June Quote:

“Service to others is the rent you pay here for your room on Earth.”

-Muhammad Ali

On May 15 at New Garden Friends Meeting, Muslims and Quakers gathered to celebrate history, faith and hope.

Speakers included immigrant and refugee community advocate Ghaisha Yahaya-Mohamed, writer and producer of podcasts for “Yes! Weekly” Deonna Kelli Sayed, and former president of the Greensboro Islamic Center, Wasif Qureshi.

The event began with a hearty potluck. “Sitting around a table and sharing meals helped us a lot to feel comfortable with each other,” said Yahaya-Mohamed. “We took the opportunity right there to introduce ourselves and build trust. For me, as for many immigrants and especially Muslims, this type of gathering gives hope and confidence to say ‘I am not alone as a person, and we are not alone as a community of Muslims or immigrants. There are people who care and love us. There are people who can stand for us. These are our neighbors, friends and families.’”

After the potluck, everyone gathered to hear the speakers. “Our prayer spaces are contested…we are almost always, at this political climate, we are always at the wrong place and the wrong time,” said Sayed. “But to understand Islamic North Carolina, we need to talk about it in the larger context. Islam and Muslims are not new arrivals. There are some Native Americans who signed localized treaties in Delaware in the 1700s that had Muslim names, indicating that Muslims had contact from very early on.”

Current issues such as Islamophobia were addressed. “What I want you to understand about Islamophobia is that it’s an industry,” said Qureshi. “To say ‘They don’t like us, they’re Islamophobes,’ that’s not a solution. That’s just recognition. That’s not a solution to anything because there are people out there who are like ‘Yeah, we are Islamophobes.’ There are people like that and believe it or not, when Donald Trump came up and said what he said about Muslims, his ratings went up eleven percent. That’s nothing to be joked about.”

“(Quakers and Muslims) being a very small portion of the population, we can only do so much towards the cause of good,” said Qureshi. “Partnering with other positive communities is crucial. My hope from the event remains that we go beyond just speaking and towards joint action for the good of our community.

“Our focus remains to come to terms with the negativity and deal with it with a positive attitude and reference. This is our mandate directly from the Muslim holy book, The Quran, and it states ‘And good and evil are not alike. Repel evil with that which is best. And lo, he between whom and thyself was enmity will become as though he were a warm friend.’ (Al Quran 41:35)”

-Alison Stalberg, AFSC Intern
Town Hall Seeks Changes in Greensboro Policing

On June 12th, community members gathered at Providence Baptist Church in Greensboro for a town hall meeting on the issue of policing and race. This meeting, attended by over 200 Greensboro residents, was held after 18 months of planning by the “Community City Working Group”.

Occurring on the same day when 50 people were murdered, the meeting began with a moment of silence for the Orlando, Florida massacre. Reverend Nelson Johnson expressed joy to see people of all backgrounds in the meeting.

Among the discussed topics was the New York Times article titled, “The Disproportionate Risks of Driving While Black.” The article highlighted specific racist patterns in Greensboro’s police force. Dr. Claude Barnes with the Beloved Community Center discussed police practices and accountability. He expressed hope for Greensboro to be a model to the nation when it comes to police reform. Advocates hope to install a citizen’s review board so police will no longer be policing themselves. This has been an ongoing concern raised for the last 50 years. In the future, they hope police misconduct can be prosecuted and that police don’t put all their resources into just minor crimes.

Mr. Bay Love with the Racial Equity Institute reported on the draft of plans for reform in police training. These plans include trainings on de-escalating conflict and on implicit bias. Audience members also raised the ideas of cultural training and sensitivity training.

Executive Director of NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) NC, Mr. Jack Register, discussed policing and mental health, namely that his organization seeks to get police to acknowledge the mental health of those they interact with. He stated that police are “not biased, but ignorant” and that they should learn mental health first aid. NAMI helps police with crisis intervention training and gives them the opportunity to meet and understand people in the mental health community.

Retired civil rights attorney Mr. Lewis Pitts discussed police body cam and dash cam footage. He brought up that victims of police brutality are not just the poor and black community, but immigrants and Muslims as well and that police videos should be accessible.

Many discussed the urgency to put these plans into action, as they fear for other lives that can be lost during the process. Many left with new information to work with for the betterment of Greensboro. Reverend Johnson asked everyone to join him at the city council meeting on Tuesday, July 19th to ask the council to vote on these discussed proposals.

AFSC Voter Registration by the Numbers

AFSC has registered over 250 people to vote in the Triad! Below are the numbers and places where AFSC has had success and we look forward to continuing our work!

Many thanks to all the interns (Irving Arias, Naomi Madaras, Alison Stalberg), staff (Leticia Benitez, Toni Etheridge), and community members (Salwa Togol) who have worked toward this effort. Our goal is to reach 300 registrations by the end of June!

-Naomi Madaras, AFSC Intern

Counts Covered: 3
(Guilford, Forsyth, & Randolph)

High Schools Visited: 5

Community Sites Frequentated: 5

Students Registered: 176

Community Members Registered: 46

Total Number of Registrations: 254
AFSC NATIONAL STATEMENT ON ORLANDO TRAGEDY

The killing of 50 people and wounding of 53 more at Pulse, an LGBT club in Orlando, Florida, shakes us and breaks our hearts. The American Friends Service Committee joins with all who are grieving this tragic act of mass violence. Our thoughts, prayers, and sympathy are with the families and loved ones of those who lost their lives, all the neighbors in the Orlando area whose community was disrupted, and with the entire LGBT and Latino communities.

