

2023 - Friends Center Annual Report

From Guilford College Friends Center Staff in July 2023

Dear Friends Everywhere,

I want to thank you for inviting us to share a report of our work at Guilford College this past year and thank you for the ongoing support your meetings and yearly meeting continues to offer Guilford College and the work of the Friends Center. With the 2022-2023 academic year behind us, there are so many good things to report out from our work at the college.

I want to try and situate our work in the Quaker world. If you'd indulge a bit of context, I'd like to start there. I have noticed a growing trend post-pandemic for some Friends to focus increasingly on the past. Maybe this is a Friends thing. Maybe it is a human thing. But it looks and sounds like a greater focus on past accomplishments. Past leaders. The way things used to be. What has been lost. It sounds and feels a lot like grieving. This feeling has become especially alive for us post-Covid, with the many ways that has impacted our personal and corporate lives. To bring some finality to Bob Dylan's famous epigram, *things have changed*. And it has been hard on all of us. It is difficult to balance both the good of the past, while accepting that things are different and we find ourselves in the tension of this present moment for better and for worse.

It may be even harder to see the good in the present, especially if our arrival to this moment has been one of let down, disappointment, loss, and struggle. Ashley Wilcox recently shared in a message to New Garden Friends that in the loss of loved ones in the meeting, we also lose their knowledge and skill. And in some places, we no longer know how to do things because they are gone. It is up to use to learn and relearn what has been lost so that we can move forward together in this present moment.

God was most certainly with Friends in the past, in the times when we were faithful and in the times when we were hard-hearted: just as God is very much with Friends in our present, and in our coming future. Our work is to be faithful to God now, rather than to an idea, a sentiment, or a legacy. We all know this but living it is much harder. Our faith is in that which is alive and changing. Ours is a faith of the present. I agree with Jack Kirk who says, "the statement 'there is one Christ Jesus who can speak to thy condition' is present and future oriented." And church historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, once wrote: "Traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition is the living faith of the dead. And I suppose that it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name."

I often find in the college similar tensions and difficulties. One of those is the tension between those who have an idea of what Guilford was and should be, versus the realities of who it is today and who those of us who are currently working at the college are helping Guilford become. In many ways, Friends Center sits at the center of this tension. We are stewards of story and practice, and it is our responsibility to help support and orient the college community in a way that nurtures healthy and faithful change. I do not believe the college should not get stuck, feel policed, or blocked by our work, but rather feel empowered and drawn deeper down into the participation of this unfolding story that all of us at the college are responsible for. In as much as Guilford continues to keep alive within herself queries like, "What does this practice or decision have to do with our Quaker tradition," "How are we living out our commitments," "Do our practices reflect what we say we are committed to," and especially, "What do we want our relationship to the Quaker tradition and its global community to be," than the project remains very much one that is shaped by those threads, those relationships, and that one Spirit that have been present within this community for 180+ years.

This is my way of saying, that while things are different, they can and, in my opinion, should on the whole be celebrated and lifted up. I believe this is one of the ways that meetings and elders can support the work of change and younger leadership today.

Reasons for celebration: That the mission of Guilford continues on after such major crises is worthy of celebration. Many great staff and faculty are still here. The students who came and who have stayed are carrying the Guilford College story into the future. This is itself a gift and something to celebrate. The fact that Guilford today has changed is also to be

celebrated. We have a lot of new leadership. The president is new(ish) and brings with him a fresh set of gifts, skills, and passions. He very clearly loves Guilford and wants to see it thrive, he also appreciates and understands the nuances of the college. Many staff are young continue to become more diverse. The student body continues to change with the college now being a minority serving institution, which is amazing considering that under earlier Quaker leadership the college didn't admit Black students until the 60s.

As a college and Friends Center, we are very committed to working with the students (staff and faculty) we have - the present, embodied community is our priority.

The **Quaker Leadership Scholars program**, expertly led by alumna Liz Nicholson, continues to adapt and change in ways that have allowed the program to continue to thrive. You can read more about QLSP below, but I want to point out that we work with the students on four categories of content that Lloyd Lee Wilson helped us develop: historical gratitude, scriptural literacy, spiritual disciplines, and authentic community. We have a very diverse group of students that we work with each semester, many of whom are not Quaker. Our work as we see it is to make "apprentices of the Quaker tradition," that is, we teach through lesson, experience, and practice the spiritual technology of our tradition, allowing for each student to integrate it and build on it in their own unique ways. I celebrate that QLSP continues to thrive and progress under new leadership.

