



# Among Friends

Friends World Committee for Consultation Europe and Middle East Section

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EDITORIAL

## INTRODUCTION



Dear friends, as I am writing my first editorial for *Among Friends* as EMES' new communication and networking coordinator, the World Plenary Meeting in South Africa and Online has just ended. My first couple of weeks in this new role went by in a flash and I was privileged to experience the WPM as a Zoom-Host for online Friends.

Here, I want to thank my incredible colleagues and all the Friends giving service who helped me learn quickly and made this plenary a success. I am honoured to have served alongside you all! I was able to get to know so many Friends and learn about so many impressive Quaker projects all while worshipping with Friends all over the world. It will take me a couple more days or even weeks to digest all that I have experienced.

But there is one thing that stood out to me very quickly, and that is still on my mind now. I was in awe of how our values, our testimonies are expressed differently but so strongly in all Friends I have met! I was reminded about some wisdom a Friend from Vienna shared with me years ago. She told me about attending a World Plenary Meeting, curious about meeting Friends from all over the world, asking herself, how people with such different practices of faith and opinions on important matters can still be united in their Quakerism. And she told me, after meeting lots of different Friends, at the end of this World Plenary she could say "yes we are all Quakers!"

I found this compelling then, but now, I can very much relate to her anecdote. I went into this gathering with the same question, and I came back home with the same answer.

There may be things that are handled differently in different meetings or worship groups, we have some cultural differences and we most certainly do not share the same opinions on all matters. As much as this can be difficult at times, when we listen to each other intently and with compassion, we can find that despite it all, we are strongly united by our shared testimonies.

Especially in times of unrest and war, let us focus our attention and our hearts not on what divides us but on what unites us! As I continue my journey with EMES Friends and Friends all over the world, I want to stay curious and listen to all with an open heart. To continue learning and embrace truth, from whichever source it may come from! And to you, Friend, I wish the same experience, to find unity, where you may not have foreseen it. To find love in the most unexpected of places. To embrace life in all its multifacetedness.

**Julia Walloch**

*EMES Communication and Networking Coordinator,  
Vienna Worship Group*

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Introduction .....	1
Meet Lena Froese .....	2
A View from the Quaker Meeting House .....	2
Gaza's Unheard Cries .....	4
Ramallah's Friends Legacy .....	5
Poetry .....	6
Woodbrooke Update .....	7
QCEA News .....	8
Annual Meeting 2024 Epistle .....	11
Ubuntu in Our World Entire .....	12
World Plenary Meeting Epistle .....	13
Diary .....	16



Friends World Committee  
for Consultation  
EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

[fwccemes.org](http://fwccemes.org)

## DID YOU ATTEND THE 1985 WORLD GATHERING OF YOUNG FRIENDS?

The 40th anniversary is approaching!

Efforts are underway to reunite. Please contact Sarah Blackburn Kehoe at [skkehoe@gmail.com](mailto:skkehoe@gmail.com) for more information. Thank you!

## NEW ROLE HOLDER: LENA FROESE

Lena has been part of the Quaker community since 2019. Living in a small town in Southern Germany, she is worshipping with Basel Meeting. Over the past few years, she has been involved with EMEYF, working as a Communications Assistant for QCEA, and volunteering with EMES (Executive Committee and Youth Group) and FWCC (Staff Advisory Committee). Professionally, she works as an Editor/Communications Manager, although she will very soon go on maternity leave to care for her first child. In her free time, Lena enjoys reading, sewing – primarily quilt blankets – and traveling to visit family in Canada.



# A VIEW FROM THE QUAKER MEETING HOUSE

by Jackie Bartlett

I am sitting in my garden to write this piece. The sun is shining and although it isn't particularly warm yet there is the promise of warmth to come. There is some bird activity somewhere close by and a moment ago a small white butterfly flopped onto a flower head and then took off again. I am seated beneath the Flowering Crab Apple tree which I planted 11 years ago when I moved into my home and which I have watched grow from a skinny sapling into the sturdy rough barked beauty which I love. My seat is an old garden bench collected from the garden of a dear neighbour who died last year. This is one of my happy places.

Gardens have long been associated with peace and restoration. A few hundred yards from where my daughter lives in Abingdon, near Oxford there is a communal garden gifted to the town by a religious foundation many years ago for the benefit of the townsfolk for their restoration and comfort. It is a beautiful place with wide lawns, mature trees and shrubs, borders packed with summer colour, benches tucked away in shady corners and a small hut equipped as a place for those who come to read. In autumn the whole garden quietly moves towards decline and decay before settling down to sleep through the winter. As if this isn't idyllic enough, at the far end of the garden is the river Thames flowing quietly by.

The hymn writer tells us that 'We are nearer to God's heart in a garden than any other place on earth' and on a day like today, remembering that Oxfordshire Garden and enjoying the peace of my own with the warmth building around me it's easy to understand that.

The Sufi mystic poet Rumi (1207-1273) had a vision of a garden as a place of reconciliation. "There is a garden" he wrote, 'somewhere between the ideas of right or wrong. I will meet you there.' A place of neutrality and non – judgement.

When he wrote those words, I suspect he was almost certainly thinking of the cool courtyard gardens of his native Persia with water splashing from fountains and the heady scent of flowers inducing sleep, for his is a garden of the imagination.

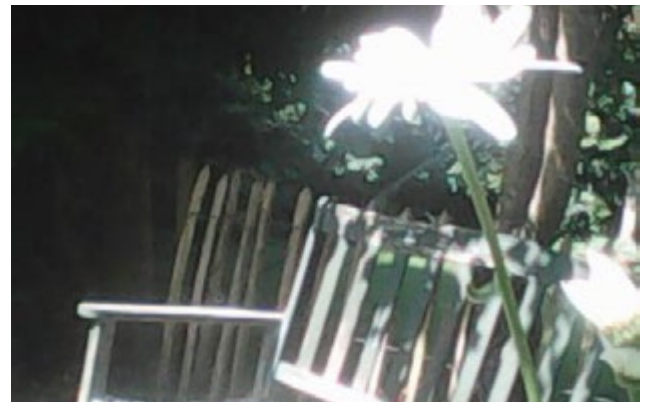
A more modern poet, John Lennon asks us to Imagine all the people living lives in peace.

Rumi and Lennon, writing 900 years apart both recognised that imagination is a state where anything can happen and where transformation can take place. They ask us to look and see their vision of peace and hope.

Rumi's garden of the imagination by its very definition has no boundaries.

It is small enough for neighbours to talk across a fence and settle their disputes or for families, in the intimate spaces of their homes to listen to and forgive each other. But it is also large enough for nations to come together and learn to trust and understanding. A garden where nation shall speak peace unto nation and neither shall there be war anymore.

Imagine that.



Jackie's Garden Today



Jackie's Garden

# GAZA'S UNHEARD CRIES: REBUILDING GAZA'S SHATTERED LIVES

by Jack Nassar

As the relentless genocidal war on Gaza continues, its residents face an agonizing reality. The devastating prospect of abandoning their homeland has become a grim truth, and the road to recovery seems nearly insurmountable.

The destruction in Gaza is beyond catastrophic. Entire communities lie in ruins; homes, hospitals, businesses, parks, and vital infrastructure have been obliterated. Once vibrant neighborhoods are now desolate wastelands. Hundreds of thousands of homes are lost, forcing families into makeshift shelters and tents – an unforgiving reality that could persist for months or even years.

