

The Urgent Call to the Religious Society of Friends

Report, December 2022

How It Started

The Quaker Call to Action was initiated in February 2022 by an ad hoc group of eighteen Friends who came together with a concern about the serious threats to U.S. democracy and related issues. This group initiated a three-month process of discernment leading to the approval of “An Urgent Call to the Religious Society of Friends” in early June (attached). The Urgent Call included queries and four possible areas of action that we asked Friends to consider: Defending Truth, Working for True Equality and Justice for All, Promoting Free and Fair Elections, and Preparing for Non-Violent Resistance. We circulated this Call widely within the Religious Society of Friends in the U.S.A., encouraging Friends as individuals, meetings and in Quaker organizations to engage in a process of discernment about whether and, if so, how they might take action. Individuals and meetings were also invited to endorse the statement. In June, we established a steering committee to coordinate the work of the Quaker Call.

Throughout all our work, we have sought to ground ourselves deeply in worship, to hew to the truth, and to discern the leadings of the Spirit. We were deeply nourished by the prayers and spiritual support of hundreds of Friends.

Quaker Call Actions

Over the past several months, the concern and participation of more than one thousand Friends who responded to the Urgent Call to strengthen our democracy has been heartening.

Many Friends and meetings responded with enthusiasm and gratitude to the initial Call. As a first step, we felt led to hold a series of “National Zoom Calls” based on the Urgent Call during which Friends learned more about this effort and had ample time to discuss thoughts, concerns, and leadings in both small groups and a large group format. Starting in September, we held three Zoom-based training sessions on “Election Protection,” “Responding to Violence at the Polls,” and “Quaker Deep Canvassing.” We are particularly grateful to Sam Caldwell who developed and maintained the Quaker Call website (www.quakercall.net) and online forum where Friends could share thoughts and support. This vital communications support allowed Friends to be connected across the country.

We consistently heard gratitude for convening national Zoom calls where people shared concerns, ideas and experienced a sense of community in the increasing fractiousness of our political culture. We were delighted to see many monthly meetings hold special called meetings for worship on the evening before Election Day. The consistent return to prayer through waiting worship and through the fellowship of community have been essential to grounding our Call.

Here are some statistics showing the breadth of responses to the Urgent Call:

- 727 individuals endorsed the Call
- 76 Quaker meetings endorsed the Call
- 1,200 people participated in one of the five national calls hosted by ESR, Pendle Hill, AFSC, and FCNL
- 345 people participated in national trainings, and a special national call for young adults
- 36,057 visits to the Urgent Call website
- 138 participants in the Quaker Call Community Forum Listserv
- 59 monthly meetings convened Election Eve worship
- 44 states are represented in the endorsements to the Call

Next Steps. . .

Despite the generally positive outcomes of the 2022 election, we carry a continuing concern for what might happen in the 2024 elections. We know that individuals and organizations are continuing their ardent efforts for free and fair elections, and we are considering how our ad hoc Quaker initiative might continue its work. Finally, we are aware that many Quaker meetings and organizations are discerning how they might act on these matters in the next couple years. We support you and encourage others to continue their discernment too. We believe that this work is not completed.

The Quaker Call Steering Committee also encourages Friends, meetings, and organizations to give us feedback in the coming weeks through our Quaker Forum or directly by email message to us using the “Contact Us” feature of our website. You can join the Quaker Call Community Forum here: <https://quakercall.net/> Just scroll down to the bottom of the home page to request a link to sign up. It is an invitation-only moderated forum to provide a safe space for us to communicate our ideas, actions, and encouragement to one another.

Gratitude

We have been deeply moved by the widespread Quaker response to the Urgent Call, to your sincere efforts to discern actions grounded in love, and to your commitment to apply practical insights in these challenging times. Your responses and actions have lifted and encouraged us as we have remained faithful to the original Call.

Please know that we will be in touch with you again as we discern next steps over the next few months. Thank you for your caring, support, and faithfulness.

The Urgent Call Steering Committee

Marian Beane, Bruce Birchard, Sam Caldwell, Gretchen Castle, Mary Ellen McNish, Diane Randall, Jim Waddington, and Michael Wajda