

FRIENDS UNITED MEETING REPORT

Great Plains Yearly Meeting – 2023

Cliff Loesch

(co-opting thoughts of Emily Provance)

A few years back, New York Yearly Meeting posted its list of nominations. Emily Provance saw her name on the list as a representative to Friends United Meeting. This was minutes before the nominations would be shared with the representatives for approval. Emily quickly found someone on the nominating committee to ask about this. She was told, “We’re putting you on the board of Friends United Meeting.” Emily said, “Shouldn’t you have asked me first?!” The reply: “You mean we didn’t?” After staring at each other a moment, the person said, “It must have been a typo. Will you do it?” And Emily says, “That’s how a typo put me on the board of FUM.”

For my FUM report this year, I want to share what Emily Provance said about FUM in a Facebook post in January of this year. Her thoughts capture my own feelings about this big, diverse family of Friends.

Emily Provance:

“It’s been a big part of my life ever since. I love the people of Friends United Meeting. I love them in part because they’re all so different. We are reaching across cultures, across conflicting theological understandings, across class differences and countries, across races, across worship styles, and we’re committed to following God together in very real and concrete ways.

“We pray together with words and bodies, but we also pray together in action. We feed people who are hungry. We educate children. We intervene in violent situations. We provide health care. We put women in positions of leadership in places where that is profoundly counter-cultural. And we stick it out when things get hard. And they do get hard. They get very hard.

“FUM has a lot of flaws. We are working on them. But after long meetings, or when I’m drafting articles, or when I’m feeling discouraged about something I can’t make happen, I remind myself that FUM is also the difference for some people between clean water and dirty water. And I think about the extraordinary lessons I’ve learned about God and our planet and humanity from the people I’ve met all over the world.

“Anyway. I've long since decided that what happened that day on the porch was a God-typo.

“This summer, there's an FUM triennial gathering in Kenya. You can go if you want to. And also, that triennial will be the end of my second three-year term as a board rep from New York Yearly Meeting. That means I have to rotate off.

“There are other ways I can stay connected, and I will, but I've been thinking about what feels important to do before my time on the general board ends. One thing I'd very much like to do is visit with folks about Friends United Meeting. The nine cats I'm currently staying with prefer that I not abandon them to travel, but if your meeting or church or worship group or region or book group or dinner club or next door neighbors are gathering electronically, I would love to join in and talk with you. I can tell stories, answer questions, give you updates about FUM if you already know a lot about it or explain the basics if you don't know much yet.

“It's a big and complicated and wonderful thing in a bigger and complicateder and kind of wonderful world. In other words, it's worth talking about.”

From Cliff Loesch:

I have been on the FUM Board, representing GPYM for all but three years since 1996. I am hoping to cycle off the board now (finally). Being involved with FUM has been a tremendous experience. I love this big family of Friends, and plan to stay connected in other ways from now on.