Gaza's educational system is shattered – half of its schools and all universities are destroyed, with the remaining facilities repurposed as temporary shelters. The region's cultural fabric has been torn apart, leaving churches, mosques, cultural centers, and sports facilities in ruins. Essential services such as sewage systems, water supplies, communications, and electricity are in disarray, deepening the suffering of its residents.

Critical infrastructure has been devastated, leaving people struggling for basic survival. Agricultural lands, once fertile, are now barren, exacerbating the hunger crisis. Health needs are dire, with many requiring treatments abroad. Persistent health conditions and psychological trauma, especially among children, demand urgent relief. Resources for healing and comfort are woefully inadequate.

The suffering of the most vulnerable is particularly stark. Orphans, adrift in a landscape of destruction, face not only the loss of their parents but also a future stripped of security. Widows mourn their lost partners, confronting economic and emotional instability. Individuals with special needs – those who are blind, deaf, or confined to wheelchairs – face compounded challenges as infrastructure destruction renders support services nearly inaccessible. The elderly, once reliant on routine and care, now face heightened risks without necessary support. Pregnant

women and the sick require immediate medical attention, while infants and young children need physical sustenance and emotional comfort amid the chaos.

The plight of pets and animals further underscores the pervasive impact of this tragedy. Many are left homeless and hungry, their suffering a poignant reminder of the widespread devastation. The environmental damage is also profound, with green spaces and natural resources severely impacted.

As global attention may waver, Gaza's residents continue to bear the heavy burden of their suffering. The scale of devastation evokes memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, perhaps even surpassing them in its scope of suffering.

As Quakers, our faith calls us to respond with unwavering solidarity and compassion. Our principles – rooted in loving our neighbors as ourselves – urge us to act with profound empathy. We must stand in solidarity with Gaza's people, including the Christians who have lived there continuously since the time of Jesus.

Early Quaker founder George Fox admonished us to “walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.” This call challenges us to recognize the divine light within each person affected by this tragedy, to deeply empathize with their suffering, and to act with meaningful support.

Jesus' words in Matthew 25:40 remind us of our duty: “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” In these moments of profound pain, our faith must manifest as tangible acts of love and compassion.

Let us not turn away or remain indifferent to this unimaginable devastation. Let us be advocates for the voiceless, champions of compassion, and agents of transformative change. Together, we can help rebuild Gaza – not merely with bricks and mortar, but with unwavering love, hope, social justice, and a profound belief in the power of grace.

Palestinians inspect the site of an Israeli airstrike in the Az-Zawaida camp, in central Gaza Strip, on August 17, 2024. Credit: Anas-Mohammed.

# RAMALLAH'S FRIENDS LEGACY: A GUIDING LIGHT AMIDST UNCERTAINTY

by Jack Nassar

In the heart of Ramallah, where the city's pulse vibrates along its main street, the Friends community has established a profound legacy of spirituality and education. The Ramallah Friends Meetinghouse – also known as the Arab Quakers Church – and the esteemed Friends schools stand as enduring symbols of this heritage. For over a century, the Friends' unwavering commitment to pacifism, social justice, and education has cast a guiding light on Ramallah, offering hope and progress amid a shifting world.

## Historical Foundation

The Friends' journey in Palestine began in the late 19th century when American missionaries introduced Quakerism to Ramallah, establishing the Friends Schools. Khalil Abdallah Totah, a notable Palestinian Quaker educator born in Ramallah in 1886, became a tireless advocate for educational reform. He championed girls' education and the integration of arts into the curriculum. The Friends Schools not only excelled academically but also instilled core values of peace, equality, and social justice, shaping the future of countless students.

The 1948 Nakba and the 1967 occupation posed severe challenges to the Friends community. During these turbulent times, the Meetinghouse and its facilities became sanctuaries, offering shelter, education, and medical aid to Palestinian refugees. This response embodied the Friends' principles, providing support and hope in the darkest times.

## Spiritual Centerpiece

Constructed in 1910, the Meetinghouse stands as a testament to a bygone era of vibrant spiritual and communal life. Its weathered wooden door, worn yet dignified, bears the marks of countless hands seeking solace within. Long windows invite light into the interior, casting intricate patterns on the stone walls. Each architectural detail – from the stone walls echoing past prayers to the wooden benches and rafters witnessing numerous gatherings – tells a story of rich history and enduring spirit.

Today, though the Meetinghouse is less frequented, it remains a vital hub for both Palestinian and international Friends. It reflects Quaker values of simplicity, equality, and integrity and serves as a platform for advocacy. Figures like theologian and activist Jean Zaru use it to promote dialogue and conflict

resolution on a global scale, continuing its legacy of influence and engagement.

## Demographic Decline

Before the 1967 Israeli occupation, which triggered a significant exodus among Palestinian Christians, the Friends in Ramallah numbered around 400, according to some reports. Today, their numbers have dwindled to approximately 20.

## Looking Ahead

As the Friends community in Ramallah faces an uncertain future, their legacy of education, peace, and community-building remains a guiding light. Their efforts have profoundly shaped the city's consciousness, inspiring future generations toward harmony and justice. The Meetinghouse, a symbol of this enduring legacy, stands as a poignant reminder of a heritage at risk of neglect.

Visiting the Meetinghouse on Sundays, I am enveloped in a sense of history and tranquility. The old stone edifice, embraced by a modest garden where trees cast gentle shadows, invites deep reflection. The resilience and hope expressed by visitors seeking solace within these venerable walls are deeply moving. Yet, witnessing this once-bustling sanctuary becoming increasingly solitary is disheartening. The silent, broken bell atop the main door, which has not rung for years, poses a haunting question: Will it ever ring again, signaling the enduring legacy of Ramallah's Christian and Friends heritage?

## Personal Reflection

Although not of Friends lineage, my connection to Quakerism and the Ramallah Friends Meetinghouse is profound. As we reflect on this legacy, we face a crucial question: Can the Friends ethos of peace, community, and education continue to thrive in Ramallah, or will the decline of this community lead to the erosion of its cherished heritage? What concrete steps can we, as a global Friends community, take to ensure that the light of the Friends in Ramallah remains a guiding force for future generations? The resilience of this community, rooted in love, peace, and education, calls for our action. Will we rise to this challenge and ensure their enduring legacy continues to shine brightly?

*Jack Nassar is a Palestinian Christian based in Ramallah. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Political Communications from Goldsmiths, University of London, and possesses expertise across sectors, driving positive change.*



### My Friends

There's a place I go to sit and stare.  
 Not alone, my friends are there.  
 I engage with them, and they with me.  
 Some old ones lost and new ones found:  
 That rock, this tree; a breeze, a shadow or a sound.  
 There's a place I go to sit and stare,  
 Just nearby and everywhere.

### An August Morning

An August morning has a peculiar grace,  
 outside summer's gates.

The dewed lawn shows trails of snails and webs of spiders.  
 Butterflies wait longer in their languid pose.  
 In the fields, the grass and corn once tall and green  
 Are only brown stubble, dust and weed.

The spring blooms have long gone: daffodil, tulip and lilac;  
 The loud colours of the meadow have now no echo.  
 The silver-white cymbal light of June lowers to  
 The bronzed gong bong-glow of harvest time.

July's swelter gives way to the soft chill that heralds autumn.  
 Mist replaces humidity. Chicory skies awake the day.  
 The morning sun dapples through the crinkling leaves  
 That the solstice arc had shone well above.