The **Multifaith Collaboration** program also marks a change for us. Under the fantastic leadership of Meagan Holleman, we set a multifaith table for the students of the college who are mostly coming from a broad range of religious backgrounds or no religious tradition at all. This past year, Meagan organized a weekly multifaith worship that brought campus and community speakers in to lift up and celebrate their various religious traditions. It was a very compelling approach and brought in a lot of different students to the program. She also works with the faculty and staff through to educate the campus on various needs of a religious plural campus. Our Quaker theology is one that is perfect for appreciating and nurturing a multifaith community without feeling the need to dilute our particular faith traditions and practices.

Another key area of our work is to support the college through trainings and ongoing education. This past year we have done trainings with the Board of Trustees, Staff Council, Faculty meeting, New Employees Orientation, Student Orientation, regular lunches throughout the year to support community building and ongoing discussion and learning of Quaker topics.

Other works on campus:

- Hosting Centering Silence weekly (two times a week)
- Wess meets with President Kyle Farmbry twice a month to discuss Quaker and Religious/Spiritual Life of the campus
- Help supporting the college in terms of building community through events, programming, and presence
- Teaching classes: The Practice of Silence, Introduction to Quakerism, Food and Faith, Social Justice in a Multifaith World, and more
- Hosted two Quaker scholars in the fall: Rhiannon Grant and Noeleen McIlveena
- Hosting weekly Experiment with Silence for Faculty & Staff with Sara Beth Terrell
- Hosting and continuing to develop the Underground Railroad tour adding new information to the tour, training more guides, etc. Tours led by staff - over 400 folks in the past year.
- Wess published a new book, co-edited with Rhiannon Grant in fall of 2023: The Quaker World
- Liz developed the Free Store, supported the Alumni Search, various community activities and free press
- Meagan created the Multifaith Calendar. Working with various volunteers and students For student led programming. Hosted "connecting conversations."

Gratefully,

Notes from Meagan Holleman - Multifaith Collaboration

Practicing radical hospitality and acknowledging the Light in all people, Guilford College welcomes people of all faith and non-faith expressions. Students are encouraged to explore their spirituality personally and academically. The goal of the Multifaith Coordinator and Chaplain for Students at the Friends Center is to assist students in this exploration. Meagan Holleman has done much over the past year to assist students directly and to continue to develop structures within the Friends Center to provide students with the resources they need on their own path of spiritual and religious exploration.

Importantly, much of Meagan's work is intended to be responsive to the needs of the Guilford Community. In what follows, we outline the programmatic efforts of Meagan in her capacity as the Multifaith Coordinator and Chaplain for Students. However, amidst these efforts to build a marked infrastructure for interfaith dialogue and worship at Guilford, Meagan attended to many unexpected and difficult campus and student crises. These visits to hospital rooms, dorm rooms, and faculty offices were often the "heart" of the work that Meagan provided this year, alongside the rest of the Friends Center staff. The work of providing presence and compassion during these difficult moments is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify. We will simply say here, prior to diving into the programmatic efforts by Meagan this school year, that it is an honor and privilege to walk alongside members of the Guilford Community across all faiths during their most trying and difficult times. Meagan, along with the members of the Friends Center staff, holds that privilege with great tenderness.

Conferences and Cultivating Student Leaders

In August 2022, Meagan attended Interfaith America's Interfaith Leadership Summit in Chicago, Illinois, accompanied by two students (Jim Glenn '24 and Ellie Dieth '25). Guilford was well-represented by these students under Meagan's leadership. Jim and Ellie went to the Summit with the passion to bring people together and left better equipped to do so on Guilford's campus and in the larger Greensboro community.

Additionally, while in Chicago, Meagan and Jim attended the Building Interfaith Leadership Initiative (BILI) orientation. For the 2022-2023 academic year, the Building Interfaith Leadership Initiative (BILI) Launchpad Fellowship selected 20 outstanding undergraduate students from a national pool of nominees who demonstrated their commitment to interreligious and cross-cultural engagement on their respective campuses. Guilford's own Jim Glenn '24 applied to the program during summer 2022, and under the supervision and direction of Meagan Holleman, was accepted to the program. The orientation in August, alongside the Interfaith Leadership Summit, was a formative kick-off to the year for both Jim and Meagan.

Throughout the 2022-2023 academic year, Jim built strong connections with peers from colleges and universities across the country; further developed interpersonal communication skills, including dialogue across different religious identities, worldviews, and life experiences; gained foundational interreligious literacy through the study of texts, practices, and ideas; and much more. In addition to monthly virtual meetings throughout the year, Meagan and Jim traveled to Washington, DC in January 2023 to continue their work with the fellowship.

