

CONNECTIONS

in Friends United Meeting



October 2020

Schools Reopen Under Pandemic Plans

In these uncertain coronavirus times, two of FUM's schools are facing the daily discernment of risks and ever-changing government restrictions.

In Ramallah, the twelfth grade returned to class in mid-August, with masks and social distancing, in order to get a jump start on preparations for the International Baccalaureate exams.

On September 7, the rest of the Upper School went online, and all of the Lower School opened face-to-face with numerous protective measures, as described in Adrian Moody's most recent [newsletter](#). Unfortunately, as COVID-19 cases increase in the West Bank, several twelfth-graders and one teacher were found to have contracted the virus, and on September 8, the Upper School campus was closed as a precaution. Teachers and students were tested and quarantined. After deep cleaning and sanitation, the campus opened again a couple of days later.

There have been some infections in the Lower School campus; those individuals, and the people with whom they've had close contact, have remained at home under quarantine. Otherwise, with all protective measures being meticulously applied, the rest of the Lower School is functioning well. In mid-September, the elementary school students were allowed to resume outdoor recess, with social-distancing protocols. However, with the rapidly-increasing number of cases in the city of Ramallah, it seems likely that the government will



order the campuses closed again quite soon.

At Belize Friends School, the government allowed schools to "open" for distance learning on September 7. Our students are currently studying at home using paper packets while the school searches for solutions to the technology challenges of live online teaching.

Friends may remember that, when the school first closed in March, students were issued smart phones through a generous donation from a local cell phone company with additional funding from FUM's COVID-19 Solidarity Fund. These phones helped the school stay in touch with each student as they were locked in at home, often in

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very vulnerable situations. The spiritual and psychosocial benefits of the phones have been profound, but a cell phone is not an ideal platform for e-learning. From March through June, the students and teachers limped along. But now that the Ministry of Education has ordered schools to remain in distance learning mode indefinitely, the Belize Friends School Board is searching for funds to supply each student with a tablet with protective cover and data access, so that students and teachers can use e-learning apps and platforms for delivering the curriculum. We're so grateful to Western Yearly Meeting for providing seed funds toward this need!

Please continue to keep all students, teachers, parents, and administrators in your prayers as they respond to this ever-changing situation in a way that prioritizes the precious worth of every child in a Friends school.

Field Staff Seek Support

Oscar Siema Mmbali, a member of Kakamega Yearly Meeting in Kenya, has just begun his second three-year term as Pastoral Minister in Belize. As the first Quaker church planter in Belize, and the only Kenyan in the entire country, his ministry is blazing new pathways for Friends worldwide.

Oscar was a twenty-one-year-old first-year student at Friends Theological College, Kenya (FTC) in 2003 when he read about Belize in *Quaker Life* magazine. He'll never forget that moment, in the library with that magazine in his hands, and how he felt God speak to him, unmistakably, telling him that He was calling him to Belize. Oscar had to go look for a map to find out where Belize was located!



He brought this astonishing revelation to the faculty of the College, who wisely advised him to keep it in prayer while patiently preparing himself for the time when the way would open. He completed his studies at FTC, worked at the Kakamega Orphan Care Center, continued for advanced theological study at St Paul's University, worked as a pastor in Nairobi, planted a church among the Maasai people, and eventually earned a PhD in International Development in Bangkok, Thailand. Through all of these steps, he never lost faith that God was preparing him for Belize.

Now that he has been in Belize for three years, we are able to glimpse the fruits of what God had in mind, back in that library with that magazine, in calling Oscar to this ministry. The church is growing. The Friends Center is addressing the needs and concerns of the community. Dozens of young people have turned their lives to Christ and committed to their own healthy futures as a result of Oscar's mentorship. Two Belizeans are now in training for pastoral ministry among Friends.

What does God have yet in mind for Oscar's ministry in Belize? Will you pray with us for Oscar's continued faithfulness to God's persistent call?

Oscar also needs financial supporters for his continued ministry. He has raised about 45% of the funds needed for this term of service, and still needs pledges equal to about \$2,500 per month. [Click here](#) to make a pledge of support for Oscar.

Thank you!

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Robert Wafula has served as the Principal of FTC for six years, and it's time to renew his pledges of support for his next three-year term. FUM's Global Ministries Director Eden Grace says, "I can hardly believe the changes that we've seen at FTC since Robert began! He started out in 2014 by articulating his 'Vision 2020' for where he hoped to lead the College by the year 2020. In nearly all aspects, he has exceeded the goals set out in that vision! I hope you agree with me that the College has never been stronger, even as it has faced the totally-unexpected challenge of moving to an online learning platform during a pandemic. FTC is the centerpiece of any strategy for spiritual renewal and growth among African Friends, and the vitality of its intellectual and spiritual life make me so proud to be associated with this very special learning community."



