

To All Friends Everywhere:

The summer sessions of Wilmington Yearly Meeting this year began with three workshops that foreshadowed the themes of our sessions—Cathy Barney’s workshop on nurturing ‘love as the first motion’ in small groups; and the Right Sharing of World Resources workshop led by Megan Fair on the power of enough; and April Vanlonden’s Bible study pairing Mark 12:28–31, on the greatest commandment, with John Woolman’s phrase that love was the first motion.

Through worship sharing, conversation, and an art activity, Cathy’s workshop provided both an opportunity for worship and an experience of the spiritual intimacy and connection that can transform us into people more capable of loving both our neighbor and ourselves.

In the RSWR workshop, Megan led participants through a discussion of too little, too much, and enough. What does too little feel like? Exhausting, unfocused, lonely, vulnerable, hungry, consumptive. Too much feels safe and secure, but also exhausting, crowded, burdensome, and painful. Enough frees our thoughts and choices, leads us to feeling at peace, refreshed, content.

April Vanlonden, in her Bible Study sessions, helped us to focus on the action that comes after love. “Love was the first motion,” John Woolman wrote, “and then a concern arose...”

One way or another, much of the business that followed these workshops touched on either a lack of resources, relationships, or imagination with which to love our neighbor; or a sense that we do, in fact, have all that we need to fulfill the ministry to which we are called, that we do have enough to love our neighbor and the wider world.

As Wilmington Yearly Meeting, sometimes our love is not followed by an “and then” course of action. Sometimes, it is.

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There are several areas where our love is restricted by what we lack. The proposal from the Finance Committee for a deficit budget was one of those instances. The report from the Five Year Planning Committee detailing the decline in our numbers and our donations dove-tailed with the sense of lack we felt in the budget discussion (even though average donations from individuals and Meetings have risen proportionately to membership, they are unable to make up for the loss of members).

We grieved for another kind of scarcity when we approved the laying down of Sabina Monthly Meeting. Though we felt gratitude for the historical witness of Friends in Sabina; and though we were profoundly grateful for the good order in which Sabina met the reality of their situation, and the faithful work of Clerk Rick Kendall in carrying out the duties attendant upon closing the meeting; we also felt the Yearly Meeting's diminishment in the course of this action.

The Nominating Committee presented another area for concern, another piece of evidence for what we lack. All three members had served on the committee in previous years, and they reported that this year it was harder work than ever before. Many of the Friends they asked to serve on a committee declined, and because they didn't want to fill committee slots with folks who would never show up, they left some committees with vacancies, or without an appointed clerk. How many people do we actually need on each committee, they asked us. Is there a way to increase the willingness of Friends to serve—do they need to be invited, or challenged? Is there some better way to identify which Friends are willing to serve, and where they are most able?

In a discussion led by the clerk of the Youth and Young Adult Committee, Jordan Snarr, it became clear that although great love and desire exists to support the spiritual development and growth of young friends and young adults throughout the Yearly Meeting, there is at the same time a sense of uncertainty. If love is the first motion, what is the “and then...” for our younger members? Those who have labored for the Youth and Young Adult Committee are frustrated now, and have been for many years, by the lack of adult volunteers and practical support for the camp program at Quaker Knoll—even though we clearly value the camp and what happens there. Also, though we created a Yearly Meeting youth minister position in 2021, with great hope, that position remains unfilled.

We also heard that the failure to plan for childcare during our sessions, or to provide a children's program, not only makes it difficult for parents to attend any of our business or nurture sessions, but also leads to a lack of relationship between the Yearly Meeting body and its children. Children won't suddenly become interested in a Junior Yearly Meeting when they are in middle school if they haven't experienced the Seniors Yearly Meeting when they are in nursery school. So the question remains: we love our children and young adults—and now what?

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While there were multiple areas where we felt or heard that we lacked the resources, energy, or imagination to minister to ourselves and to the larger world, there were other areas where we clearly had what we needed for the ministry to which we were called.

We had enough resources to help send two Young Adult Friends, Lucy Enge and Jordan Snarr, to the 2023 Friends United Meeting Triennial in Nakuru, Kenya. Not everyone could go, but Friends gathered at the USFW Missions banquet enjoyed seeing their pictures and hearing their stories. Lucy was also able to participate in FUM's post-Triennial trip to Turkana, and told us, "I thought I lived a simple life, and then I met Friends in Turkana. I've never seen poverty like theirs. But even so, and even though I have so much more than they do, they have enough. They have enough to have purpose and joy in their lives. I'm still uncomfortable with missions as a concept, but the leadership of the FUM Turkana Mission is from Turkana, and Friends around the world then empower what the Turkana are doing."

