

“Nothing Happens Without a Struggle”

*AFSC Midwest Regional Executive Committee members on their motivation to serve
October 2015*

Robert Walker, a Midwest Region Executive Committee (EC) co-clerk from Dayton, Ohio, said his motivation for joining the former Great Lakes EC was his relationship with AFSC staffer Charles Williams in Dayton in the 1980s. Charles had started a unique youth program, working on empowerment in the summer. Robert’s relationship with AFSC continued with AFSC staffer Pat Trammell.



Along with other leaders in the faith-based community, Robert appreciated the power of collaboration and social justice advocacy. His own agency was faith based, concerned with caring for human needs. But there was a lack of addressing systemic issues. Partnering with AFSC offered the opportunity to address local and global systemic issues, joining with other organizations to push the edges of critical issues in the community. It was a no-brainer for him to join AFSC.

Responding to injustices, how do we create a just society for all? How do we share in the creation and be good stewards to each other? He still has those values, and he still believes it’s the direction to go. We can’t always see the immediate outcome. Nothing happens without a struggle. It’s part of the act of living. When he looks at this body – the former Great Lakes EC and now the Midwest EC after the merger with the Central Region – as he looks around the table, he sees our impact. Not only do we experience the results of staff’s work, we still see the hope of our colleagues, the hope we have collectively to continue to ensure that all people have access to the goodness of this universe. [Watch this [interview](#) with Robert.]



Jeannette Raymond, from Minneapolis, joined the EC after serving on the AFSC Corporation and Board. In 2004, she organized AFSC’s Eyes Wide Open exhibit in the Twin Cities, developing a relationship with former Midwest Regional Director Michael McConnell and Wage Peace Coordinator Mary Zerkel. When AFSC’s Twin Cities program was starting up, she wanted to contribute and support Sharon Goens-Bradley, who was hired to direct the Healing Justice Program. Jeannette saw herself as a person to serve from the Twin Cities area as the program was being established.

She is guided by Isaiah 40:3 “Prepare ye the way of the LORD” seeking to create the possibility for the creation of God’s kingdom on earth. What does she do to help advance that? AFSC is one way. One role she plays on the

Executive Committee is to ask questions – how are we building skills in our programs’ constituents? How are we preparing them to advance the changes we seek? How is AFSC constituent-led? How can we make AFSC a better organization? How do our program activities contribute towards meaningful change?

Victoria Albright, an EC co-clerk from La Plata, Missouri, said this resonates with her experience with AFSC. Relationships are key. One of her friends, Laura Holliday, kept at her for a couple years to serve on the EC. The reason “way opened” was her new “weird life-style,” spending part of her year in Houston, the other part in northeast Missouri. Prior to AFSC, she was doing nonviolence workshops, permaculture, etc. She couldn’t do those things anymore with integrity because she couldn’t finish what she started due to her moves.



She got involved with the Central Region, and the timing was beautiful. Sonia Tuma, the former Central Regional Director who now directs the West Region, saw the merger of AFSC’s regions coming. Two special places – the Twin Cities and St. Louis – needed much healing. This was a wonderful opportunity for Victoria. She’d done community planning before, and she could bring her skills to the job, meet new people and make connections.

The community outreach we did in St. Louis with community leaders working with youth and having listening sessions – we couldn’t have wished for anything better. Wow, she thought, this is a wonderful organization! Writing the program plan, serving on the search committee, finding Joshua Saleem, the St. Louis Peace Education Director – all this was life giving for her.

Then when the regional merger came, she realized she could do this from either of her homes. She was nervous about being on AFSC’s Board with only one year of EC experience. She has a different view and tries to share that view with all of us. She considers it a privilege to work with us all here and with other EC clerks on the Board. The clerk from the South Region said to her at breakfast during one Board meeting, “Isn’t this just wonderful? All these people who care about the things I care about.” It’s wonderful to work together.

Matt Burton, from Kansas City, said he’d been interested in peace and justice issues for some time. Serving on the EC was a great chance to utilize the skills he spent so much money on in college. It’s also a chance to gain new skills while doing the work he loves. He said everyone has impacted him. He wants to gain as much knowledge, skills and insight as he can. He would love to work with Friends in a full-time capacity to continue the great work we do.



Keta Cowan, an incoming EC co-clerk from Ann Arbor, said she joined the EC because she'd reached a point in her personal life and career where she questioned whether she was living out her belief in social justice. She'd worked on those projects important to her community, but they were sometimes more human service issues. She longed to do social justice work and immerse herself in it. She was recruited to the EC by Rachel Holmes, who had served on the Great Lakes EC. Rachel didn't tell her about the workload.



Serving on the EC gave Keta the opportunity to spread beyond local work. She's enjoyed the fellowship and the chance to think through social justice, what it means, and how can programs intervene in injustice. Injustice is personally painful to her. She saw being on the EC as an opportunity to impact and change the flow of those injustices.

The immediate work is more administrative than she initially understood. She's decided to try to make an impact there, and she's been able to help with that workload. Ultimately, she wants her contribution to be greater. She stays because the fellowship is enriching. EC weekends are like a 72-hour fest. All the reading is stimulating, and she feels she's growing. She sees hope and has hope. There's great potential for impact in supporting the programs in doing the work – she sees it on the horizon. She can feel her work on the EC is more relevant to the struggle on the ground.



Bob Yeats, from Mt. Vernon, Iowa, says his family's joke is that he brings his curmudgeonly spirit. He's afraid that's true here, too. He supported AFSC long before he was a Quaker. Then he became a Quaker, and the next thing he knew, he was his yearly meeting's representative to the AFSC Corporation.

