Thank you for joining us in conversation, as part of the FWCC dialogue programme. It is a great honour to be invited and to speak on behalf of the Africa section. We are looking forward to engaging with other Quakers from the different strands of Quakerism because Jeremy had the opportunity to engage with Quakers from Kenya, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC through the Quaker Peace Network - Africa and AVP. We honour the work being undertaken by FWCC in fostering dialogue and peace.

At this challenging time as we seek ways to stop the devastating Coronavirus pandemic, we need to draw from the collective wisdom that has helped us in confronting other crises that we have faced. For this reason, we will be sharing the experience in the global protracted campaign to end Apartheid. Parallels exist between the social revolution to end the unjust apartheid system, which the world declared a crime against humanity and the growing global action and solidarity in response to the COVID 19 pandemic.

As part of the national liberation movement, we learned the importance of organising broad-based support and making people aware of their power. Musicians, poets and writers composed songs, poems and plays about freedom. Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika - God bless Africa became the struggle anthem. We chanted “Victory in our Lifetime” and “Amandla! All power to the People”

We organised our own newspapers, books and pamphlets to counteract state propaganda and censorship. We organised against inferior education and formed the people’s health movement. Workers formed unions and organised strikes. University based academics provided expert advice to social, labour and political movements. Churches came together in organisations like Diakonia and the South African Council of Churches and were inspired by liberation theology from Central and South America. They organised a significant interfaith resistance.
Progressive lawyers and doctors formed alternative professional bodies and supported detainees and nursed the wounds of bitten by police dogs or healed those injured in state sponsored violence. Progressive young white men refused to be conscripted and became conscientious objectors. Women organised and demanded their issues to be included on the national liberation agenda. We said “A Nation is not free unless women are free.” The opposition to Apartheid went global and the Anti-apartheid movement organised boycot of South African goods and mobilised a powerful disinvestment campaign.

While a new chapter in South African political history was opened on 27 April 1994 which ushered in Mandela as our first black democratically elected president, we soon realised that fighting for freedom is not a once-off event but a constant struggle.

Today’s social movements in South Africa build on that rich history. The people’s campaigns for access to land, decent housing, healthcare or quality education are a reminder that the struggle continues. The voices of protest continue to rise through the people’s movements. In 2001 the Treatment Action Campaign partnered with the government at a time when the multinational corporations were meant to be invincible and pressured pharmaceutical firms into abandoning court action seeking to prevent the government from importing cheaper generic medicines. The TAC played a pivotal role in a campaign to win access to ARVs for people infected with HIV and AIDS and took our government to the Constitutional Court to compel it to provide nevirapine to stop mother to child transmission of the virus.

These struggles illustrate the power of building alliances outside and inside of structures of power. Their victory illustrates the importance of collective action.

In the face of the COVID pandemic, public voices are rising calling for a people's vaccine. People are demanding information on exact plans to make the vaccines available and on the roll-out plan. Whether it is around developing vaccines or delivering health care, the pandemic has reminded us of the importance of cooperation instead of competition.

The pandemic has highlighted socio-economic inequalities. This is reflected also in the demographics of the impact of the virus as articulated in a statement from Abahlali Basemjondolo (Shackdwellers’ Association). It says, “Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, we as the poor
and marginalized in the townships, rural areas and urban shack settlements have been concerned that once the virus is spread in our areas, it will hit us worst.” The statement continues: “During this pandemic we in the shacks of indignity continue to suffer and die while the political elite and their families live in luxury. We share dirty and dangerous public toilets with more that 2 000 people. We spend hours in queues for water. We burn when there is fire. We are washed away during tropical storms. This has become our daily life. We have no access to roads for emergency services to use.”

Our response to the pandemic must take these issues into account. As we seek to build back better, with a democratic dividend for all citizens, we must demand public leadership and policies that embrace the values of the greater common good.

Quakers have a rich history of responding to global crises. The Quaker testimonies have guided our action. Quakers value partnerships and coalition building, which Jeremy will be addressing later in our conversation.