While in Washington, DC, in January 2023, Meagan and Jim attended the Q Christian Fellowship Conference, an annual gathering where LGBTQIA+ Christians gather for worship, fellowship, workshops, and keynote speakers. The theme of the conference was "Liberated to Love," which focused on cultivating radical belonging for LGBTQIA+ Christians and allies. While there, Meagan and Jim gathered ideas about how to best support LGBTQIA+ students of faith at Guilford College.

Connecting with Local Congregations

During the Fall 2022 semester, Meagan taught MYCQ100 to first-year students. The title of the course was "Better Together: Social Justice in a Multifaith World." Meagan's class visited several faith communities in Greensboro and learned about their involvements in a variety of social change movements. Meagan taught this class again during the Spring 2023 semester. In addition to exposing students to a diverse set of faith traditions, teaching this class allowed

Meagan to deepen on-going relationships with local clergy and to brainstorm with them about further opportunities for partnerships between Guilford College and these congregations.

Also during Fall 2022, Meagan collaborated with the Office of Student Leadership and Engagement and the Campus Activities Board to host Guilford College's first Places of Worship Fair, offered concurrently with the traditional Student Activities Fair. Twelve local congregations – representing faith traditions and denominations across Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Unitarian Universalism – joined together to share opportunities to engage with their faith communities. Finding a faith community to “call home” during their journey at Guilford College is vital for many students. Hosting this Places of Worship Fair offered students an opportunity to discover congregations in which they could grow roots, receive support, foster spiritual growth, and participate in community involvement. Students were also shown the new [Worship Opportunities in Greensboro Guide](#), which includes almost 40 local faith communities, listed by religious tradition and denomination, so students can easily find a place of worship that meets their needs.

Interfaith Religious Life on Campus

For both the Fall and Spring semesters, we continued our tradition of publishing a Multifaith Calendar. This calendar tries to include the major holidays within various religious identities and traditions represented among students, faculty, and staff at Guilford College. We produce and distribute this calendar to educate and remind the members of our community of the celebrations of their peers.

During the fall semester, Friends Center celebrated the Feast of St. Francis by blessing pets from across campus. Meagan invited students with service and emotional support animals to bring their furry companions for blessings and treats. Additionally, Jewish students had the opportunity to fellowship at a community lunch and Shabbat dinner at a professor's home.

In the Spring of 2023, we were thrilled to host fifteen Guilford Community Meetings for Worship. Each Wednesday from 1:30pm-2pm, students, faculty, staff, and members of the wider Greensboro community gathered in the Moon Room to pause and be present with each other. Throughout the semester, faith communities worked on a rotating basis to plan worship. We had 13 incredible speakers including Wess Daniels (Quaker), Zhihong Chen (Muslim), Rev. Wesley Morris (Christian), Rabbi Libby Fisher (Jewish), Rev. James Blay (Christian), John Kernodle (Buddhist), Sanjeev Choudhary (Hindu), Rabbi Joshua Ben-Gideon (Jewish), Sam Jackson (Muslim), Rev. Sadie Lansdale (Unitarian Universalist), Rev. Kevin Matthews (Christian), Amelia Blanchard (Christian), and Taleisha Bowen (Christian). In addition to a variety of faith traditions, these speakers represent leaders across Guilford's campus and community organizations and congregations with which the Friends Center partners. Additionally, for the two remaining weeks, students from multiple faith traditions worked together with Friends Center staff to plan an intentional interfaith-themed worship. Looking forward to the future, we hope to continue growing awareness across campus of this new tradition, but we were extremely pleased with the community we were able to form and sustain through these Wednesday afternoon meetings.

In this midst of weekly meetings for worship, the Spring semester brought celebrating Ash Wednesday by offering ashes-to-go on the quad and bringing lent to a close with another partnership with First Friends Meeting to plan a beautiful Easter Sunrise Meeting for Worship. Also throughout this academic year, we hosted three Connecting Conversations. These are events intended to park interfaith dialogue, sharing, listening, learning, and teaching concerning diverse topics. During these conversations, participants engage in group activities, guided discussions, and reflection. This year, our speakers were Rev. Erica Saunders (Communications Manager at Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America), Dr. Sonalini Sapra (Associate Director for the Center for Principled Problem Solving and Excellence in Teaching), and Dr. Anna Holleman (Postdoctoral Research Associate at Duke University's Clergy Health Initiative).

During Ramadan, the Friends Center sought to both support Muslim members of the Guilford Community, as well as to educate the non-Muslim members of the Guilford Community about this important religious holiday. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting, prayer, reflection and community. Ramadan in 2023 was held from the evening of March 22 through the evening of April 21. During this time, Meagan organized three Iftar meals for Muslim members of Guilford's faculty, staff, and students at Nazareth's Bread Company, a local restaurant owned by a Muslim family in Greensboro. Iftar is the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset. The Friends Center was able to provide these three Iftar meals to Muslim individuals

and allies. Additionally, at each of the three Iftar meals, at least one other non-Muslim member of the Guilford Community joined Meagan and the Muslim members of the Guilford Community. These meals were an opportunity for community building and spiritual discussions across religious traditions.

