

Statement of Clarity and Unity

In the summer of 1990, unprogrammed and programmed Friends of African descent from the United States and around the world, gathered at Pendle Hill, a Quaker retreat center in Pennsylvania. The power of the Spirit and the depth of connection between those gathered inspired a second gathering in 1991. Amid the enthusiasm and extended worship at this event, a new sense of purpose emerged that culminated in the founding of the Fellowship of Friends of African Descent. The newly minted Fellowship embraced the following as its purpose:

“to publish and respond to the concerns of Friends of African descent within the Religious Society of Friends; to provide for the nurture of Friends of African descent, their families, and friends and to address and respond to issues affecting people of African descent in their communities.”

As part of its expansive mission, the Fellowship’s primary activity continued to be annual meetings of Quakers of African descent on and off for several decades. The meetings were held at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Yearly and Monthly meetings around the United States, Penn Center, and in nearby Jamaica. In 2017, a group of about twenty Fellowship Quakers flew from the United States to Ghana to fellowship and worship with Quakers at Hill House Friends Meeting. Over the years, Fellowship gatherings continued to be refreshing and inspiring for those seeking a culturally responsive spiritual experience within Quakerism.

At its Gathering in August of 2016, the Fellowship of Friends of African Descent was asked to consider a minute drafted and prepared by a group of Black Quakers from Philadelphia who had come together to address the recent high-profile killings of Black people around the country by police. That document entitled “The Minute on State Sanctioned Violence,” called for the formation of a peace keeping force of local activists, educational and outreach services to children, and other community service activities.

The Minute on State Sanctioned Violence was approved by the Fellowship and the Ujima Friends Peace Center was born in May of 2017. During the ensuing years, the Ujima Friends Peace Center conducted free food and clothing programs, summer Freedom schools, renters’ rights classes, and craft programs uniting seniors and young people, among other activities at the Center. This work was done under the care of a group of Black Quakers who worshipped at the Center every week after the manner of Friends.

During the Covid19 Pandemic, this worship continued online and attracted worshippers from places outside of Philadelphia. The worship continued the traditions of the Fellowship Gatherings, including the pouring of libations, singing and musical instruments, and sharing the joys and struggles of liberation movements within and outside of the Religious Society of Friends. From these online gatherings, the desire for a more formal structure emerged and the Ujima Friends Meeting was formed and announced in the summer of 2021. Its formative document was called the “Minute of Declaration and Commitment of the Ujima Friends Meeting.”

Each of these Quaker institutions, the Fellowship of Friends of African Descent, the Ujima Friends Peace Center and the Ujima Friends Meeting, though legally distinct and structurally independent, continue to work and worship together with overlapping memberships.

The Fellowship continues to focus on its annual Gathering, the Peace Center does service work in the North Philadelphia community and the Ujima Friends Meeting worships weekly in an online community without borders. With a common heritage and purpose, together they expand and continue the commitments and traditions of an African centered spiritual experience of the Divine within the Religious Society of Friends.