As a focus for this conversation, I have picked two issues: Peace in Africa and ending poverty.

In 2000 and in response to my appointment as Deputy Minister of Defence, our Yearly Meeting engaged in a creative Quaker process and the result was a ‘Quaker Statement on Peace in Africa’. The Quaker Statement says, “Peace is not brought about by preparation for war. Peace is achieved by ensuring democracy, good governance and justice and upholding the rule of law and human rights. It is achieved by addressing the basic needs of people such as provision of adequate health care, fighting the scourge of HIV/AIDS, eliminating inequality and poverty and providing education, including early childhood education, adult literacy and peace education.”

Although the Quaker Statement has influenced our actions individually and collectively, we did not actively pursue and evaluate its impact on government policy. It remains a valuable document if we regard it as a living document and we can engage with some areas in which it could be developed.

The Quaker Statement remains relevant today as we seek to build better. For example in the statement we said:

“We commit ourselves, and call on all citizens and governments to work towards the abolition of war in Africa, build peace by non-military
means, demilitarise and reduce expenditure on arms, convert arms industries to socially useful production and in the interim to ensure transparent and accurate reporting of all subsidies, direct and indirect, to the arms industry and related activities.”

We also said:

“Consider voluntary or national youth non-military service as a means of building peace and development. Consider state funded 'Institutes for Peace' to research non-military means to ensure the security of the state against the strategic threats as well as research the experience in peacemaking that has been developed on the African continent. “

In relation to this and as we consider our collective response, let’s be reminded of the statement President Dwight Eisenhower made in March 1953, after the death of Joseph Stalin and as part of drawing attention to the Cold War era arms race. He said:

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone.”

In light of the poor health infrastructure to cope with the COVID 19 pandemic I find it instructive to quote the rest of the statement from President Eisenhower. It says:

“It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some 50 miles of concrete highway.

We pay for a single fighter plane with a half million bushels of wheat. We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people. This, I repeat, is the best way of life to be found on the road the world has been taking. This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”

” (President Dwight Eisenhower
Friends, as we feel the pain and havoc caused by the COVID pandemic, let us draw inspiration from the many successful struggles we have waged. Our individual and collective action will defeat the virus and other crises that we face.

I wish to conclude by drawing on the wisdom in the call by Dr. Harold Weaver of the Black Quaker Project in the pamphlet: *Race, Systemic Violence, and Retrospective Justice: An African American Quaker Scholar-Activist Challenges Conventional Narratives.*

His call to Friends is to look at societal problems through new lenses: confronting systemic violence with antiviolence; acknowledging institutional and systemic racism, rather than merely individual racism; considering a retrospective justice program that compensates for and helps remove the historical inequities related to the transatlantic slave trade, chattel slavery, and their legacies – Jim Crowism, other forms of dehumanization and exploitation, police brutality, and the school-to-prison pipeline. This unjust world is maintained by misinformation and disinformation in the media, formal education, scholarship, and political discourse. Dr Weaver lays out steps and queries to guide Friends and others to begin addressing these concerns in the wider world.

Thank you for listening and for sharing.

**JEREMY**

I will be talking about the Quaker Community as a Complex Adaptive System, that by its very nature is well placed for using this approach for analysis.

As we approach the run up to the FWCC World Gathering in Durban in South Africa in 2024 we will be living through the COVID19 pandemic, that is affecting the whole world. The pandemic raises other issues that also need to be addressed such loss of jobs, poverty, inequality, racism and xenophobia, the arms trade, war. and the digital divide that perpetuates inequality... So what can we do.

As Nozizwe has shared, we can look to the past and learn from the successes and failures. The Friends testimonies are valuable guidelines.

My understanding of Complex Adaptive Systems arose when Nozizwe was
Deputy Minister of Health and worked with the Institute of Healthcare Improvement. She was given a book, Crossing the Quality Chasm which I paged through and found the article by Paul Plesk - Redesigning Health Care with Insights from the Science of Complex Adaptive Systems, which I have made use of it ever science.