Looking Forward to the 2023-2024 Academic Year

Looking toward the 2023-2024 academic year, Meagan and the rest of the Friends Center Staff plan to continue offering the above programming to the Guilford Community. Meagan will continue to develop and expand partnerships with faith communities across Greensboro, seek out and attend conferences and other opportunities for professional development – both personally and on behalf of student leaders at the Friends Center, facilitate student exposure to interfaith worship through weekly on-campus worship opportunities, attend to the specific needs of individuals on Guilford's campus from historically marginalized religious communities, and create safe space for the often difficult work of interfaith dialogue.

Additionally, Meagan plans to expand upon the efforts of last year in some key areas, such as:

- Planning a Fall Break spiritual retreat for students,
- Hosting a spiritual life welcome gathering,
- Working with local faith communities to plan visits and interfaith community service days,
- And much more!

Notes from Liz Nicholson - Quaker Leadership Scholars Program

The 2022-2023 academic year was a building and deepening year for the QLSP community. It was our first full year returning to in-person worship, service opportunities, and programming. Coming back from the peak pandemic challenges, at times students struggled with accountability. We created community commitments, consistently provided opportunities for rest, play, connection, and worship which students reported was life giving in their very busy lives, and allowed them to pause, reflect, and build trust with themselves and each other. Our weekly worships a highlight and were often co-led by students, community members, and Friends Center staff. We were grateful to have many guests and Friends from the local Quaker communities join or lead worship spaces, conversations in QLSP Modules, and service projects throughout the year—thank you! We had seven module offerings where students got to engage in community building, scholarship, and engaged practice:

- Testimony and Practice, and The Practice of Silence with Wess
- Quakers & Non-Violent Direct Action, and Decolonizing Quakers with Liz
- Widening the Interfaith Circle with Meagan
- Women Who Speak for God: Prophetesses in the Bible with Ashley Wilcox
- Alternatives to Violence Project Basic Workshop with Kathy Adams and Caiden Haarvig

Some student highlights from the year include: leadership from Jim Glenn 24' and Katy Farr 24' in opening and running the "Quaker Closet" a mutual aid free-store project on campus, student senior service project from Brandon Sisnett 23' addressing non-native plant species in the Guilford woods, senior Anisgul Stanikzai 23' receiving the Algernon Sydney Sullivan Award for her work with refugee families in ECAR, senior Kennedy Nzekwe 23' was awarded the Intercultural Engagement Center's Martin Luther King Leadership Award for his leadership of the African Student Association on campus, first years Destini Nyorkor 26', and Will Beardsley 26' joined Director Liz Nicholson to attend the first Quaker Leadership Conference at ESR, and senior Liz Poole 23' was awarded the Judith Weller Harvey Award in Campus Ministry for her leadership in QLSP. There were so many joys to celebrate, and students doing incredible work on campus, and in our wider communities.

Nine of our QLSP scholars were honored in our QLSP graduation gathering; Teagan Gilliam, Kenny Nzekwe, Jocelyn Okese, Avery Edwards, Lydia Saunders, Liz Poole, Gabriela Vazquez, Brandon Sisnett, and Anisgul Stanikzai were given a print by artist Ricardo Levins Morales, prayer cards from Deborah Shaw, and a Quaker Minute of Introduction with gifts

named by members of their community. We are so proud of them and know their impact will continue to shape the program and campus.

This fall, we are excited to welcome eight incoming first year students, two second year transfer students, and five current Guilford students to the program. These incoming QLSPer's will start the year together a pre-term orientation which will be held at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary for a time of grounding in selves, spirit, and community before jumping into Guilford academics! We are looking forward to another year of spiritual deepening, community building, reflection, mutually reciprocal service, learning, and relationships in QLSP and our wider Quaker community. Please reach out to Liz if you would like to learn more about ways to support the program or be involved!

Finally, there are a couple upcoming events to know about:

- August 16 - We welcome new QLSP students to campus
- August 23 - Classes begin
- Sept 28 - 1:30-3:00 - Diane Faison presents "Harriet Tubman," a live performance in the Moon Room.
- Sept 28-Oct 1 - Homecoming
- Special Quaker Visitor - Dwight Dunston is visiting late October - TBA

Thank you again for all of your support!

Sincerely,

C. Wess Daniels

William R. Rogers Director of Friends Center and Quaker Studies at Guilford College