

Quakers for One Another

An Epistle for World Quaker Day 2023 by the Bohol Worship Group, Philippines

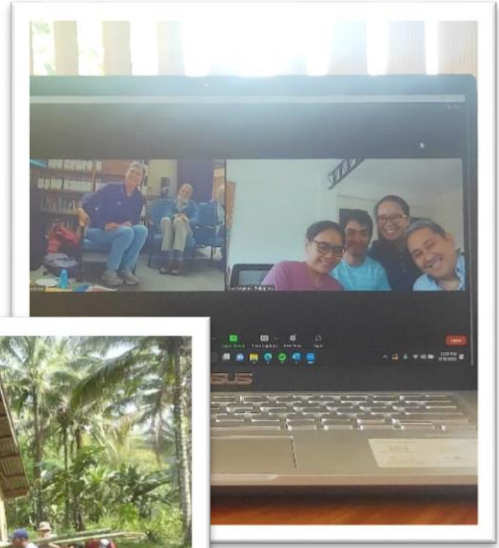
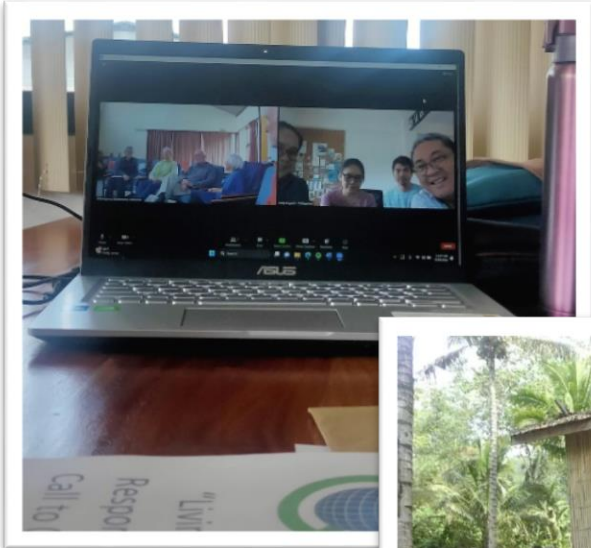
(Written by: Ludwig Quirog)

There is something about sharing food that brings happiness to people. Whether one is sitting with family for a meal, catching up with friends over coffee and sandwiches, or giving to others food that one has grown and prepared with their own hands, there is always a palpable sense of joy in it. Perhaps this is why in many forms that Christianity is practised throughout the world, the Holy Communion is a physical and literal breaking and partaking of bread. After all, the Bible does indicate that many significant events in the Earthly life of Jesus Christ were centred around the act of sharing food, from the wedding feast at Cana to the multiplication of the loaves to the last supper. And even among Quaker circles everywhere, the ubiquitous post-Meeting gathering over tea and biscuits holds immense value as it facilitates the building and nurturing of relationships among Friends.

Even as we are often compelled these days to use Zoom as an alternative to physical gatherings, many of us may be seen with food and a beverage cup during the chatty bit after the silence has been broken. These tools help remind many of us without Meetinghouses to walk to on First Day mornings that, though miles away from one another, connected only through the world wide web, we are a community of Friends who have just met to Worship. On September 30, our group did just that. Separated by some 7,600 kilometres of sea and land, across five time zones, the miracle of technology allowed us to Worship and chat briefly with Friends from Whanganui Meeting in Aotearoa/New Zealand wherein we had the opportunity to share insights and stories with each other, and explore the concept of *Ubuntu* as it exists in our own local cultures. It was truly a gift to be able to meet with them and, after the call, in our own small physical gathering for the sharing of after-thoughts, in typical Quaker Meeting fashion, we had our own little party of smiles over coffee and cakes.

The following day, on World Quaker Day itself, food was also central to our little Friendly celebration. We paid a visit to a small village that housed families displaced by the construction of our province's new international airport. As all of us in the group have benefitted from this aviation facility, without much awareness we have also in some way contributed to the coercive relocation of these people, so it was high time we gave them good attention and perhaps build a positive relationship with them. For this visit, we met the neighbourhood children – about 60 of them – in their small community centre where one of our attenders, Rechel, a teacher at Golden Link College, a school supported by the Meeting, started things off by creating a space conducive to the building of friendship. To our surprise, she even managed to get these kids to hold a few minutes of silence, much akin to the quiet that is practised in Meetings for Worship, except with children who had never previously heard of Quakers or perhaps even the practice of stillness in prayer. It was a rather brief encounter, not more than a few minutes past an hour, but it was a very meaningful one. All the children snacked well and we are currently in talks with one community leader, Marisa, for another visit so we may give free classes to parents and guardians on cooking delicious and nutritious vegetarian food that even children will gobble up easily, much like the spaghetti, sandwiches and plantain rolls we brought.

The sharing of food is indubitably a language everyone understands and it was serendipitous that World Quaker Day this year also fell on World Vegetarian Day. So, we in the Bohol Worship Group thought, "What better way to celebrate both events, in the spirit of *Ubuntu*, than to pool a little bit of our gifts, whether in the form of financial resources or skills, and share a low-carbon footprint meal made from locally produced plant-based ingredients with others who have less?"



“BAYANIHAN” (UBUNTU for us in the Philippines)

