

# FWCC World Plenary 2024 Report

The Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC) World Plenary Meeting convened in Vanderbijlpark near Johannesburg, South Africa. From August 5th through 12th, bringing together over 250 Friends from 53 countries, with an equal number participating virtually through "Hub" groups. The plenary's theme "Ubuntu," meaning "I am, because we are," guided all aspects of the gathering. Through the daily schedule the spirit of Ubuntu winded it's path through workshops, worship, (programmed and unprogramed) free time and meals. All were seamlessly knitted together. When led by the spirit we danced in the aisle's, sang songs, held hands, cried and prayed together. Language translation was not needed for these experiences!

This was the first ever hybrid, in person and virtual, World Plenary Meeting. It was hosted by Southern Africa Yearly Meeting.

## Theme and Focus

The central theme was "Living the spirit of Ubuntu: Responding with hope to God's call to cherish creation and one another."

Ubuntu, a Zulu word, 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."

The meeting was structured around three interconnected thematic streams:

1. Ubuntu and Community  
Exploring interconnectedness and mutual responsibility.
2. Care for Creation  
Addressing environmental concerns and sustainability.
3. Healing and Repairing Relationships  
Confronting historic injustices and continuing injustice.

## Testimony and Transformation

Duduzile Mtshazo, a South African Friend, shared her journey to Quakerism during apartheid. At a White Friends Meeting, she experienced unprecedented equality through sharing tea from the same cups as whites—a defiance of segregation norms. "I walked from the spiritual drought of a busy and hurried life into the sea of silence," The Friends Meeting treated her with a respect and love that she deserved and she found her spiritual home. Her words had a profound effect on me; I felt I was experiencing Dudu's journey, walking and sharing the divine love of Christ. Her story led me to many questions about how we greet our guests and returning visitors to Meeting.

## **Global Witness and Ministry**

Friends worldwide shared powerful testimonies: Ukrainian Friends continuing peace work amid conflict, Kenyan Friends supporting youth affected by domestic violence, The havoc that climate changes are radically impacting Friends. Individual Friends shared numerous ministries demonstrating Quaker principles in action. These Important issues were discussed in the three thematic streams/strands: Ubuntu, Climate, Historical Injustices. For me, the most heartfelt way I can express my experience is the Tapestry document. I encourage all friends to read this piece.

## **Looking Forward**

The gathering affirmed global Quakerism's vitality while raising questions about welcome, inclusion, climate, equity, and addressing both historical and contemporary injustices. Opportunities for meaningful service remain abundant across cultural and international boundaries.

## **Key Takeaways and Outcomes**

### **1. Unity in Diversity**

Despite their multitude of differences, participants celebrated that they share not only their Quaker founders but also deep Friendship, an openness to new Biblical interpretations, their structures and processes, their deep commitment to peace, justice, love of the Earth, and their love of God.

### **2. Young Adult Friends**

Met together at a pre-gathering before the conference. They shared their learnings, wonderings and gifts with the wider community during the plenary. FWCC has a commitment to help develop and strengthen the Young Adult worldwide Friends Community.

### **3. Strategic Directions**

Strategic Directions for FWCC's future were established.

### **4. Confession and Commitment on Environmental Action**

Regarding creation care, Friends acknowledged: "We confess that we have fallen short of our commitments in the Kabarak and Pisac calls, at the triennials, held at those locations, for ecojustice." And are called to reflect on what action is needed for true sustainability.

### **5. Call to Transformative Action**

The epistle emphasized being "seized with the urgent need to do transformative work in the world" While also being "called by that still small voice to pause, to listen deeply to one another and to creation."

## 6. Inclusivity and Technology Integration

The hybrid format proved successful in creating the most inclusive event ever held by the FWCC. Demonstrating how technology can help bridge geographical and cultural divides within the global Quaker community.

## 7. Commitment to "Recognize, Repent, Redeem and Restore"

The gathering emphasized the collective ability to "recognize, repent, redeem and restore" and to work together in beautiful and transformative ways, particularly in addressing historical injustices.

## 8. Documentation of Outcomes

The meeting produced several key documents:

- An official epistle shared worldwide.
- A Weaving document and a Prayer document.
- A "tapestry" document capturing emerging concerns.

The meeting concluded with a renewed sense of global Quaker unity and a call for both local community focus and collective global action, emphasizing that through God's grace and the spirit of Ubuntu, the Quaker community remains committed to being agents of positive transformation in the world.

These questions have led me into discussions about what I, our Monthly and Yearly Meetings can actively do to create a better future for our world and strengthen the ties within the Society of friends.

Respectfully Submitted by Ellerie Brownfain