FUM's usual policy is to require field staff to secure commitments equal to a full three years of support before beginning each three-year term of service. With Covid-19, the Executive Board has allowed field staff more time to raise their full amount. In his September newsletter, Robert wrote that he currently has 38% of his support needs met in the form of donations or pledges. Can we get to 50% by the time of Robert's next newsletter?

To pledge your support for Robert's ministry, use the links below to indicate your continued, new, or increased support.

[To set up a monthly credit card charge.](#)

[To set up a monthly bank account deduction.](#)

[To indicate the amount that you intend to give](#), or to let us know that you will be continuing your existing level of support.

FUM is Hiring for Global Ministries

In response to staff departures, adjustments, and reorganization, FUM has undertaken a search for two positions related to Global Ministries.

The FUM Africa Ministries Office (Kisumu, Kenya) is seeking a dynamic, highly-organized junior professional to join the staff team as an Operations Manager. This person will be responsible for overall office running, financial transactions, bookkeeping, and tracking of plans, tasks, and deadlines. The other members of the team will look to this person to complement their skills by providing practical organization of the team's work so that the ministries of FUM can flourish. The application deadline was 11 September, and an appointment is expected by mid-October.

FUM is also seeking a full-time Global Ministries Coordinator. Applicants for this position should be highly organized and willing to join the staff team in Richmond. The Coordinator of Global Ministries will be an active member of the Global Ministries Team. This person will provide administrative support for FUM's field staff and global ministry partners by coordinating schedules, communications, financial activities, and overseeing assigned programs. [More information can be had here.](#) The application deadline is October 20, 2020.

New Clerks Appointed for RFS Board



During this year of transition and transformation at Ramallah Friends School, Friends United Meeting is working more closely with the school's Board of Trustees than ever before. It remains FUM's primary commitment for the Board of Trustees to function in a way that reflects the best of Quaker governance and values. To this end, Ron Bryan, the Clerk of FUM, and Sarah Lookabill, Assistant Clerk of FUM, were appointed as Custodial Clerks of the RFS Board. FUM intends for Ron and Sarah to guide the Board in Quaker procedures and mentor the incoming Clerks during this year of transition and transformation.



The Executive Board of FUM met on 12 September and are pleased to announce the appointments of Mazen Karam as the Incoming Clerk and Omar Tesdell as the Incoming Assistant Clerk of the Ramallah Friends School Board of Trustees. While Ron and Sarah will continue to provide oversight of the Board, they recognize the importance of working collaboratively with clerks who understand RFS and the Palestinian culture. Additionally, FUM understands the need to have appointed clerks in Ramallah to represent FUM and RFS to the government and the local community. Ron and Sarah recognize Mazen and Omar's leadership and are excited to work closely with them during this year of transition and transformation.

Above, left: Incoming Clerk Mazen Karam.

Left: Incoming Assistant Clerk Omar Tesdell speaking with outgoing Clerk Samer Shehadeh.

Covid Credit at RFS

As is true for people the world over, Palestinians are suffering from the economic impacts of the coronavirus safety measures implemented by the government. Parents have been expressing their increasing financial worries, and this past week the RFS Board of Trustees discerned a generous response as a concrete expression of the Quaker values of the school. A 10% "Covid Credit" will be applied to the 2020/2021 tuition of every student in the school, with the hope that this credit will contribute to the community's resilience and safety.

The Board requested that those families who don't need this extra financial assistance consider donating their credit back to the Student Financial Aid Fund, to support more vulnerable families in the community. Those families who are struggling to pay, even after the credit, were urged to make their need known to the administration, since additional financial aid funds are available to assist them.

It is estimated that the Covid Credit will cost the school approximately \$600,000. Friends are invited to consider an extra donation to the school at this difficult time.

What's Happening to the Girls During Kenya's Prolonged School Closures?

For nearly fifteen years, Friends United Meeting has held a special concern for the education of girls. Girls in nomadic Kenyan communities like Turkana and Samburu are particularly vulnerable to exclusion from school, exacerbated by such things as forced early marriage, dangerous teenage pregnancy, and female genital mutilation. Research shows that every year of schooling for a girl pays dividends in the long-term health and well-being of her whole family.

