



Southern Africa
Yearly Meeting

1 August 2021

Quaker Community in Southern Africa Yearly Meeting 2021

Greetings to Friends Everywhere

The Quaker Community in Southern Africa held our Yearly Meeting online over five days on 16 June (the 45th anniversary of the 1976 student uprising in Soweto, Cape Town and other parts of South Africa) and on the two weekends of 24/25 July and 31 July/1 August 2021. We send love and warm greetings to Friends all around the world.

We met during a time of vulnerability, uncertainty and heightened awareness of continuing poverty and inequality, while the Covid19 pandemic was raging around the world, and South Africa was experiencing rioting, looting, death, damage to infrastructure and an attempted insurrection in the two provinces of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, which are the economic hubs of the whole region.

We missed hugging and touching, the shared meals, the early morning yoga and walks and children's laughter, and yet we met in a spirit of love, hope and joy as we greeted and shared with each other from Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe and welcomed Friends from the Britain Yearly Meeting and Africa Section. Meeting virtually reduced travel costs of our dispersed yearly meeting and also reduced our carbon footprint.

Marie Odendaal delivered The [Richard Gush Lecture 2021](#) — *Creating our World in Love's Image: Journeying Beyond Apartheid* — on 16 June, chosen as this day 45 years ago police fired on students protesting peacefully, leading to the 1976 student uprising in Soweto, Cape Town and other parts of South Africa, which changed the trajectory of South Africa's history. Marie's moving, powerful story of her life lived with compassion and integrity, ended with a challenge to our Meetings to rise to the historic challenges of colonialism, apartheid, economic inequality and land dispossession.

Simon Gush, a descendent of the 1820 settler Richard Gush, is investigating the land issue in Salem, an area of Gush's farm. Three of [Simon Gush's](#) films were recommended for watching in preparation for the lecture.

The challenges could overwhelm us, and yet they could unite us in action. Marie reminded us of Margaret Mead's advice:

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.
Always remember that you are absolutely unique. Just like everyone else.
Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have."*

She encouraged Friends in Southern Africa to reflect on our own stories and Quaker legacy to explode the myths of race, contribute to restitution and reconciliation, and help build the beloved community.

The Meetings for Worship and Worship Sharing groups were rich in silence and ministry, and brought us together in a spirit of love and hope and a "strange feeling of togetherness at a distance."

The business was interspersed with worship sharing, musical interludes, 5-minute talks, short videos on Friends' work, testimonies of departed Friends and discussions with breakout rooms and report backs.

The Clerks introduced the idea of Participatory Action and Research Groups (PAR Groups) which can involve Friends from all the meetings. The PAR Group on Poverty and Inequality explored the idea of a universal Basic Income Grant or Universal Basic Share as a means of addressing poverty and inequality. A private initiative has piloted the idea in Namibia and it is catching on in South Africa. PAR Groups on Peace and Quaker Bible study will be started. We acknowledge that Inequality is a cross-cutting theme that can be addressed in all the PAR Groups and in all our work.

The meeting supported a proposal to explore the viability of an ambitious Peace Education programme in the region — Investing in Peacebuilding. This would be a Quaker social investment to implement the Peace Testimony in response to the reality that the countries of Southern Africa experience great socio-economic hardship and high levels of interpersonal violence. Murder rates in Lesotho and South Africa place these countries in the 10 most violent countries in the world. South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and Eswatini have the highest rates of reported rapes per 100 000 people in the world. The peacebuilding proposal involves three independent but intersecting parts:

- Training 10 000 young people in Lesotho, South Africa, and Zimbabwe in responsible, loving and nonviolent parenting
- Establishing a postgraduate programme in Peacebuilding at the National University of Lesotho
- Recommencing the KZN-AVP peace education programme and extending it throughout southern Africa.

Young Friends shared a video of a wonderful camp in the Drakensberg. They are keen to be nurtured in taking on positions of responsibility in the meeting and want to be involved in community work and AVP.

We heard a report of an active children's programme including linking across the YM and connecting to meetings in the UK, which they look forward to and enjoyed, during a difficult time for children.

Digital technology has facilitated participation of Friends at our Yearly Meeting. This shows how adaptable Quakers are. There is also a need to put in place measures that address issues such as devices and data/connectivity, to maintain and increase the participation of Friends.

We appreciate that we were able to meet and share creative ways of gathering remotely. During this Yearly Meeting we were able to meet in Breakout Rooms and watch videos and were inspired by the presentation of music interludes and five-minute talks.

We agreed to continue exploring different ways of gathering, including holding blended meetings (face-to-face and digital) and we agreed to the Representatives Meetings taking place three times a year, possibly in blended meetings.

The Yearly Meeting is deeply concerned about the recent violent riots in South Africa and the growing socio-economic inequality and poverty in our region. The Yearly Meeting issued a public [statement on the attempted insurrection, rioting, looting and damage to infrastructure in South Africa](#).

Signed
Co-Clerks
Sipho Nsimbi and Justin Ellis
Quaker Community in Southern Africa