But most of all, the August garden is quiet.  
 Birds have sung their chorus, staked their claim.  
 Stuffed their young and stopped their greed.  
 Time has come for welcome berries and thankful seed.

An August morning has a peculiar grace, while winter waits.



### We Woke Together

This morning, we woke together,  
 she, sprawled across the bed.  
 The room was bright and cheerful,  
 a joyful day ahead.  
 Our faces met, each beaming.  
 I stretched out my hand and arm.  
 She wrapped her rays around me,  
 the sun, she made me warm.

Poems and Photographs by *Duncan Dwinell*



# WOODBROOKE UPDATE

Since our last update, we have launched our new programme for the second half of 2024. The programme includes courses about refugees and climate justice, guidance for those in Quaker roles, online day events on spirituality, support for meetings taking steps in anti-racism work, and more.

We have a variety of courses and sessions that focus on global perspectives. These include our popular course 'World Quaker Voices,' designed to bring together Friends from various traditions to enhance mutual understanding and strengthen our global community. A Spanish version is planned for later this year. Additionally, we are offering 'Being a Quaker Clerk: A Course for Friends from Around the World,' which examines different clerking styles. We are also hosting three one-off sessions on 'Global Perspectives on Conscientious Objection.' For details on these courses and our full programme, please visit our website: [woodbrooke.org.uk/courses](http://woodbrooke.org.uk/courses).

Over the past couple of months, we have held and been involved in some exciting events. In June, Woodbrooke's Centre for Quaker Studies held a Quaker Studies Conference at Lancaster University in partnership with the Quaker Studies Research Association and the Conference of Quaker Historians and Archivists. The three-day major transatlantic event showcased the latest scholarship in Quaker studies. This year's George Richardson Lecture was delivered at the conference by Nigel Smith who explored the dynamic period of Quaker activity from the mid-1650s to the early 18th century and looked at what we can learn from it today.

In July, we joined other organisations in marking the 400th anniversary of the birth of George Fox. During the month, we highlighted our ongoing yearlong programme of online courses and sessions which dive into the legacy and influence of George Fox on the Quaker movement.

At the end of the month, we held a stall at Britain Yearly Meeting. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting and discussing our work and the future of the organisation with Friends. The weekend also saw this year's Swarthmore Lecture, given by Ben Jarman. In his lecture, Ben drew from his personal experience to explore the myth and reality of how society responds to serious crimes, inviting Friends to reflect on what we can do to renew our efforts in the field of penal reform.

In August, we upheld Friends coming together at the FWCC World Plenary in South Africa and online. During the Plenary, we undertook a survey of the attendees to gather information about the diversity and commonality in the world family of Friends. This pilot study is the first step towards the undertaking of a 'World Survey of Friends'; something which has not yet been carried out among Friends globally before.

We continue to regularly hold online Meeting for Worship in partnership with EMES, providing opportunities for worship for those all over the world. We also hold an online Young Adult Worship and a monthly Quaker Educators Worship which is hosted by members of Quaker Values in Education (QVInE).

We look forward to seeing you on one of our courses soon.



Mike Pinches

| Ben Jarman delivering the 2024 Swarthmore Lecture at Britain Yearly Meeting, July 27, 2024



# FROM CRISIS TO COLLABORATION: QCEA'S LAUNCH EVENT FOR NEW MEPS

As the new Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), Commissioners, and their staff settle into their roles, the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) is launching an initiative to foster a more compassionate and integrity-driven political environment.

The political landscape surrounding key issues such as climate justice, migration, and peace has become increasingly polarised. These topics are often politicised as parties and Member States seek to bolster their support bases. QCEA believes that fostering a European Parliament grounded in compassion and integrity is essential for making decisions that benefit both people and the planet.

QCEA's initiative aims to encourage MEPs to adhere to the principles of good governance and to avoid language and actions that incite hatred and fear. By promoting dialogue that paves the way for innovative solutions, QCEA seeks to build relationships with MEPs and their staff across the political spectrum.

As part of this welcoming project, QCEA is sending out personalised welcome postcards accompanied by handmade textile gifts crafted by our staff and supporters. We hope that these gifts will symbolise the principles of integrity, compassion, and respect. Additionally, QCEA is inviting MEPs' personal assistants, policy advisors, and trainees to participate in training sessions at Quaker House. These sessions will cover topics such as active listening, having difficult conversations, mediation, and other relevant skills.

The initiative will kick off with a hybrid launch event on September 25 from 7 PM to 9 PM (CET), titled "From crisis to collaboration: reimagining our political future." This event, open to all, will feature Paul Ingram as the keynote speaker. Paul will explore how we can transform our approach to domestic, European, and global politics to reconnect with the electorate, restore faith in our political system, and build trust in politicians. He will discuss how to enhance our collective capacity to address impending stresses and catastrophes, and balance our objectives to resolve great power conflicts sustainably, fostering greater collaboration in tackling the major issues of our time.

Paul Ingram brings a wealth of experience to this discussion. He is a research affiliate at Cambridge University's Centre for the Study of Existential Risk, specialising in nuclear risk and great power war. He is involved in several track 2 negotiations, is a Founder Director of the Middle East Treaty Organisation working towards a WMD Free Zone, and a former Executive Director of the British American Security Information Council. Additionally, Paul has experience as a systems thinking tutor at the UK National School of Government and co-Leader of Oxford City Council.

We are looking forward to seeing you at the launch event, whether in person at Quaker House or online. We hope that this event will bring together diverse perspectives to envision a collaborative political future. For more information and to register, please visit [our website](#).

**FROM CRISIS TO COLLABORATION**  
reimagining our political future

25 SEPT 2024 07:00 PM - 09:00 PM QUAKER HOUSE BRUSSELS/ ONLINE

REGISTER NOW: [www.qcea.org](http://www.qcea.org)

with **Paul Ingram**  
research affiliate at Cambridge University's Centre for the Study of Existential Risk



# LIVING THE SPIRIT OF UBUNTU

Epistle from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting  
Held online, April 26-28, 2024

## To Friends everywhere, greetings:

Dear friends, annwyl cyfeillion, kjære venner, chers amis, liebe Freunde, lieve vrienden, queridos amigos, cari amici, kära vänner, kære venner, rakkaat ystävät, kallid sõbrad, drazi přátelé, dārgie draugi, dragi prijatelji, дорогі друзі, дорогие друзья, kedves barátaim, drodzy przyjaciele, Shanovni Droozii, a chairde, Salamaat Asdiqa!

Loving greetings to Friends everywhere from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section's Annual Meeting 2024, meeting online.

On the weekend of April 26-28 an enthusiastic community of between 60 and 90 Friends, from 23 different countries, gathered together online to investigate the theme: "Living the spirit of Ubuntu", using John 13:34-35, about love, as our guiding gospel. This was the first time translations into Russian and German have been offered.

We settled into the work of the weekend with a period of silence. In that silence we commemorated friends who have died this past year. We give thanks for their work and inspiration.

Our theme of Ubuntu was highlighted in many sessions and in many ways: Quote from Albert Schweitzer at the first Epilogue, "We are united with all life that is in nature. We can no longer live our lives for ourselves alone"; Bible study with Janet Scott: Love one another, How? Different "love" commandments, different definitions of who is my neighbour. What does "Love" exactly mean? We felt we were beginning to be a community.

Our main speaker Hezron Masitsa, Justice & Peace Secretary FWCC World Office and Nairobi YM, said the word Ubuntu embodies a set of values and principles that emphasise the interconnectedness of all people and the importance of community, compassion and mutual respect: Our humanity and wellbeing is tied to others. The happiness and dignity of one person is linked to the entire community. It is also linked to all of God's creation. We are all part of one great whole.