In response to the spread of the Covid-19 virus, Kenyan schools have been closed since March of this year, and the government has indicated that schools will remain closed until at least January 2021. Eden Grace, FUM's Global Ministries Director, read an alarming article about how girls in northeastern Kenya have been forced into marriage during these school closures, and she requested updates from the leaders of the Samburu and Turkana missions on the forty girls currently enrolled in FUM's girl child education program.



John Moru, Director of Turkana Friends Mission, responded:

“Our sponsored girls are doing well in their various villages. I have not received reports of any pregnancy cases about them. I have witnessed our sponsored girls who are around Lokoyo and Lodwar trying to have time to do reading of the few text books they have, and asking me how they can do online study in their smart phone or laptop, for those who can borrow it from Friends. Some are undergoing challenges of getting sanitary towels because they were being given at their schools.”

Daniel Lentirangoi, Administrator of Samburu Friends Mission, wrote:

“The Samburu girls are all well. None of them has been married. I always keep in touch with them through their parents, and we also told them that they should attend to church services for easy monitoring of their progress. I can also confirm that most of our sponsored girls are from vulnerable families. Life is actually hard for them but members of the church visit them with food stuffs.”

One of the priorities of FUM's girl child education program has always been the investment that the local church makes in these girls. The program funds may originate abroad, but each girl is sponsored by a local church, not a program halfway around the world. The girls have always been told that they can turn to the church for support. In this time of crisis and disruption, when so many girls in similar situations are falling through the cracks, we praise God that the Friends churches are standing with these girls and keeping them safe.



Young people participate in an Alternatives to Violence workshop at Kasokwony on Mt. Elgon, facilitated by Kenya's Friends Church Peace Team, on August 26. The three-day workshop was the first to include youth of both genders. Fourteen girls and fifteen boys attended, all between the ages of thirteen to twenty-one.

Billboards for Peace

Thirteen unique billboards—“advertisements for peace”—stand along roadways in southwestern Ohio from August to October as a means for promoting Wilmington College’s Westheimer Peace Symposium and the annual event’s 2020 focus on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the atomic bombings of Japan.

The thirtieth edition of the College’s signature program will be a virtual symposium Oct. 1 and 2 with the theme, “Peace and the Nature of War: The Nuclear Threat. Past, Present and Future.”

Event coordinator Dr. Tanya Maus, director of the Peace Resource and Quaker Heritage centers at Wilmington College (WC), said the seventy-fifth anniversary is an important milestone to recognize. Indeed, the world has gone three quarters of a century since last using nuclear weapons, yet the grave threat continues to exist. “We hope to draw attention to this important anniversary and that we at Wilmington College hope that nuclear weapons will never be used again,” she said. Also, she said, given present circumstances in the United States, “We don’t want this anniversary to be entirely lost.”

The billboards are located at various locations in Clinton, Highland, Fayette, Clermont, Brown and Adams counties—a significant part of the region from which WC draws its students. The outdoor advertisements can be found near Wilmington, Sabina, Washington Court House, Jeffersonville, Blanchester, New Vienna, Hillsboro, Williamsburg, Sardinia, Peebles and Greenfield. This [interactive map](#) shows the locations of all the billboards.

The billboards include archival images regarding the atomic bombings that were curated by the Peace Resource Center’s Barbara Reynolds Memorial Archives, while some feature original artwork by multidisciplinary artist elin o’Hara slavick, a professor of art at the University of North Carolina. She is internationally known for creating art about Hiroshima and Nagasaki from the perspective of eliminating all war. o’Hara slavick said that the photographic collection at Wilmington’s Peace



Resource Center inspired her works, especially a military advertisement stating, “Peace is our profession.”

Initially, o’Hara slavick had planned to curate an exhibition on the walls of the PRC, but the pandemic changed those plans to feature outdoor billboards. “I love the fact that even in a pandemic, people drive and will see these billboards that promote peace, remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the peace symposium,” o’Hara slavick says. “I hope the billboards provide spaces of respite and pause in our stressful and violent times. Advertisements for peace!”

Read more about Wilmington’s [Peace Resource Center](#) and the [Westheimer Peace Symposium](#).

Wilmington College is affiliated with Wilmington Yearly Meeting, in southwestern Ohio.

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Seeking Pastor

First Friends Meeting is calling for applications for the position of Pastor from spiritually mature people ready to lead a congregation of about 100 souls. The ideal pastor should be a member of a Quaker congregation, have a degree from a recognized seminary, and have experience working with groups who hold a wide variety of beliefs. Experience with the Religious Society of Friends organizations is a plus.

To apply, please send your resume and a sample sermon to First Friends Meeting, 2010 Chester Blvd., Richmond, IN, 47374. Attention: Bonita Porter or bonita.porter@gmail.com.



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