I will give some information about CAS and then show how we can use this understanding in the Quaker community, and how the Quaker Community has been using this understanding from the beginning. I will also use the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) and the Quaker Peace Network- Africa as good examples of CAS which many of you are familiar with, and you may also bring up examples.

To introduce the idea of complex adaptive systems, I would like to look to the natural world and show you a short video.

I want you to relax, make yourself comfortable, (don't be distracted by the advert), and just watch these birds. **Ask yourself what you think they are doing, and how do you think they are feeling?**

**Flocking birds**

What these birds are exhibiting is the characteristics of a complex adaptive system.

I would like us to put on another set of glasses and look at the world, our countries, our Quaker community, Sections, Yearly meetings, local churches/meetings as **complex adaptive systems** which are not predictable or able to be managed and controlled in detail, and yet they have inherent order and purpose.

Traditional science - gave us the image of a clockwork universe and this worked well for several hundred years. Greater study of the parts would give greater predictability. This has had considerable success in designing cars, planes and much of the modern world and produced great advances in knowledge. Mechanical systems thinking does work in many situations when applied to human systems. It is precisely because mechanical systems thinking works in many situations that it has become such a strongly held paradigm.
The flocking birds and our Quaker Community are different from a skyscraper which is built from a blueprint that architects and engineers have drafted and the builders follow precise orders to build it.

Our Quaker Community is more like the flock of birds that is fluid and yet it has order. It changes direction yet has a purpose.

I would like to share some characteristics of complex adaptive systems

A system can be defined by the coming together of parts, interconnections and purpose. In the case of Quakers we can identify the parts as members and attenders, meetings/churches, Yearly meetings and FWCC representing the different parts. The important aspect of a CAS is that the parts have autonomy, not like the parts of a skyscraper.

The parts are inter-connected horizontally and vertically in a weak hierarchy and accountability with each level having a great degree of autonomy. The real power is the way the parts come together and are interconnected to fulfill some purpose. **What is the purpose of the Quaker community?**

The inter-connections are the Quaker processes of - intervisitation, gatherings, post, phone and now email and Whatsapp. Under Covid-19 we have developed additional connections which I don't think we will abandon.

Quakers have adapted particularly well (compared to other religious groups) to Zoom which has been used for Yearly gatherings, Yearly meetings, Meditation groups, Music groups, Worship Sharing, Discussions, Meetings for Worship and business meetings and these FWCC Conversations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of system</th>
<th>Mechanical</th>
<th>Naturally adaptive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Car accelerator, steering wheel, air conditioner, skyscraper</td>
<td>A Quaker clearness meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Ventilation in office block</td>
<td>A monthly meeting or Friends Church, the World Quaker community, Covid19 pandemic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This diagram is a useful way to look at the two systems.

In the lower left portion of the diagram are issues in which there is a high degree of certainty (as to outcomes from actions) and a high degree of agreement (among the people involved in taking the actions). Here, mechanical systems thinking with detailed plans and controls is appropriate.

For other issues in human systems for which there is very little certainty and very little agreement (the area in the upper right of Figure B-1), chaos reigns and is to be avoided. A riot in the streets is an example.

CAS thinking allows for a third possibility. Many human systems lie in the zone of complexity between control and chaos.

The Science of Complex Adaptive Systems

A complex adaptive system (CAS) is a collection of individual agents that have the freedom to act in ways that are not always predictable and whose actions are interconnected such that one agent’s actions changes the context.
for other agents. Such systems have been the focus of intense study across a variety of scientific fields.

The study of such systems reveals a number of properties.

1. Individual agents have freedom to act in unpredictable ways. (Just think of any Friends church or Quaker Meeting)
2. Adaptable elements that can change themselves. (Even the Covid virus is mutating and becoming more virulent).
3. Simple rules

- It is liberating to realize that the task of complex system design does not itself need to be complex. Although it has been suspected intuitively that it may not be possible to design in detail something as complex as the U.S. healthcare system, there is no need to fall victim to chaos. The answer is to create the conditions for self-organization through simple rules under which massive and diverse experimentation can happen.
- Simple rules for human CAS tend to be of three types: (1) general direction pointing, (2) prohibitions, and (3) resource or permission providing.