We were encouraged and hopeful after hearing the Wilmington College report from Interim President Corey Cockerill. She spoke about the regulatory and demographic challenges that have sent the undergraduate program at Wilmington into a period of deficit, which is projected to last for at least another ten years. Yet the financial consultant that the College has hired to help chart a path toward financial stability has instructed them to think about their revenue problem, not their spending problem. "You can't cut your way to freedom," the consultant has said, and we see this wisdom at work in the four avenues which the College will be using to increase revenue—including reconstituting the state prison education program, which is dear to the hearts of many Friends in the Yearly Meeting. A renewed commitment to the Quaker values and identity of the College is one of the pathways by which the administration and the College's Trustees believe they can find a way forward into a sustainable future.

We also heard about our Yearly Meeting ministry to the wider world when Libbie Curry spoke about our long relationship with Cuba, and Cuba Yearly Meeting. She and her husband Harold first started visiting Cuba with FUM in the 90s, when there was a period of thaw in US-Cuba relations, and Friends United Meeting was able to reconnect with Cuba Yearly Meeting. After several visits, Cuban Friends began to ask where Libbie and Harold were from. When they said "Wilmington, Ohio," Cuban Friends responded with recognition and joy—which Libbie and Harold eventually learned was because of our Yearly Meeting's history of witness to and connection with Cuba, which Cuban Friends remembered even though Wilmington Friends had forgotten, and even though we had been separated for decades during the Cold War. In fact, this Yearly Meeting helped found a school in Puerto Padre named after us (the Wilmington School), and within the past five years our financial contributions and our travel to Cuba have helped rehab the old school building into a retreat center that can sleep forty people. Love in motion!

And yet, our contributions have not been enough to overcome the political struggle between our two countries, which is increasingly leaving our Cuban Friends without food, medicine, or sources of energy. It is more difficult to travel to Cuba now than it was a few years ago. Libbie worries about the many Cuban Friends who have way too little, and worries also about when she will be able to see them again. Our financial sufficiency, in this case, cannot be the end of where the motion of love takes us.

On Saturday evening, we heard of the damage wreaked by war on the soldiers who fight in it from Loghan Young, a volunteer with the Dayton Literary Peace Prize. At the Peace Lecture Saturday evening, Loghan told us about feeling compelled to aim weapons at children while a soldier in Afghanistan, and how it impacted her relationship with her own child when she returned; she credits her experience reading David Wood's book *What Have We Done* and the concept of "moral injury" with starting her on a path of healing. Loghan and Sharon Rab, founder of the Prize, drew repeated connections between experiencing quality literature and developing capacity for empathy.

Earlier the same day, we heard how individuals within the Yearly Meeting have had enough to help support people caught in the Ukrainian war. Christine Snyder and Neil Snarr have been instrumental in funneling financial support from concerned Friends in the Wilmington area and around the Yearly Meeting to Wilmington's sister city Merefa, which is in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine, which has been a locus of fighting.

In two years, Wilmington Yearly Meeting has collected and sent \$32,320, \$7,347.28 this year. Through the non-profit organization Agency for Development and Investment, in Merefa, we have contributed to supplying baby formula, blankets, and other necessities to babies and very young children living in a war zone, assisting the most vulnerable of people to have enough to survive. We are grateful for Friends who continue to focus our attention on needs greater than our own, and we find that when asked, we have more than enough to share.

We gave thought to the way that we tell our story together, and how we might shift those patterns to include more stories of having enough. Our Memorial Meetings are special times of worship and sharing, but perhaps also celebrating new births and marriages? Perhaps doing more to celebrate Friends as they complete the Training and Recording process; we are blessed to always have Friends seeking companionship and guidance in exercising gifts of ministry.

Before one of our business sessions, Presiding Clerk Patricia Thomas read the 2023 Epistle from Great Plains Yearly Meeting. This witness from Friends there spoke to our condition:

It is clear to us that we can trust in God to find ways to strengthen what remains, that our work is indeed unfinished in the eyes of God and we need to redouble our efforts. We do value the things which really matter. We will not give up, for our hurting world desperately needs us to share the love and peace which God offers.

We share that trust. In the coming year, we will be joining with FWCC and Friends around the world in considering how to become the Quakers the world needs, our theme for 2023-24. We pray that Friends around the world are blessed with enough to both survive and thrive, and are moving with love as concerns arise.

Grace and peace to you all,
Wilmington Yearly Meeting