



June 2020

## COVID-19, Cell Phones, and Love

Belize Friends Ministries Director Nikki Holland writes:

I called a special All Staff Meeting on Monday, March 16. We were brainstorming ideas and questions so that later in the week, we could make decisions about our plan for what to do if the Ministries of Health and Education closed the schools and churches. About an hour into the meeting, we received the news that in fact, the schools were closing on Friday. We had four days to develop and implement a plan that would enable our students to continue their studies.

Our brainstorming session turned into a strategy meeting.

Something that felt really important to all of us was finding a way to stay connected with our students. They needed to be able to communicate with their teachers when they needed help, the teachers needed to be able to give them resources and assignments, we needed to be able to stay connected as a community, and we needed a way to let the students know about updates to our status and when we will reopen.

We lamented that so many of our students did not have cell phones or even internet access at their houses. Eden Grace, FUM's Global Ministries Director, just happened to be, at this time, on a planned visit to FUM's Belize ministries. She said, "Well. We could buy phones for them to use."

I stared at her. "We can do that?"

She said, "Yes."

So we developed a plan that involved packets of paper homework and the use of the messaging application WhatsApp to stay in touch. That night I sent an email to Smart!, a local telecommunications company, to tell them about our needs. I asked if they could give us a discount on a data plan. They responded with a free month of a data plan and a huge discount on the cell phones we needed.

It was more than I had dared hope for! They worked with us on Tuesday to get the phones, and then worked through logistical problems throughout the week.



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We developed a contract with the students and a borrowing plan that includes the possibility for the students to buy or work for the phones when this crisis is over. We distributed the phones on Thursday and we had tutorials and trouble shooting on Friday, the last day of school.

The expressions on the kids' faces while they were learning about their phones showed that they felt valued and invested in, as they were entrusted with such equipment for their own benefit. They felt loved, cared for, and connected, in a really destabilizing situation.

In the week since we distributed the phones, our students have sent hundreds of messages to each other and the staff. We have organized the distribution of food packages. We have shared community support. We have settled disputes about who said what about whom. We have shared online resources and opportunities. We have done homework tutoring and video lessons. We have greeted each other in the morning and bid each other farewell in the evening.

We have calmed students who panicked when the first COVID-19 case was confirmed in Belize. We have shared music videos and silly memes.

These phones, provided by Smart! and FUM's COVID-19 Solidarity Fund, have enabled Belize Friends School to come together as a community in a time of enforced separation and isolation to support some of the most vulnerable people in Belize City.

We couldn't be more grateful.

*Thanks to Friends like you, and your generous donations to our COVID-19 Solidarity Fund, we have been able to buy personal protective equipment for Friends Lugulu Mission Hospital. We have been able to purchase food for the most economically marginalized members of our communities. Together, we hope to do more. If you can donate, please visit our website today.*

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# Kenyan Friends Partner for Coronavirus Relief

Friends United Meeting's Africa Ministries Office is partnering with Friends Church Kenya and Friends World Committee for Consultation–Africa Section to provide medical, spiritual, and humanitarian support for communities impacted by the coronavirus. Through the COVID-19 Africa Collaboration Fund, African Friends have raised over 5 million Kenyan shillings (\$5,000) to provide compassion and relief across Africa. John Muhanji, AMO Director, writes, “As we continue to fight the COVID-19 pandemic across the globe, we are reminded as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience . . . Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as Christ God forgave you. [Ephesians 4:32]. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Therefore, as a faith community we are guided by Paul’s encouraging words to reach to our neighbors with a heart of compassion.”

You can read a joint letter from FUM-Africa, Friends Church Kenya, and FWCC-Africa Section at <https://bit.ly/KenyaQResponse>. Here’s how the Collaboration Funds have been spent so far:

1. Kaptama Health Center on Mt. Elgon — 70,000 Kenya shillings was allocated for health workers’ protection against COVID-19. (Masks, sanitizers, gloves, soap, thermogun, plus a donation of an oxygen concentrator.)
2. Nairobi Lockdown challenge — 150,000 Kenya shillings (food and masks)
3. DRC Uvira Flooding challenge — 50,000 Kenya shillings
4. River Nzoia Victims (Matete and Navakholo Sub-Counties) — 150,000 Kenya shillings (Blankets, soap, and masks.)
5. Media sensitization as a church to the community’s awareness — 50,000 Kenya shillings

Total — 470,000 Kenya shillings



*Relief supplies—blankets, soap, and masks—are distributed by Friends to flood victims in Navakholo Sub-County of Kakamega County, Kenya.*

# FUM Cancels Fall Cuba Trip

It is with heavy hearts that Friends United Meeting has decided to cancel our Living Letters trip to Cuba in November 2020. Due to safety concerns and the uncertainty of travel during the COVID-19 outbreak, we believe that the best way to show our love and support for our Cuban Friends is to refrain from visiting with them in Cuba at this time. As travel restrictions are lifted and we can resume sharing friendship and fellowship with the members of Cuba Yearly Meeting in safe and healthy ways, we will plan to visit with them again as we are able.