- A good set of simple rules might include all three types. These three types of rules tend to match the predispositions of many systems designers. Those who would focus on leadership and aim setting are drawn to the simple rules of the first type. Those who are drawn to regulation and boundary setting are comfortable with the second type. Those who would focus on incentives and resources are drawn to the third type.

- The theory honors all three points of view and suggests that it is best to have only a few such rules, so that no one point of view dominates.

Jesus understood complex adaptive systems. He did
not set up a command and control system like the Roman Empire he lived under. He told stories and offered a simple rule—Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul, and your neighbour as yourself. And look what happened

Another simple rule may be the Quaker poster
‘THE TWO MULES’
A fable for the Nations

CO-OPERATION
IS BETTER THAN CONFLICT
4. **Non-linearity** (Small efforts large effect and large effort small effect are both possible.) Thinking of 10 Quakers meeting in London with the intention of abolishing slavery. That would have been unimaginable at that time, but it eventually happened.

5. **Emergent behaviour or novel behaviour.** Continual creativity is a natural state of the system. (Think of the Quakers who responded to a request from Greenhaven prison inmates for help with violence. Their response and persistence has spread AVP around the world. Think of two former inmates from Cape Town who are now running Basic, Advanced and T$F Online Zoom AVP workshops at Nelson Mandela University)

6. **Not predictable in detail.** Eg weather. (Only way to know is to observe it.)

7. **Inherent order.** Eg termites, forrests, …(Quakers have simple processes for making decisions and keeping order.)

8. **Context and embeddedness.** Systems exist within systems. (We are part of the world and are acted on by what is going on in the world, at the same time as we are trying to change the world)

9. **Change.** Co-evolution as the system moves forward through constant tension and balance. (Think of how Quakers have evolved as they spread around the world and took on different forms of worship and organisational structures. We should embrace this diversity as a strength, that makes us resilient)

10. **Biological Approach and Evolutionary Design**

11. **CAS science** suggests that we cannot hope to understand a priori what a CAS will do or how to optimize it. A design cannot be completed on paper. CAS need two processes in order to evolve: (1) processes that generate variation and (2) processes that “prune” the resulting evolutionary tree. (We have experimented from our beginnings as George Fox ‘s life shows us, and we continue to experiment. There is even an Experiment with Light initiative which is looking back and practicing the methods George Fox used to discern the way forward.)

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**Summary  Key Elements in an Approach to Complex Adaptive System Design**
• Use **biological metaphors** to guide thinking.
  • Create conditions in which the system can evolve naturally over time.
• **Provide simple rules** and minimum specifications.
• Set forth a **good enough vision**
  and create a wide space for natural creativity to emerge from local actions within the system. (Use the See, Judge Act process of continually experiment by trying something, observe what happened and act using what you have learned.)

Questions to consider in your discussion

1. **What is a good enough 5 year vision (2021-2025) for our Quaker Community in Africa, remembering we will be hosting the FWCC World Gathering in 2024**
2. **What simple rules are important to guide this process**
3. **How do we create space for new ideas and innovation**

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**I wish to end with 3 quotes**

AMANA GORMAN’s poem from the Biden Inauguration

When day comes we step out of the shade,
aflame and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it.
"The truth can be spoken only by someone who already lives inside it; not by someone who still lives in untruth and only sometimes reaches out from untruth towards it."

—Ludwig Wittgenstein - Philosopher

"And we are put on earth for a little while, that we may learn to bear the beams of love."

—William Blake

Perhaps the small set of simple rules are to live with light, truth and love, and to enjoy the journey like the Flocking birds
If you are interested in the article on Complex Adaptive Systems you can email me and I will send it to you
We can also send the Quaker Statement on Peace in Africa.
JeremyRRoutledge@gmail.com