

Executive Secretary Report to the Section Meeting
March 20, 2021, by Robin Mohr

We are indeed here for just such a time as this.

To deliver pastoral care to one another “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:11 NIV

In a time of tremendous death and disruption, Friends are more in need of pastoral care for themselves as well as the people around them.

Practicing good self care is important. Kindness, gentleness, patience, mercy and forgiveness are all spiritual gifts that are harder to find in oneself and in the other people around us who need it too.

Quaker meetings and churches have a responsibility to provide care for their members and attenders, even when the public health guidelines prevent us from visiting one another in our homes or in hospitals or in our meetinghouses.

How can different branches of Friends share what they have learned, from paid staff and from volunteers and committees, about how to do this now?

Friends also have a responsibility to care for our neighbors, especially the most vulnerable, in times of unemployment, housing evictions, health crises, hunger and natural disasters. How can Friends help each other to do this faithfully in times like these?

FWCC has a responsibility to model good pastoral care for our event participants, our staff, our volunteer leaders, and all Representatives. And again, to be a channel for new ideas and best practices to spread across the existing divisions among Friends.

• • •

To make new wineskins for new wine “Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” Matthew 9:17

This is about new forms and methods for doing God's work. It includes the massive adoption of online technology for worship and business in the last year. It could also include new committee structures and laying down old structures that aren't working anymore. Even new media or processes for evangelization. This is part of FWCC's responsibility, not to force meetings to adopt different forms, but to enable good ideas to spread across the branches of Friends and across geographic and cultural differences.

• • •

To offer to the world that which we have “Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Acts 3:6

This is, to me, both the passing on of traditions and of new revelations about God's will for the world.

This includes the translation of traditional texts and new ideas into Spanish or English or other languages. This includes sharing Quaker practices of discernment, and patterns of faithful living across the branches of Friends.

This includes newer concerns like ecological sustainability and climate resiliency, and disaster preparedness locally and internationally. This includes new Light about old injustices like racism and colonial patterns of economic and social life.

This also include the holy grace of our connection to the divine, our experience of communion with the Living Christ, and the peace and fulfillment and courage that this holy connection brings to us as individuals and as a Quaker community.

The world needs this healing grace. This is also part of FWCC's responsibility to share this healing grace and new ideas and old traditions with our siblings and cousins among Friends and our Quaker message to the world.

• • •

The covid19 pandemic has been a tragedy in many ways. It is an obstacle in some ways.

But as human beings, we have the capacity to see beyond this moment, here and now.

We can take advantage of the clearing of our calendars and the clearing of old ways of doing things. In the Section of the Americas, our faithful experiments in the last six years have prepared us, though we knew it not at the time, for a moment such as this.

Later this year we will publish a report on the accomplishments and impact of our [Strategic Plan, Weaving the Tapestry 2015-2020](#). I am proud of how much we have accomplished. Not me. Not just the staff, not just the officers, but all of us in the Section of the Americas. We're ready for the next step forward.

• • •

We are going to listen our way forward. Listening to God and listening to each other, listening to the world that calls us to become the Quakers the world needs.

We will stop categorizing our work into either "Visitation" that is face-to-face or "Connections" that is heart-to-heart but remote. Those were the two categories or buckets that we set up as part of the Weaving the Tapestry strategic plan. But those are not really relevant categories going forward.

It will be more useful to identify the subjects or topics of our work for the coming planning period, whether that is six months, or one year, or five years. Then, addressing each topic will involve some online components, some in-print components and some in-person components.

Like Woolman's image of walking through a miry place, we will test each step before we go forward. But we will not stop. We are ready. Here, in the Section of the Americas, we are called to move into our role around consultation. What do you think Friends need to consult about? I could make a list of ten topics off the top of my head. Which should we consider first?

I see the theme and subthemes that were identified by the Executive Committee for the Section Meeting as the main topics of our work in the past six month period and probably the next six months as well. During this Section Meeting, the workshops all address some element(s) of these subthemes. In the following six months, we would do well to continue the conversations that have developed during the event and follow where the Holy Spirit leads us. We will not have exhausted the interest in those topics in two weeks in March.

Which topics will be the most interesting and important in the following six months? Which elements will be possible or more prominent in each of the possible scenarios for 2022 or 2023? We don't have to decide all of it now. We can choose one for the next six months. Narrow our options for the next six months and then review and choose again. The program continuity will be in the process of consultations. Each one can include an online or in- person event, traveling ministers, published religious education materials for individual or group reflection. We will use everything we have learned from the Salt & Light, Living Water, Traveling Ministry Corps, Bax Fund and Representative Engagement programs. And from the series of consultations in 2020 on the right holding of online annual sessions. If this works, we can keep doing it. If we feel that one topic needs a longer time, we can keep it or come back to it. If it doesn't work, or stops working, we can make other plans in the then-present-reality.

Sabbatical plan

The dates are March 29-June 4. My essential plan is to write a book. I expect to go away for a week or so at the beginning and end of the time to really disengage from my day to day life and seek God's guidance.