Hezron's talk was thought-provoking, inspiring and challenging: "get out of your comfort zone and normal routine"; "let your empathy run a little wild!". He quoted the American philosopher Erik Hoffer who wrote: "It is easier to love humanity as a whole than to love one's neighbour." And went on to say that "while in the modern world neighbours are often buildings rather than people, traditional African houses have open compounds and no doors." We have sadly heard about heavy rains in East Africa, destruction of property... Ubuntu also means unity with all creation, caring for nature, sustainability and proper distribution of the world's resources.

The word and the concept of Ubuntu was new for many participants. Some Eastern European friends struggle with reminiscences of socialism;

others point out that light of conscience helps to reconcile individuality and togetherness in truth and love, in the spirit of nonviolence. But Ubuntu reminds people of traditional peasant and craftsman communities and the religious principle of conciliarity grassroots "sobornost" – unification and assistance to survival and wellbeing.

In our Home groups we were asked to consider the challenging questions Hezron had prepared for us:

- What struggles do you encounter that hinder the expression of love for one another? Do you consider some people as difficult to love?
- How does understanding Ubuntu challenge you to do something different?
- How can the Quaker community contribute to the restoration of Ubuntu?

We were offered various workshops with themes ranging from the up-coming World Plenary in South Africa and online, reparations for slavery and colonialism, story weaving to caring for people traumatised by violence. Also updates from Quaker organisations.

In our business sessions we heard of the work done by our staff on our behalf, for which we offer our heartfelt thanks. The elders brought up the need for online elders, and elders offering pastoral care, and it was decided to take this suggestion forward.

In our EMES section wars are raging. Our Peace and Service Network asked the vital question "How can we be of service?" and on Saturday afternoon, with the help of a friend from Georgia and one from Russia, the question was partially answered. At present there are two ad hoc groups at work within the network. One is concentrating on helping deserters from the Russian Army and supporting conscientious objectors, mainly from Ukraine. The second working group is focusing on ways of helping people caught up in the war in Palestine. Our thoughts and love go to our friends in Ramallah and Brummana, who could

not join us this year, and to all people afflicted by these atrocities. Friends, let us join hands and hearts, and pray for a cease-fire in Ukraine and in Palestine – and for universal peace.

On Saturday evening we gathered at our computer screens, and in spite of the distance found great community and fun in sharing stories, songs, videos, wonderful photographs and paintings, and by creating our own version of the Eurovision Song Contest. We saw smiles everywhere. What a creative crowd of Quakers we are!

A silent epilogue for reflection, thanksgiving and prayer brought our rich day to a close.

For some early risers Sunday morning started with gentle exercise, including the "Quaker Stretch".

We were encouraged by the ministry in Meeting for Worship to consider the need to live in real togetherness and share world resources, and to meet the needs and interests of others before our own. And to think about this everyday.

We have spent a deeply rewarding weekend together. Without the devoted efforts of our staff and technicians this would not have been possible. And thanks to the great service our interpreters provided, our community became more whole. Peace be with you all!

*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

—John 13:34-35 (ESV)

In Friendship, mewn cyfeillgarwch, i vennskap, i vänskap, i venskab, ystävyydessä, bien amicalement, in Freundschaft, in Vriendschap, en amistad, in amicizia, v přátelství, u prijateljstwu, draudzībā, barātī ūdvōzletel, sōpruses, w przyjaźni, Zi Droozhnim privitom, в дружбі, в дружбе, le cairdeas, fi alsadaqa.



| Annual Meeting 2024

# UBUNTU IN OUR WORLD ENTIRE: TWO READINGS TO ENCOURAGE REFLECTION

by Jennifer Wang

## “I am because we are.”

This oft-quoted definition of the Zulu term “ubuntu” speaks of human interconnectedness and prompts us to reflect on not only our place in the world, but also the meaning of our existence. In this current moment of human existence, we in Europe (as elsewhere) are facing major armed conflicts in close proximity, growing anti-immigrant sentiment, and the climate crisis. I believe it is fitting in these uncertain times to seek new ways of seeing and of being, with the hope of changing course. Can the concept of Ubuntu help us repair the fractures within ourselves, as well as within and amongst our communities? Can it even help us repair our relationship with our beloved planet?

A central question is posed in “The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World” by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu (with Douglas Abrams): How can we humans “transform joy from an ephemeral state into an enduring trait, from a fleeting feeling into a lasting way of being”? Given the perpetual inner peace and compassion shown by these two spiritual leaders, despite very traumatic life events, they’re perhaps particularly well-positioned to respond. Joy seems to be especially elusive in the context of suffering. One of the keys to overcoming this suffering, according to the Dalai Lama, is remembering our connection with all of humanity: “Many of us have become refugees...and there are a lot of difficulties in my own country. When I look only at that,...then I worry. [...] But when I look at the world, there are a lot of problems. [...] When we see these things, we realize that not only do we suffer, but so do many of our human brothers and sisters. So when we look at the same event from a wider perspective, we will reduce the worrying and our own suffering.”

Focusing on our human connections has other benefits at the individual level. The Dalai Lama argues that affection and warmheartedness are essential for human happiness, that they build self-confidence and interpersonal trust, thus reducing fear of others. This trust is necessary for cooperation, which is in turn necessary for human survival. On the other hand, “when you focus too much on yourself, you become disconnected and alienated from others. In the end, you also become alienated from yourself, since the need for connection with others is such a fundamental part of who we are as human beings.” Excessive self-focus may even be tied with our physical and mental health. A 1989 study shows that people who disproportionately use first-person pronouns have a significantly greater risk of heart attack. And a 2017 study shows that those who very often use first-

person singular pronouns are more likely to be depressed than those who tend to use first-person plural.

Perhaps it is in manifesting our love for others that we arrive at joy. According to Archbishop Tutu, “ultimately our greatest joy is when we seek to do good for others.” He adds that “we’re wired to be compassionate, [...] to be caring for the other and generous to one another. We shrivel when we are not able to interact. [...] That is part of the reason why solitary confinement is such a horrendous punishment. We depend on the other in order for us to be fully who we are.” Research does indeed seem to back up the importance of compassionate acts for individual happiness. According to neuroscientist Richard Davidson’s unified theory of “the happy brain,” which is based on extensive neuroimaging research, there are four independent brain circuits that influence our lasting well-being. One of these is devoted entirely to “our ability to be generous.” Our brains literally feel good when we help others or observe others being helped.

Both research and personal observation show that cultivating our own joy can also benefit those around us. According to the psychiatrist Howard Cutler, “Survey after survey has shown that it is unhappy people who tend to be most self-focused and are socially withdrawn, brooding, and even antagonistic. Happy people, in contrast, are generally found to be more sociable, flexible, and creative, and are able to tolerate life’s daily frustrations more easily than unhappy people. And, most important, they are found to be more loving and forgiving than unhappy people.”

We seem to be presented then, with an interesting cycle: By remembering the pain of others, we can heal our own pain. By healing our own pain and cultivating our joy, we can bring joy and healing to others. “I heal because we heal; I am joyful because we are joyful.” And vice versa.

