



Friends World Committee
for Consultation

EUROPE & MIDDLE EAST SECTION

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Epistle from the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section Annual Meeting held Online

26-28 April 2024

Living the Spirit of Ubuntu

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)

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, drazí přátelé, dārgie draugi, dragi prijatelji, дорогі друзі, дорогие друзья, kedves barátaim, drodzy przyjaciele, Shanovni Droozi, 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!

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