

Dear Friends,

Beginning January 1st, I will reduce my role on the Friends United Meeting staff to half-time. Between then and June 30, new staff will likely be recruited and hired to take over the responsibilities for Advancement and North American Ministries for FUM.

I count it a great privilege to have worked for nearly ten years of my life for this global community. Of all the Quaker organizations best positioned to help Friends thrive in the future, FUM is at the top of the list. Our distinct mission, leading priorities, and the breadth and depth of our global community help form a fellowship and network that can effectively energize, equip, and connect Christ-centered Quakers around the world. Despite the challenges associated with this work, I believe FUM's health and vitality are crucial for the Religious Society of Friends and its future.

Two years ago, when I returned to the FUM staff after a hiatus, I did so as an experiment. I agreed to a one-year commitment to work full-time for FUM as their Advancement Officer and Director of North American Ministries. Though these two roles are each full-time responsibilities, we agreed to pair them because of budget constraints. At the same time, I agreed to continue to work for Everence as a consultant and instructor, in part because the focus of their work correlated with some of what I would do for FUM and would help facilitate some of the advancement activities of FUM. I agreed to this for one year, knowing I did not want to work more than a full-time job and an additional part-time job for an extended period. Beyond work, I have other interests, family and community responsibilities, and a sense of calling that I feel a growing urgency to pursue in this season of life.

One year crept into two, and though FUM and Everence have expressed satisfaction with how it works for them, I have found it increasingly less so. FUM needs more time and energy given to advancement activities, especially with major donor and bequest gifts. Our North American Ministries have expanded considerably over the last two years. They now need more significant time, attention, and creativity to continue responding to our community's needs in this part of the world. In both cases, having someone working in close proximity to the Richmond office, rather than 2000 miles away, would significantly improve communication and collaboration among the staff. FUM's ministry is multi-focused, and since such a small staff coordinates so much activity, it is essential to have everyone pulling together. Unfortunately, working remotely has made this more challenging than I had hoped. I sense that FUM will benefit by having additional staff onsite in Richmond to help shoulder the load and ensure work is coordinated.

There are other logistical reasons it makes sense for FUM to have someone else doing this work. The cost of my travel—both financial and ecological—continues to make less sense. When visiting FUM donors or congregations, nearly every trip for me is at least 1000 miles. Any in-person North American ministry event is at least the same. Someone centered in or near Richmond seems like more faithful stewardship to me. I also recognize that I am now the oldest staff person serving FUM. Our community needs a new infusion of creative and committed young leaders who can help us think and act faithfully in the 21st century.

More personally, I have been wrestling with the very serious question, “what does faithfulness look like in the last years of my life.” Though I have loved working for and leading Quaker organizations, I feel like that focus is winding down for me. Over the last year, I have met regularly with a spiritual care committee to help me discern what God is calling me to do now. My greatest priority is deepening my own spiritual life. I want to know Christ more deeply. I want to live more faithfully. Together with my care committee, we have discerned that this needs my best time and attention, not leftovers from jobs that demand more and more energy. I also sense an impulse to work more broadly than in the Quaker world. Increasingly, I have been given opportunities to work with other faith communities in ways that feel life-giving. Finally, I have been given a great deal of encouragement to give more time to writing and speaking. Over the years, there have been plenty of opportunities for the latter, but not as much deliberate attention has been given to the former. I have several partially completed written projects that I want to finish. Having a more reasonable work schedule will allow me to focus on this.

I cannot fully express my gratitude to the FUM community, including the staff and board members I have been privileged to get to know and work with over the years.

I will remain a committed donor and prayerful advocate for all we do. I anticipate continuing to give time and energy to the Flourishing Friends project within North American Ministries because I sense it will be a helpful resource for local meetings and churches.

With gratitude,
Colin