Please continue to pray for the ministries of Cuba Yearly Meeting and FUM's ability to visit with our Cuban Friends again in the future.



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## Pandemic Changes Expectations for Support



Usually, this is the time of year when FUM's field staff are traveling to our Meetings and Churches to raise awareness and support for their ministries. Unfortunately, this year we will not be doing that. Although the three-year terms of **Oscar Mmbali** and **Robert Wafula** are scheduled to be renewed in September 2020, the COVID-19 threat and associated travel restrictions are preventing them from traveling to raise their support. Because of these challenges, the Executive Board of FUM has lifted the policy requiring field staff to raise their entire support for a three-year term before they are released for ministry.

Instead, FUM, Oscar, and Robert are working to raise their ministry support for one year, with the expectation that the remaining amount will be raised by December 2021.

You can donate directly to support Robert's or Oscar's ministry accounts, or by giving to the Global Impact Fund, or by making a three-year commitment to support their ministries. If you wish make a new commitment, please visit <https://www.friendsunitedmeeting.org/giving/donate> and choose Oscar's or Robert's name from the dropdown menu. To renew an existing commitment, please call the FUM Richmond office at (765)962-7573, or email [info@fum.org](mailto:info@fum.org).

# Ben Snyder Leaves FUM Staff

Friends United Meeting is sad to announce the resignation of Ben Snyder, Coordinator of North American Ministries. Ben is completing an MA in Practical Theology from Barclay College and has accepted the call to serve as pastoral minister for Carmel Friends Meeting in Western Yearly Meeting. Ben has brought a positive and helpful spirit to our staff team. He has been instrumental in coordinating Living Letters trips, engaging African Friends in North America, and working with the Stoking the Fire planning committee. While we will certainly miss him, we are excited about this new opportunity for his expanding ministry, and for his family.



Friends United Meeting is thankful to generous Friends who are funding this position and we will continue to be committed to developing FUM's ministries to support North American Friends.

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## FUM Staff can Visit You Virtually



FUM Global Ministries Staff are available to visit you online! Whether you're looking for a speaker for your remote Yearly Meeting session, or for pulpit supply at your hybrid worship service, or a guest at your USFW gathering, let us gather with you . . . virtually!

FUM Belize Director Nikki Holland has been able to visit multiple Friends' meetings this way, and was even able to record an interview via Skype at the local radio station in Wilmington, Ohio, all without leaving her home in Belize.

Many members of our Global Ministries staff are willing to "visit" your meeting during its online worship, either to bring a main message or to offer a short message of encouragement and connection from the field and to let Friends know how they can be praying. If you would be interested in having a field staff member join your gathering, please send General Secretary Kelly Kellum an email at [kellyk@fum.org](mailto:kellyk@fum.org). Kelly is also available to speak for online worship or other online gatherings.



## Financial Resources for Difficult Times

If your Meeting or Church is facing financial difficulties in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, or if you simply want to deepen your congregational conversation about stewardship, go to [friendsunitedmeeting.org/resources/stewardship](https://friendsunitedmeeting.org/resources/stewardship) to see the resources that we are able to offer through our partnership with Everence. These include help with online giving, tips on managing a benevolence fund, financial counseling for individuals and households, and planned giving advice. We're also thrilled to be offering a series of webinars with Everence. To learn about these and other stewardship resources, please contact Colin Saxton, Stewardship Consultant with Everence: [colin.saxton@everence.com](mailto:colin.saxton@everence.com).



“FCNL gave me my voice when I was finding my faith, finding my role in the Religious Society of Friends, and finding my role in activism. I hope that the money that I will one day contribute to FCNL from my 401(k) can help give someone else a voice.”

– Katie Breslin, Richmond, IN

Join Katie in making FCNL a beneficiary of your IRA or 401(k). For more info or to let us know you've made this decision, please contact Mary Comfort Ferrell at (202) 903-2539 or [marycomfort@fcnl.org](mailto:marycomfort@fcnl.org).



## FUM's 2020 Summer Mission Focus: Turkana Friends Mission 50th Anniversary

If you're planning a Vacation Bible School, or programming for Quaker camps, or other summer fundraising efforts, keep in mind that our summer focus this year will be the **Turkana Friends Mission**. TFM is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary this year, and we're looking forward to giving you materials on the history of the mission and how God has used it to bring hope and peace to the Turkana region.

Downloadable materials can be found here: <https://www.friendsunitedmeeting.org/connect/summer-mission-focus>