At his first three Corporation meetings he didn't have any idea what was going on. He remembers a discussion of a report from the Simplicity Committee. He didn't have the slightest idea what they were talking about in the context of Philly. It took him three years to learn.

He was surprised how many Quakers didn't have good feelings about AFSC – that AFSC had changed and had moved away from their ideas. This doesn't make sense – we have the same values. Somehow, structurally, we moved apart. He naively thought he could help bring those two things together. He filled out a form two years ago and was asked if he was still interested in serving on the EC. He was glad he agreed. He still feels we don't need to be so polarized. Social justice has always been a passion for him. He likes to help out and serve.

Bethany Styer, from Lansing, Michigan, was invited to serve on the EC by Ann Francis, and people are powerless to resist Ann. Bethany felt it was an honor. She's known AFSC since her Earlham college days in the late 60s and early 70s, and has been aware of AFSC's peace efforts. She's been a social justice activist for many years.



Ann's request came when Bethany had made major changes in her life and was ready to step into this new role. She's been uplifted by meetings and has been honored to meet and talk with program staff – that's one of the highlights of her experience.

Her prior contact with AFSC had been solicitations and e-mails. As a member of the EC, she's been backstage and has seen there are a lot of problems with AFSC. That's taken some of the shine off. She didn't know there was so much administrative work, that our role was pen and paper and paying attention to schedules, reporting to the Central Office. That's challenging.

She really likes looking at programs: how to be effective, how to be supportive, how to identify more resources for them. She's happy to say she's found a wonderful young Quaker from her meeting to take her place on the EC. There's been a representative from Red Cedar Friends Meeting in Lansing on the Great Lakes/Midwest EC for decades. That will continue.



Mike Murphy, from Kansas City, said he first became aware of AFSC when he met Ira Harritt, Kansas City Program Coordinator, at a party. During the buildup to the first Iraq war, Mike became involved with the KC Iraq Task Force, which had formed earlier in response to sanctions against Iraq. There were lots of demonstrations, and people wanted to get involved. AFSC had a key seat at that table. Ultimately all that work got absorbed into AFSC.

Mike is still very honored to serve on the local KC area advisory committee. His predecessor, Steve Iliff, was on the area committee and used to give reports about the EC meetings. Mike is reminded of the parable of the elephant and blind people – he had no idea of all the things AFSC was involved in. He jokes that he must have missed a meeting at which he was nominated to the EC. It had been a grueling time for Steve as tough decisions were needed.

Like Steve, Mike is not a Quaker, and so this experience gave him perspective on Quaker process. It made him nervous at first when there was some decision hanging in the balance, but then everything would fall in place and it seemed to work. Steve passed off to Mike a bunch of books, including the former Central Regional EC manual,

known as the Redbook. His very first EC meeting was here in Des Moines as part of the Central Region. He feels very blessed to be exposed to everyone and feels like he's getting more out than he puts in. He wishes he could be of more service. He wonders whether he spreads himself too thin and wishes he could do more. He hopes he brings some perspective to this group, and he treasures the fellowship. He feels indebted to everyone and says thank you.



Mama Nozipo Glenn,

from Dayton, served on the Dayton area program committee and thought it was a privilege when the director of the program asked her if it was OK to put her name in for service on the EC. She thought it was very significant because this was the same person she'd recommended for the job. She looked at his enthusiasm and passion, and how serious he was.

It was an honor for her to come in to the EC. She didn't have a clue and didn't know several meetings would be over the phone. She has a hard time doing things over the phone. She also didn't know she'd learn computer stuff. She's not an administrative person and feels overwhelmed by so much information. What do immigrants and refugees get out of all this paper?

She's now an old immigrant and wants to be sure new immigrants have the chance to become old immigrants like herself. She received a lot of support as a new immigrant. That was in the 1970s, but she's still going in 2015 because AFSC is working with African immigrants. Her great grandma said, "You're an ambassador for your people." She feels like she's the African police – making sure we act with integrity in support of African refugees and immigrants. [Watch this [video](#) of Mama speaking about growing up in South Africa and connecting with AFSC in Dayton.]

Robert thanked the EC for their sharing.

Victoria said her daughter and son-in-law are activists in Missouri. They wonder why Victoria would get involved with an organization that has so much travel and so many conference calls. AFSC's overall structure helps the programs happen. Some of us have to be willing to keep going.

She finds that the [Midwest Digest](#) keeps her grounded. It was such an epiphany for her, seeing former Michigan staffer Ron Simpson-Bey's beaming face in the most recent issue. It touched her heart so much. She appreciates that we've toured almost all the offices. She wants to keep in touch with the programs on a regular basis. She's made a little promise to herself, a vow to start reaching out with a phone call or an e-mail to tell staff all those wonderful things she thinks. She thanked Jon for this work on the

Digest and gave her thanks to all of the staff.

Robert said it would be good to ask the staff the same question about motivation for service during the staff retreat. It's good to be reminded of who we are and why we do what we do. He thanked people for their time this morning. He said he values the diversity of this group and the joy of serving as co-clerk with Victoria.

For more information about service on the Midwest Regional Executive Committee, please contact Keta Cowan at ketacowan@gmail.com. If you're interested in serving on this or any AFSC governance body, please fill out this [volunteer interest form](#).



The Midwest Regional Executive Committee meets with Iowa and regional staff in Des Moines, October 2015.