents, innocent as doves”? What was that like?

In what ways do you see lobbying as part of your faith? How do you define “public interest”? Why?

2. We Seek a World Free of War and the Threat of War

Suggested Reading: Lisa Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship Pacifism, and Just War Theory*, esp. 166–77.

Questions for Reflection:

There is much to fear in the world today and concern to defend our lives and our freedom. What does Jesus teach us about the right action in the face of terror?

What is our responsibility in the United States to protect individuals and groups threatened by genocide?

3. We Seek a Society with Equity and Justice for All

Suggested Reading: Lon Fendall, *Citizenship: A Christian Calling*, esp. 53–71

Questions for Reflection:

In the face of terrorist threats, what right does the government have to hold and question people indefinitely without charge, access to courts, or other protections of the law? Is it ever acceptable to torture prisoners? How do you define “torture”?

Many people of color still feel marginalized in our nation, and few Quaker meetings or churches reflect the racial and cultural diversity of our communities. What role should Quakers, as a heavily middle-class group, be taking to speak for justice in our legal system?

How should we respond to the many undocumented migrants in our communities and across our nation? What message might we give our legislators?

4. We Seek a Community Where Every Person’s Potential May Be Fulfilled

Reading: David Morse, *Testimony: John Woolman on Today’s Economy*, or Tricia Gates Brown, *Free People: A Christian Response to Global Economics*, esp. 175–205

Questions for Reflection:

17th century Friends were central in changing the economic system of their day by establishing a fair, fixed price for the goods they sold. What might Friends witness for justice, equity, and truth be in the modern global economy? What role should the United States play in setting world economic policies?

“Right sharing of the world’s resources” is a way of living advocated by many Friends, yet we live in a nation with disproportionate wealth. What is the role of the U.S. government in reducing this disparity?

5. We Seek an Earth Restored

Suggested Reading: *Sojourners, Holy Ground: A Resource on Faith and the Environment*

Questions for Reflection:

What does the vision of an “earth restored” evoke in you? What does this say about our role as individuals and as a nation, as stewards of creation?

What role do you see government playing in seeking to limit or reverse global warming?

How is your personal life a witness to the kingdom of God on earth? How does this inform what you say to Congress?

Margery Post Abbott

Margery Post Abbott is a *released Friend*, writing and traveling in the ministry with the support of Multnomah Monthly Meeting in Portland, Oregon.

Her travels began in 1995 as Brinton Visitor to Intermountain Yearly Meeting and speaker at the 1997 International Quaker Consultation on Identity, Authority and Community in the U.K. She has led retreats for European Friends who travel in the ministry along with numerous other courses at Woodbrooke, the Quaker study center in Birmingham, England. Over the years she has spoken at Earlham School of Religion, Haverford College, and Guilford College and at major events in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand, as well as offering workshops and retreats across the United States and Canada.



Margery Post Abbott. Photo by Kate Holt/FCNL

Marge carries a concern for Friends: What truth are we called to speak out of our brokenness? What does holiness look like among us? The Light visible through Friends is refracted in a prism which extends around the world and across the divides that have torn Quakers apart in the past two centuries. Friends' conflicts and our unity both shape our message.

Marge's concern has been nourished by women from churches and meetings in Oregon, and she helped organize the first Pacific Northwest Quaker Women's Theology Conference, which has brought together evangelical and liberal Friends every other year since 1995. After participating in the 1991 World Conference of Friends, she helped organize the 1992 Western Gathering of Friends. She served as clerk of North Pacific Yearly Meeting between 1992 and 1994.

Her concern for making the Friends' voice heard more widely in the world has taken her regularly to Washington, D.C., where she served as presiding clerk of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) from 2005 to 2007.

In Oregon, she served for a decade on the governor's Ocean Policy Advisory Council and many years on the Theology Committee for Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. As part of a National Institutes Health grant, she has co-led a series of Quaker workshops on Genetics, Ethics, and Theology. She has also written on the Quaker testimony of simplicity and its manifestation in the FCNL "green" office building in Washington, D.C.

In her writings, Marge engages with Friends from all traditions, from across the continents and throughout the centuries, in spiritual reflection and consideration of the nature of Friends' witness to the world. Through her writings' she hopes we can see ourselves more honestly and be opened to unanticipated leadings.



FCNL Education Fund



The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) Education Fund promotes civic engagement to achieve a peaceful, just, and sustainable world. It works closely with the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), which lobbies Congress, and William Penn House, which promotes Quaker advocacy from a learning and hospitality center on Capitol Hill.

All three are national, nonpartisan, and nonprofit Quaker organizations working collectively to advance peace, justice, and environmental stewardship.

To learn how to lobby, visit fcnl.org/virtuallobbying

To support FCNL, visit fcnl.org/donate

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"Washington Monument" by Celso Diniz

Back Cover

Photo credit: FCNL



Supporters gather yearly to align priorities and learn core lobbying skills at the Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute. FCNL photo by Jennifer Dominick.



FCNL
Education Fund