How then, could the concept of Ubuntu figure into human civilization’s degrading effects on the natural environment? We turn now to the indigenous and scientific perspectives offered in “Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants” by Robin Wall Kimmerer, a Potawatomi botanist. Kimmerer relates to us the Mayan story of creation: After imagining the world into existence, the gods wished to create beings who were capable of telling the story of their creation and of giving praise for it. They went through several attempts to get it right, forming humans of different materials in turn—mud, wood, even pure sunlight—but each set of humans lacked something important. Finally the gods tried making humans from corn. These humans could dance,

sing, and use their words to tell stories and pray. They were compassionate and wise enough to be grateful. And so they were sustained upon the earth.

What is it about corn that the Mayan storytellers of old favored? “What is corn, after all, but light transformed by relationship?” Kimmerer points out. “Corn owes its existence to all four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. And corn is the product of relationship not only with the physical world, but with people too. The sacred plant of our origin created people, and people created corn. [...] Corn cannot exist without us to sow it and tend its growth; our beings are joined in an obligate symbiosis.”

This symbiosis between nature and human seems to be an integral part of the American indigenous worldview. A number of native traditions speak of Skywoman, the being who fell from Skyworld and, after being helped by various animals, created Turtle Island, or our Earth, from mud and seeds. Kimmerer compares Skywoman to Eve: “On one side of the world were people whose relationship with the living world was shaped by Skywoman, who created a garden for the well-being of all. On the other side was a woman with a garden and a tree. But for tasting its fruit, she was banished from the garden. [...] In order to eat, she was instructed to subdue the wilderness into which she was cast. Same species, same earth, different stories.”

It can be hard to accept that we humans have a positive role to play in the flourishing of Skywoman’s garden. But Kimmerer insists that the true nature of the human-planet relationship is a reciprocal one. For instance, take sweetgrass, a fragrant, rhizomatous, perennial grass that has long been used for basketmaking by Native Americans. One of Kimmerer’s graduate students spent two years studying the effects of different harvesting techniques on sweetgrass populations. Her findings refuted the assumptions of Western scientists while proving the wisdom of indigenous basketmakers: “The failing plots were not the harvested ones, as predicted, but the unharvested controls. [...] Picking sweetgrass seemed to actually stimulate growth.”

If we humans, then, are meant to be in relationship with nature, what should that relationship look like? Whereas Western notions place the human at the top of a hierarchy of beings, with plants at the bottom, Kimmerer states that for indigenous Americans, it is the reverse: “[Humans] are referred to as the younger brothers of Creation, so like younger brothers we must learn from our elders. Plants were here first and have had a long time to figure things out. [...] Plants are providers for the community and exemplify the virtue of generosity, always offering food. What if Western scientists saw plants as their teachers rather than their subjects?”

A relationship, in Kimmerer’s view, is established by the acts of giving and receiving. She recounts a childhood spent picking wild strawberries in the fields around her home. “Gifts from the earth or from each other establish a particular relationship, an obligation of sorts to give, to receive, and to reciprocate.” At the end of the strawberry season, Kimmerer would weed out the patches of ground where strawberry plants sent out runners to take root, resulting in an even larger abundance of berries. With a gift comes a relationship, and with a relationship comes responsibilities. “From the viewpoint of a private property economy, the ‘gift’ is deemed to be ‘free’ because we obtain it free of charge, at no cost. But in the gift economy, gifts are not free. [...] The currency of a gift economy is, at its root, reciprocity.”

Reciprocity. Nature takes care of us, and so we should take care of Nature. Kimmerer recalls walking around Onondaga Lake, one of the most polluted lakes in the US, now in the midst of an ecological restoration. She detects a familiar sweet smell and to her surprise discovers sweetgrass. The presence of sweetgrass in such a wasteland is a reminder that “it is not the land that has been broken, but our relationship to it.” But how do we heal that broken relationship? “Ecological restoration can be viewed as an act of reciprocity in which humans exercise their caregiving responsibility for the ecosystems that sustain them. We restore the land, and the land restores us.”

A natural companion to reciprocity is gratitude. Together they “increase the evolutionary fitness of both plant and animal,” Kimmerer asserts. In addition, Lewis Hyde’s studies of gift economies finds that objects “remain plentiful because they are treated as gifts.” Kimmerer adds that in a gift relationship with nature, “We tend to respond to nature as a part of ourselves, not a stranger or alien available for exploitation.”

And gratitude, as “The Book of Joy” reminds us, “connects us all. When we are grateful for a meal, we can be grateful for the food that we are eating and for all of those who have made the meal possible—the farmers, the grocers, and the cooks. When the Archbishop gives thanks, we are often taken on a journey of Ubuntu, acknowledging all of the connections that bind us together and on which we are all dependent.”

In a world where natural resources are treated as profitable commodities rather than as gifts to be shared, and where, as Hezron Masitsa of Nairobi Yearly Meeting pointed out in his 2024 EMES Annual Meeting keynote speech, many people have houses instead of people for neighbors, can we learn to embody Ubuntu?

**Can we use it to transform and heal our world?**

# WORLD PLENARY MEETING EPISTLE IN KISWAHILI, SPANISH & ENGLISH

Agosti 12, 2024

## Kwa marafiki wote kila mahali,

**Tunatumia salamu za upendo kutoka kwa Kamati ya Mashauriano ya Ulimwengu ya Marafiki, iliyofanyika Agosti 5 hadi 12, 2024 mtandaoni na Vanderbijlpark karibu na Johannesburg, Afrika Kusini, kwenye kingo za mto unaojulikana kama IHailarib, Lekwa, iLikwa na Vaal. Kwa kweli 'tuko chini kando ya mto' tunapoweka mizigo yetu na kuinua kwa Mungu.**

Marafiki 500 wamekusanyika ukingoni mwa mto Vaal na mtandaoni, wakitoka nchi 53 na wakiwakilisha Mikutano 95 ya Mwaka, vikundi vya kuabudu na mashirika ya Wakweka. Nusu yao walijiunga na mkusanyiko mtandaoni, mmoja mmoja na kupangwa katika vibanda 50 kote ulimwenguni, mkutano wa kwanza wa Mkutano Mkuu wa Dunia. Kwa furaha tunatafakari jinsi imekuwa vyema kuwa na michango kutoka kwa Marafiki mtandaoni kwenye chumba. Kwa sisi tuliopo mtandaoni, ilikuwa ni furaha kujumuishwa na kupata uzoefu wa pamoja. Cha kusikitisha ni kwamba baadhi ya Marafiki walizuiwa kujiunga nasi. Tunajutia kutokuwepo kwao na kuwashikilia kwenye Nuru.

Mada yetu ni 'Kuishi Roho ya Ubuntu: Kuitikia kwa Tumaini Wito wa Mungu wa Kuthamini Uumbaji na Mmoja Kwa Mmoja. Ubuntu ni neno la Kizulu linalozungumzia uwezo na kazi isiyokoma ya Roho Mtakatifu kati yetu, akituwzesha kwenda zaidi ya nafsi zetu na kufahamu kwamba 'Mimi niko kwa sababu tuko'.

Katika mkusanyiko huu wa furaha, tumepanua uelewa wetu na kuthamini sisi - kama Wakweka - tulivyo. Ni zawadi gani. Licha ya wingi wa tofauti zetu, tumesherehekea kwamba tunashiriki sio tu waanzilishi wetu wa Ukwaka - heri ya miaka 400 ya kuzaliwa, George Fox! - lakini pia Urafiki wa kina, uwazi kwa tafsiri mpya za Biblia, miundo na taratibu zetu, kujitolea kwetu kwa kina kwa amani na haki, upendo wetu kwa Dunia, na upendo wetu kwa Mungu.