Already, we see politicians and news media stoking fear and hatred by generalizing the acts of one individual to all those of Muslim faith. Yet we know that this fear is misplaced. Intolerance and violence toward gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people is a culture-wide problem, evidenced by a wave of anti-LGBT legislation across the country, venomous rhetoric in the wake of recent victories for equality, and a shocking series of attacks on trans women of color. We fear the backlash following this mass shooting will land on immigrant communities who are repeatedly singled out for unmerited blame as threats. We stand with LGBT people, Muslims, immigrants living in the U.S., and all who are vulnerable in the wake of this attack and the hateful, xenophobic rhetoric that is already on display.

The American Friends Service Committee, a Quaker organization that addresses the root causes of violence and oppression in communities worldwide, knows that violent responses to violence make us all less secure. We must stop the cycle of hateful violence that lands disproportionately on marginalized people, including LGBT people of color. There is no place for xenophobic responses to this attack, which will only make the targeted communities more vulnerable. We must instead bridge differences and work together to reject hate. We pray that all communities will stand up against bigotry and work to ensure the rights of each and every person. Please join us in true partnership, working for a world in which love drives out hate, and in which all of us are safe from violence.

Online at: http://afsc.org/story/afsc’s-statement-june-12-tragedy-orlando

FOURTH ANNUAL UNDOCUGRADUATION STIRS THE LEGISLATURE!

For the fourth year in a row, students and allies from across North Carolina gathered at the General Assembly to call for fairness, opportunity and equal access to education.

In NC alone, there are an estimated 42,000 undocumented students, hundreds of whom graduate high school each year but are unable to attend college because of the out of state tuition fees and inability to receive federal or state aid. This annual event gives students the opportunity to speak with representatives, share their incredible stories, their academic success thus far, and their future career aspirations.

Guilford County had a strong presence this year. AFSC interns and Let’s Learn Triad (LLT) Coordinators, Jose and Yubi Sandoval recruited 20 students and allies to attend and take leaderships roles during this event. Former interns Maria Cortez and Fernando Jimenez were interviewed during the event. Christina Gallegos, a core member of LLT shared her story. “Denying acceptance to the school of my dreams is something a student should not have to face…simply for not being able to afford it,” she said.

We must work together to change our policies and stop depriving these students from an education they truly desire and can only be beneficial for our state! All of our residents must have the opportunity to move up the economic ladder and become self-sufficient in the NC economy. With three bills under consideration that could allow students to access in state tuition, we ask you to speak to your representatives and urge their support!

For more information about these bills, and how to get involved, please contact Leticia Benitez at lbenitez@afsc.org.

-Leticia Benitez, AFSC Fellow
Free Resource for Bridge Building with Black & Brown Youth

AFSC of the Carolinas is excited to announce free online access to our African American-Latinx Bridge Building & Awareness (AALBBA) project curriculum. On the website, www.afsc.org/AALBBA, anyone can access AALBBA videos, workshop curriculum, and activities designed to create spaces for our black and brown youth to engage in powerful conversations, and to spark interest in community building and collective activism.

This project was a collaboration between AFSC NC staff and cultural educator Kali Ferguson (www.kaliferguson.com), program participants, and the members of the community that provided feedback from the start. We hope you will use and share these resources to cultivate safe spaces for communities to engage in powerful conversations!

-Leticia Benitez AFSC Fellow

www.afsc.org/AALBBA

Immigrant Leaders Emerge!

On June 14th, we celebrated AFSC’s 2016 Community Leaders Learning Program graduation. Since January, five individuals from diverse immigrant communities have participated in a series of trainings that provided them with tools and skills to share with their communities and work on lifting the voices and experiences of immigrants and refugees in Guilford County. Leaders participated in workshops that informed them of their rights as immigrants, workers’ rights, voter registration, and policy advocacy.

Paired with each rising leader were mentors committed to supporting their development and who devoted their time and resources to help engage each member in their various areas of interest. We are grateful for the support of our partners: the Greensboro Public Library, Central Carolina Worker Center, and the Latino Community Coalition of Guilford, who each provided us with access to significant resources making our program possible. Additionally, with the same gratitude, we would like to thank Andrew Young (Young Project), Adamou Mohamed (Church World Service), Eric Jonas (Holy Cross), Juan Miranda (Raise Up for 15), and Christy Jones (New Frame, LLC) for being our guest facilitators. We can’t wait to see the great things our new leaders do in the community!

-Aleticia Benitez AFSC Fellow

AFSC Welcomes New Intern!

Ashley Mike is a rising senior at Berea College in Kentucky. She is majoring in Sociology with minors in Women and Gender Studies and Communications. Her passion lies in her beliefs that community organizing is one of the most powerful ways to make change, respect is the core of all positive interactions, and that there is worth and power in all people.

Ashley will be interning in our Peace and Economic Justice Program, focusing on police reform in Greensboro and summer voter registration. She will also be assisting a local youth basketball tournament league as an assistant media correspondent, volunteering at Greensboro Urban Ministries, and facilitating workshops for the Elimu Enrichment Summer Camp.

Welcome Ashley!