

Dear Friends,

As we share these parting words you find us back alongside the banks of the River Lee for the first time since 2013. This time around the city is awash with red and white flags and bunting as the Cork Senior Hurlers prepare to face Clare in Croke Park in Dublin on All Ireland Final Sunday.

Between the 17th and 21st of July we have been nestled on the grounds of Cork College of Further Education and Training near Grand Parade, grateful for the hospitality and welcome shown by local Friends.

We were delighted to share our gathering with visitors and representatives from other Yearly Meetings and faith groups who joined us both in person and online. In the spirit of Ubuntu, four representatives from local faith groups played an active part in our gathering, with their contributions reflecting our shared experiences.

As Quakers around the world prepare to gather at the FWCC World Plenary in South Africa in August, we have taken this time together in Cork to consider the theme of Ubuntu. We began by looking inward at the state of our own Yearly Meeting, before looking outward to consider our approach to Ubuntu within the wider Irish and UK societies.

Madeleine Pennington from Theos Think Tank and Johnny Currie from the Trussell Trust led us to consider how the theology of Ubuntu influences us as we grapple with economic inequality in our society, and how we must look beyond temporary fixes, such as food banks, towards solutions which empower those living in poverty to have more dignity and control in their own lives.

With guidance from Tracy Martin of the Quaker Council of European Affairs, we continued to move outward to consider our role in Europe and the wider world. Sylvia Wigham from Churchtown Meeting highlighted the struggles faced by refugees and those seeking international protection in Ireland.

With 1 in 69 people around the world displaced from their homes, befriending activities can provide an invaluable connection to those feeling isolated; from lending a listening ear to assisting with form-filling to providing driving lessons, our own small actions can have a powerful impact.

Having looked outward, we came back to ourselves and our relationships with others. The imagery of a windmill was used in a Peace Committee toolkit provided by Aoife Reaper Reynolds of Churchtown Meeting to convey the steps required to understand and improve how we deal with conflicts which may arise in our interactions. Inward reflection can provide the push needed to start this cycle, while self-care and care for others are essential to sustain momentum.

Larry Southard of Cork Meeting spoke to his book 'Wayfaring' which he sought to link to the theme of 'Learning Together'. The fundamental theme of the book can be summarised as envisaging God as a verb rather than a noun and divine guidance as a process. If you truly want to be led you must put yourself in a position that allows following.

Special Interest Groups before our gathering, Bible study and worship sharing each morning, along with the new addition of smaller base groups in our programme gave Friends many opportunities to share fellowship with each other and provided space and time to explore these issues in greater depth.

Although we had looked forward to the return of Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge to deliver our Public Lecture in person, unforeseen travel difficulties meant we had to return to the wonders of modern technology to hear her inspiring talk entitled *Ubuntu: A Profound Universal Value and our Hope for World Peace*.

As a lifelong campaigner for human rights and justice, she highlighted a number of examples of this theme in action from an Irish perspective. She also challenged us to find ways to use it in our own lives and communities.

True to Irish form, it's been a mixture of sunny spells and scattered showers here on the south west coast over these past few days. Despite that, there was no shortage of places and things to explore and see in the wider Cork area during our free time.

As our time together draws to a close, our thoughts are very much with Friends around the world as they get ready to travel to South Africa for the World Plenary organised by the Friends World Committee for Consultation. We hold our Friend Simon Lamb in the Light in his role as Clerk of FWCC and we pray that God's guidance will give him the strength to carry out his work, and to foster a sense of unity in the very diverse worldwide community of Quakers.

We also prayerfully uphold our two Irish representatives Dawn Marie Rafferty and Stephen Winder Baggot, as well our other Friends Lynn Finnegan and Margaret Fraser, all of whom will be present in person.

We are guided by a quote from IYM General Christian Counsel, Organisation and Christian Discipline *"Live in love with one another as commanded by Christ, watching over one another for good, bearing with each other's failings, upholding one another prayerfully in times of difficulty and sorrow, and sharing with each other's joys."*

Signed on behalf of Ireland Yearly Meeting,

William Haire, Clerk

Hugh O' Farrell Walsh, Assistant Clerk

Dawn Marie Rafferty, Assistant Clerk

Philip McDonagh, Assistant Clerk