Kwa shauku kwamba Marafiki wote waliokusanyika washiriki kikamilifu iwezekanavyo, tumeunganisha umbali wa kijiografia na tofauti za lugha kwa teknolojia, wakalimani wenye subira, na neema ya Mungu. Tunashukuru. Katika ari ya ujumuishi ya Ubuntu, sote - na haswa wazungumzaji wa Kiingereza - tumepewa changamoto ya kuzungumza polepole na kwa uwazi vya kutosha ili wakalimani wetu wafanye kazi yao. Sote tumepewa changamoto ya kupata uwiano

unaoongozwa na Roho kati ya kuzungumza na kusikiliza, kati ya tendo na kutafakari, kati ya kutenda na kuwa tu.

Kabla ya mkusanyiko huu, Marafiki 46 kati yetu walikuja pamoja kwa siku nne za uzoefu wa pamoja, mazungumzo, tafakari, vicheko, ibada, na wimbo. Kuishi katika jumuiya, Marafiki wa Vijana waligundua, kushikilia, na kucheza kwa mambo ya kawaida na tofauti. Katika hali ya kusisimua, kamati ya ulimwengu ya Marafiki Wanane wa Vijana kutoka sehemu zote za FWCC iliundwa. Hili linaonyesha kujitolea kwa furaha kuendelea kukuza hisia mpya za jumuiya. Kwa kufahamu ukubwa wa jukumu hilo, Vijana marafiki wanatupigia simu sote kwa usaidizi na uaminifu.

Tulikaribishwa kwa uchangamfu na furaha na wenyeji wetu kutoka Mkutano wa Kila Mwaka wa Afrika Kusini na Sehemu ya Afrika ya FWCC. Rafiki wa hapa alitushirikisha salamu ya Afrika Kusini 'sawubona', ambayo ina maana 'Nakuona na si wewe tu, bali wote ambao wamekufanya kuwa wewe'. Pia alizungumza jinsi kuja kwa Quakers kulimsaidia kuamini maisha zaidi ya ubaguzi wa rangi. Safari za mtandaoni na za ndani ziliboresha programu yetu. Safari za maeneo ya Cradle of Humankind na Makumbusho ya Ubaguzi wa Kibaguzi zilisimamisha mkusanyiko katika muktadha wa safari chungu na yenye misukosuko ya nchi yetu mwenyeji. Tumetiwa moyo na uthabiti uliojazwa na Roho wa wenyeji wetu, tukiibuka kutoka kwa mapambano ya zamani na ya sasa kwa uthabiti kuthibitisha kwamba kupitia neema ya Mungu, bado tuko hapa. Sisi ni wamoja.

Pamoja, tumeabudu, tumesali, tumeimba, tumepashwa joto na jua, tumepozwa na baridi ya jioni, na, bila shaka, tulizungumza -- na kuzungumza - na kuzungumza zaidi. Tumetafuta kutambua njia zinazoongozwa na Roho mbele ili kuheshimu kujitolea kwetu kwa mada zetu tatu zilizounganishwa: utunzaji wa uumbaji, uponyaji wa mahusiano kwa kuzingatia ukosefu wa haki wa kihistoria na unaoendelea, na kulea Ubuntu. Wasiwasi wetu unaojitokeza umenaswa na kuunganishwa pamoja katika hati ya maandishi.

Tumeshikwa na hitaji la haraka la kufanya kazi ya kuleta mabadiliko ulimwenguni. Pia tunaitwa na sauti hiyo ndogo tulivu kutulia, kusikilizana kwa kina na kwa uumbaji. Yeremia 29:11-14 inasema: 'Maana nayajua mawazo ninayowawazia ninyi, asema Bwana, ni mawazo ya amani wala si ya mabaya, kuwapa

ninyi tumaini siku zenu za mwisho.' Mungu yu pamoja nasi. Tuko hapa. Sisi ni wamoja.

Tumepewa changamoto, na wengi wetu tumeitwa kujiunga na hatua ya pamoja, ya kimataifa ya Ukwaka ili kuishi matatizo yetu -- kuwa, kama George Fox alisema - "shujaa kwa Ukweli". Wengine miongoni mwetu wanazingatia jamii ya wenyeji. Tunajifunza kupanua huruma yetu kwa sisi ni nani, kama vile tunavyojikuta katika uharibifu wetu wote na uzuri wetu.

Tofauti za mitazamo yetu, zingine kubwa, zingine ndogo, zimekuwa dhahiri zaidi, wakati fulani kwa uchungu. Tumeweza, kwa baraka zake Mungu, kusuluhisha mvutano fulani kupitia mazungumzo ya huruma, huku mengine yakiwekwa katikati yetu. Hatujakatishwa tamaa.

Mambo yetu ya zamani na ya sasa yanatukumbusha uwezo wetu wa kuwa wabadilishaji waaminifu, jasiri. Kwa matumaini makubwa, tunaamini katika uwezo wetu wa pamoja wa "kutambua, kutubu, kukomboa na kurejesha" na kufanya kazi pamoja kwa njia nzuri na za kuleta mabadiliko. 2 Wakorintho 5:17 inasema: Kwa hiyo, mtu akiwa ndani ya Kristo, kiumbe kipya kimekuja: ya kale yamepita, tazama! Tunajua kwamba kupitia mwaliko wa Yesu kwenye maisha mapya, 'Mambo yote yanafanywa kuwa mapya.' Mungu hana mikono ila yetu, hana miguu ila yetu, hana midomo bali yetu, kwa hiyo tunaendelea kuwazia ulimwengu bora. Mimi ni kwa sababu wewe ni. Mimi ni kwa sababu sisi ni. nakuona. Sisi ni wa kila mmoja. Bado tupo hapa. Sisi ni wamoja.

Msisitizo mkali wa George Fox juu ya kuleta Ufalme wa Mungu kwa nyanja zote za maisha yetu, ulikalika kile alichokiita 'kiumbe kipya'. Je, tuko tayari kwa yale yajayo? Je, tuko tayari kufanya kile kinachohitajika kwetu ili kuzaliwa uumbaji mpya? Je, Ubuntu wetu unaoishi unabadilishaje ulimwengu?

Tunaporudi nyumbani, kwa upendo mpya kwa familia yetu ya kimataifa ya Wakweka, Mungu abariki nafasi kati yetu tunapotafuta ulimwengu bora kwa viumbe vyote. Hebu uumbaji mpya uje.

*Katika upendo wa Mungu, kwa matumaini makubwa,*

**Simon C. Lamb, Karani, FWCC**

kwa niaba ya wote ambao walikuwa sehemu ya Mkutano wetu wa Mjadala wa Ulimwengu.

12 de agosto de 2024

## A todos los Amigos alrededor del mundo,

Enviamos un cariñoso saludo desde la Plenaria Mundial del Comité Mundial de Consulta de los Amigos, celebrada del 5 al 12 de agosto de 2024 de manera virtual y en Vanderbijlpark, cerca de Johannesburgo, Sudáfrica, a orillas del río conocido como IHa!arib, Lekwa, iLikwa y Vaal. Verdaderamente estamos 'a la orilla del río' mientras dejamos nuestras cargas y las elevamos a Dios.

