

Report by Mey Hasbrook ~ December 27, 2019 (*Kalamazoo MM, Lake Erie YM*)  
FWCC Section of the Americas: The Travel-in-the-Ministry Scholarship Fund Resource Group

I traveled among Friends of Britain Yearly Meeting from August 14 to September 15. This ministry formed around a focused time with Southwest Cumbria (Swarthmoor) Area Meeting. The possibility was initiated by Jane Pearson, former eight-year manager of Swarthmoor Hall and also Swarthmoor AM member. Timing coincided with a Quaker arts exhibition on sustainability. As AM visits “grew up” around workshops for Swarthmoor Hall on Aug. 31, the month-long ministry took shape around these contours. And as the ministry made its way forward around formal occasions, “between” moments significantly gave pause and lent insight to the ministry’s unfolding.

About the movement of Spirit between human-laid plans, I want to lay bare an important “groundlaying”. Over initial days in London, I held in-depth conversations with longtime Quakers about sustainability and spirituality. These helped gauge perspectives around May’s Swarthmore Lecture given by American Eden Grace at BYM’s annual sessions. Attitudes about the lecture served an important point of reference for the concern I carry and for spiritual conditions among BYM Friends. For one, since its public release was delayed into the Fall, responses about the lecture were mainly tied to commentaries in weekly editions of *The Friend*.

I sought out these editions for the knowing as a result of the London conversations, and read them alongside a personal copy of the lecture transcript that Woodbrooke Centre generously provided to me in July. Rather than addressing the concern itself, published responses revolved mostly around the lecture’s spiritual focus. The London conversations mirrored this trend, and onward drew me to listen to weighty Friends about the spiritual condition of BYM. I kept listening for ways to welcome Friends into sustainability as Right Relationship amid conditions of “spiritual dryness” (phrase used by some weighty Friends about BYM).

In London, the ministry began with midweek worship at Kingston Local Meeting (Aug. 14). I met with FWCC World Office staff to share views on sustainability matters, including its project with Quaker Earthcare Witness (Aug. 15). I visited Tottenham LM at its community garden with asylum seekers (Aug. 16) and also First Day worship (Aug. 18). The same day as the garden visit, I video recorded interviews about the garden and the sanctuary guest home of Martha House; this footage is going toward a multimedia section in the ministry’s arts installation, *In Relation*.

At Bolton LM, I led a discussion titled “Transformative Earth Care: 18th-Century Benjamin Lay for Today” (Aug. 20) for its weekly series Talks & Thoughts. Thirteen guests spanned non-Quakers to Friends from Bolton and nearby meetings. One weighty Friend’s comment about the 2019 Swarthmore Lecture gave us a chance to de-tangle labels of “fundamentalist” and “evangelical”; this due to an influential commentary published in *The Friend* inaccurately using the terms regarding American Friends and Eden Grace in particular. A paired activity with mobiles for *In Relation* concluded the session.

Next I joined midweek worship at Central Manchester LM (Aug. 21) and stayed afterward for fellowship especially answering a co-clerk’s questions about the ministry. The same day, it was a gift to talk personally with Jonathan Dale including about sustainability and the condition of BYM.

Between Aug. 24 and Sept. 9, I visited in worship among local meetings of Southwest Cumbria (Swarthmoor) Area Meeting: with Windermere LM at Gatesfield residential community for First Day (Aug. 25) and at Glenthorne Centre for midweek (Aug. 27); with Swarthmoor LM for midweek (Aug. 28) and its monthly group at Soutergate, Kirby-in-furness (Sep. 3); also Cartmel LM for First Day (Sept. 8). At each worship, there were between four to ten persons.

In this time frame with accompaniment from Swarthmoor AM, I joined monthly worship groups that gather Friends from wider Area Meetings: at Swarthmoor Hall for extended worship (Aug. 29), and at Rookhow Area Meeting House (Sept. 4). Also I was hosted at Lancaster LM, which is part of a separate AM, in joining First Day worship and Meeting for Business (Sept. 1).

I gave the workshop series “Traveling Roots, Arriving at Courage: Creative Change for Climate & Community” at Swarthmoor Hall on Aug. 31. A demo-portion of *In Relation* was displayed for the day. The first session drew upon ancestral wisdom of Right Relationship from early Friends and indigenous communities; among five people, two were non-Quakers. Then I led seven Friends from Lancaster LM in requested silence while they wrote names of The Valiant 60; these were on torn fabric pieces toward the installation. The final session with three persons completed the names and added thread to swatches; discussion flowed around questions about sustainability in our daily lives as spiritual practice.

At the historic Rookhow Meeting House, I joined Swarthmoor AM at its Meeting for Business on Sept. 7. After lunch, I led a session on “spiritual sustainability” requested by AM overseers and elders. Eleven stayed for the spoken ministry and worship sharing. We explored Right Relationship using BYM’s *Faith and Practice* alongside reflection upon how we are part of wider Creation, how Creation shares in worship with us, and how we may enter Creation-wide worship in simple everyday ways.

The “outbound” portion of the visitation held some “firsts” including a stay in the Midlands. I joined morning worship at Woodbrooke Centre in Birmingham and visited with several staff members plus the new secretary for the FWCC EMES Section (Sept. 11). I encouragingly heard how Woodbrooke is addressing the conditions of BYM, as recognized during this ministry, with a new series that bridges sustainability with spirituality and sometimes using the arts. Staff also learned about the new cooperation between QEW and FWCC through my visitation.

Another first was visiting with Friends of Oxford LM (Sept. 13). I joined a weekly session for Eco-Listening led by Laurie Michaelis, former longtime secretary of BYM’s recently laid-down Sustainability Working Group. It’s a public meeting that resembles worship sharing, with attention to our condition living amid climate change. The same evening among nine people, I led the monthly series Friday with Friends on the topic “Sacramental Living for Sustainability.”

I returned to London at the month’s end. A recurring host organized a meal (Sept. 14) with a few Quakers who carry a concern about Bhopalis who are continuously harmed by the Union Carbide disaster. These BYM Friends are seeking partners based in North America, and I was able to encourage them toward seeking a clearness process to discern how best to focus their efforts.

On my departure day, it was a joy to join First Day worship at Kingston LM (Sept. 15) and to be led to speak from the silence with story and song. As in any travel, while not all plans bear out as expected, there also are unexpected blessings. And in this report, I’ve aimed to convey the sense of the ministry with select examples. Truly, I’m humbled by the movement of Spirit between human-laid plans.