500 amigos se han reunido a la orilla del río y de forma remota provenientes de 53 países, representando a 95 Reuniones Anuales, grupos de adoración y organizaciones Cuáqueras. La mitad de ellos se unieron a la reunión de forma online, individual y organizados en 50 "hubs" (grupos reunidos en las diferentes Juntas para conectarse en línea) en todo el mundo, por primera vez para una Reunión Plenaria Mundial. Con gozo reflexionamos sobre lo grandioso que ha sido tener en la sala las contribuciones de los Amigos que asistieron de forma virtual. Para aquellos de nosotros quienes asistimos de forma online, fue un placer ser incluidos y experimentar el compañerismo. Lamentablemente, algunos Amigos no pudieron unirse. Lamentamos su ausencia y los mantenemos en la Luz.

Nuestro tema es 'Viviendo el Espíritu de Ubuntu: Respondiendo con Esperanza al llamado de Dios a apreciar la creación y a los demás'. Ubuntu es una palabra zulú que habla del poder y la obra incesante del Espíritu Santo entre nosotros, permitiéndonos ir más allá de nuestro yo individual y comprender que 'yo soy porque nosotros somos'.

En esta jubilosa reunión, hemos ampliado nuestra comprensión y nuestro aprecio por quienes realmente somos como Cuáqueros. ¡Qué regalo! A pesar de todas nuestras diferencias, hemos celebrado que compartimos no solo a nuestros fundadores Cuáqueros, ¡feliz cumpleaños número 400, Jorge Fox! - sino también una profunda amistad, una apertura a nuevas interpretaciones bíblicas, nuestras estructuras y procesos, nuestro profundo compromiso con la paz y la justicia, nuestro amor a la Tierra y nuestro amor a Dios.

Deseosos de que todos los Amigos reunidos puedan participar lo más plenamente posible, hemos superado la distancia geográfica y las diferencias de idioma con la tecnología, con intérpretes pacientes y con la gracia de Dios. Estamos agradecidos. En el espíritu inclusivo de Ubuntu, todos - y particularmente los angloparlantes - hemos sido desafiados a hablar lento y lo suficientemente claro para que nuestros intérpretes hagan su trabajo. Todos hemos sido desafiados a encontrar un equilibrio guiado por el

Espíritu entre hablar y escuchar, entre la acción y la contemplación, entre el hacer y simplemente ser.

Antes de esta reunión, 46 Amigos Jóvenes Adultos se reunieron durante cuatro días para compartir experiencias, conversaciones, reflexiones, risas, adoración y canciones. Al vivir en comunidad, los Amigos Jóvenes Adultos exploraron, sostuvieron y bailaron con sus semejanzas y sus diferencias. En un acontecimiento emocionante, se formó un comité mundial de ocho Amigos Jóvenes Adultos de todas las secciones del CMCA. Esto refleja un grato compromiso de seguir alimentando el nuevo sentido de comunidad. Conscientes de la magnitud de la responsabilidad, los Amigos Jóvenes Adultos nos llaman a todos a brindarles nuestro apoyo y confianza.

Fuimos recibidos con gran calidez y alegría por nuestros anfitriones de la Reunión Anual de Sudáfrica y la Sección de África del CMCA. Un Amigo local compartió con nosotros el saludo sudafricano 'sawubona', que significa 'Te veo y no solo a ti, sino también a todos los que te han hecho ser quien eres'. También habló de como el acercarse a los Cuáqueros le ayudó a crear en la vida más allá de la segregación racial. Las excursiones, tanto virtuales como locales, enriquecieron nuestro programa. Las excursiones a la Cuna de la Humanidad y al Museo del Apartheid situaron la reunión en el contexto del doloroso y turbulento proceso de nuestro país anfitrión. Hemos sido inspirados por la resiliencia llena del Espíritu de nuestros anfitriones, emergiendo con firmeza de las luchas del pasado y del presente afirmando que, por la gracia de Dios, todavía estamos aquí. Somos uno.

Juntos, hemos adorado, orado, cantado, sido calentados por el sol, enfriados por las heladas nocturnas y, por supuesto, hemos hablado, hablado y hablado un poco más. Hemos buscado discernir caminos guiados por el Espíritu para honrar nuestro compromiso con nuestras tres corrientes interconectadas: el cuidado de la creación, la cura de las injusticias históricas y continuas y el cuidado de Ubuntu. Nuestras inquietudes emergentes han sido capturadas y entretejidas en un documento de tapicería.

Nos sentimos urgidos a actuar ante la imperiosa necesidad de llevar a cabo un trabajo transformador en el mundo. También somos llamados por esa voz apacible y delicada a hacer una pausa, a escucharnos profundamente los unos a los otros y a la creación. Jeremías 29:11-14 dice: "Porque yo sé los pensamientos que tengo para con vosotros, dice el Señor, pensamientos de paz y no de mal, para daros

un porvenir y una esperanza". Dios está con nosotros. Estamos aquí. Somos uno.

Hemos sido desafiados, y muchos de nosotros somos llamados a unirnos a la acción colectiva y global de los Cuáqueros, para vivir nuestras inquietudes, para ser, como dijo Jorge Fox, "valientes por la Verdad". Otros entre nosotros se enfocan en la comunidad local. Estamos aprendiendo a expandir nuestra compasión por quienes somos, al encontramos en nuestro quebrantamiento y belleza.

Las diferencias en nuestras perspectivas, algunas grandes, otras pequeñas, se han vuelto más evidentes, a veces de manera dolorosa. Con la bendición de Dios, hemos sido capaces de resolver algunas tensiones mediante conversaciones compasivas, mientras que otras únicamente fueron mantenidas entre nosotros. No nos desanimamos.

Nuestro pasado y presente nos recuerdan nuestra capacidad de ser agentes de cambio fieles y valientes. Con esperanza radical, confiamos en nuestra capacidad colectiva de "reconocer, arrepentirnos, redimir y restaurar" y de trabajar juntos de maneras hermosas y transformadoras. 2 Corintios 5:17 dice: Por tanto, si alguno está en Cristo, la nueva creación ha llegado; ¡Lo viejo se fue, lo nuevo está aquí! Sabemos que a través de la invitación de Jesús a una vida nueva, "todas las cosas son hechas nuevas". Dios no tiene más manos que las nuestras, ni más pies que los nuestros, ni más labios que los nuestros, así que seguimos imaginando un mundo mejor. Yo soy porque tú eres. Yo soy porque nosotros somos. Te veo. Nos pertenecemos los unos a los otros. Aun Seguimos aquí. Somos uno.

La insistencia radical de Jorge Fox en llevar el Reino de Dios a todos los aspectos de nuestras vidas invitaba a lo que él llamó "la nueva creación". ¿Estamos preparados para lo que está por venir? ¿Estamos preparados para hacer lo que se requiere de nosotros para dar a luz a la nueva creación? ¿Cómo cambia al mundo el que nosotros vivamos Ubuntu?

Al regresar a nuestros hogares, con un amor renovado por nuestra familia Cuáquera internacional, que Dios bendiga los espacios entre nosotros mientras buscamos un mundo mejor para toda la creación. Que venga la nueva creación

*En el amor de Dios, con esperanza radical,*

**Simon C. Lamb, Secretario del CMCA**

On nombre de todos los que participaron en nuestra Reunión Plenaria Mundial.

August 12, 2024

**To all Friends everywhere,**

We send loving greetings from the Friends World Committee for Consultation World Plenary, held August 5 to 12, 2024 online and in Vanderbijlpark near Johannesburg, South Africa, on the banks of the river variously known as the IHailarib, Lekwa, iLikwa and the Vaal. We are truly 'down by the riverside' as we lay down our burdens and lift them up to God.

500 Friends have gathered at the river's edge and online, coming from 53 countries and representing 95 Yearly Meetings, worship groups and Quaker organisations. Half of them joined the gathering online, individually and organised in 50 hubs all over the world, a first for a World Plenary Meeting. With joy we reflect on how great it has been to have the contributions from online Friends in the room. For those of us online, it was a joy to be included and to experience the togetherness. Sadly, some Friends were prevented from joining us. We regret their absence and hold them in the Light.

Our theme is 'Living the Spirit of Ubuntu: Responding with Hope to God's Call to Cherish Creation and One Another'. Ubuntu is a Zulu word that speaks to the power and ceaseless work of the Holy Spirit between us, enabling us to go beyond our individual selves and grasp that 'I am because we are'.

In this joyous gathering, we have expanded our understanding and appreciation for who we – as Quakers – really are. What a gift. Despite our multitude of differences, we have celebrated that we share not only our Quaker founders – happy 400th birthday, George Fox! – but also deep Friendship, an openness to new Biblical interpretations, our structures and processes, our deep commitment to peace and justice, our love of the Earth, and our love of God.

Eager that all gathered Friends may participate as fully as possible, we have bridged geographical distance and differences in language with technology, patient interpreters, and God's grace. We are thankful. In the inclusive spirit of Ubuntu, we have all – and particularly English speakers – been challenged to speak slowly and clearly enough for our interpreters to do their work. We have all been challenged to find a Spirit-led

balance between speaking and listening, between action and contemplation, between doing and simply being.

Prior to this gathering, 46 of the Young Adult Friends among us came together for four days of shared experience, conversation, reflection, laughter, worship, and song. Living in community, Young Adult Friends explored, held, and danced with commonalities and differences. In an exciting development, a world committee of eight Young Adult Friends from all FWCC sections was formed. This reflects a joyful commitment to keep nurturing the newfound sense of community. Aware of the magnitude of the responsibility, Young Adult Friends call on all of us for support and trust.

We were warmly and joyously welcomed by our hosts from Southern Africa Yearly Meeting and the Africa Section of FWCC. A local Friend shared with us the South African greeting 'sawubona', which means 'I see you and not only you, but all who have made you who you are'. She also spoke of how coming to Quakers helped her to believe in life beyond racist segregation. Excursions both virtual and local enriched our programme. Field trips to the Cradle of Humankind and the Apartheid Museum grounded the gathering in the context of our host country's own painful and turbulent journey. We have been inspired by the Spirit-filled resilience of our hosts, emerging from the struggles of the past and present steadfastly to affirm that through God's grace, we are still here. We are one.

Together, we have worshipped, prayed, sung, been warmed by the sun, chilled by the evening frost, and, of course, we talked -- and talked -- and talked some more. We have sought to discern Spirit-led ways forward to honour our commitment to our three interconnected themes: care of creation, the healing of relationships in the light of historic and ongoing injustice, and nurturing Ubuntu. Our emerging concerns have been captured and woven together in a tapestry document.

We are seized with the urgent need to do transformative work in the world. We are also called by that still small voice to pause, to listen deeply to one another and to creation. Jeremiah 29:

11-14 says: 'For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.' God is with us. We are here. We are one.

We have been challenged, and many of us are called to join collective, global Quaker action to live out our concerns -- to be, as George Fox said -- "valiant for Truth". Others among us focus on local community. We are learning to expand our compassion for who we are, just as we find ourselves in all our brokenness and our beauty.

The variance in our perspectives, some large, some small, have become more apparent, at times painfully so. We have been able, with God's blessing, to resolve some tension through compassionate conversation, while some was simply held in our midst. We are not discouraged.

Our past and present reminds us of our capacity to be faithful, courageous changemakers. With radical hope, we trust in our collective ability to "recognise, repent, redeem and restore" and to work together in beautiful and transformative ways. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! We know that through Jesus' invitation to new life, 'All things are made new.' God has no hands but ours, no feet but ours, no lips but ours, so we keep imagining a better world. I am because you are. I am because we are. I see you. We belong to each other. We are still here. We are one.

George Fox's radical insistence on bringing the Kingdom of God to all aspects of our lives, invited what he called 'the new creation'. Are we ready for what is to come? Are we prepared to do what is required of us to birth the new creation? How does our living Ubuntu change the world?

As we return to our homes, with renewed love for our international Quaker family, may God bless the spaces between us as we seek a better world for all creation. Let the new creation come.

*In God's love, with radical hope,*

**Simon C. Lamb, Clerk, FWCC**

On behalf of all who were part of our World Plenary Meeting.



Photos from the Plenary Meeting

# DIARY DATES 2024

More dates are available on the website: [fwccemes.org/calendar](https://fwccemes.org/calendar). Please send items for inclusion in the diary to [michael@fwccemes.org](mailto:michael@fwccemes.org)

**Woodbrooke & EMES** offer several weekly online Meetings for Worship. Please check the Woodbrooke website for the latest information: [woodbrooke.org.uk/worship](https://woodbrooke.org.uk/worship)

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## EMES NOW RUNS REGULAR ONLINE EVENTS

### PEACE & SERVICE CONSULTATION

Monthly gatherings for people involved in peace and service work are held on the second Thursday of each month. For more details contact [julia@fwccemes.org](mailto:julia@fwccemes.org).

### EMES YOUTHGROUP

Monthly gatherings for young people aged 14-18. More details: [fwccemes.org/youthgroup](https://fwccemes.org/youthgroup).

Contact [michael@fwccemes.org](mailto:michael@fwccemes.org) for more information.

We also hold monthly gatherings for EMES Representatives and Roleholders in the first week of each month. In January, May and September we run online gatherings for International Members in the Section. Contact [michael@fwccemes.org](mailto:michael@fwccemes.org) for more information about these events.

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At the time of printing, these events were still scheduled to go ahead in the format listed below, however, this may change so please check the [EMES website](https://fwccemes.org) for up to date information.

4-6 October 2024

**Peace and Service Network Annual Gathering,**  
online [Link – Registration Form](#)

6 October 2024

**World Quaker Day**

31 October – 3 November 2024

**German Yearly Meeting**  
[anniej@fwccemes.org](mailto:anniej@fwccemes.org)

1 November – 4 November 2024

**France Yearly Meeting**  
[quakersenfrance@gmail.com](mailto:quakersenfrance@gmail.com)



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### SUBSCRIPTIONS

Among Friends is available free of charge at: [fwccemes.org](https://fwccemes.org)

To receive a copy by post please contact us at the EMES office.

**There is no set subscription fee for Among Friends. We depend on voluntary subscriptions. And we hope those who are able to pay will consider an annual donation of around €15 or £13.**

If you wish to make a bank transfer, please use the following details.

#### Euro account

For transfers or standing orders in Euros please use these account details:

Institution name: Wise  
Account Name: FWCC-Europe & Middle East Section  
IBAN: BE33 9672 0215 6046  
SWIFT/BIC: TRWIBEB1XXX

**Among Friends 161 Deadline**  
*31 October 2024*

#### Sterling account

Bank name: CAF Bank  
Bank address: 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent. ME19 4JQ UK  
Account Name: FWCC EMES  
IBAN: GB73CAFBA40524000025578  
SWIFT/BIC: CAFGBB21XXX  
Account Number: 00025578  
Sort Code: 40-52-40

For holders of UK bank accounts please send cheques or CAF vouchers in GBP to the EMES office or directly to CAF Bank using the account number and sort code above. Scottish Charity number: SC 036528