I love a good story.

Some humor, some adventure, maybe romance, and a bit of intrigue are all elements of the kinds of stories I like. Mostly I like the stories that describe some movement forward. Happy endings are always good.

I’m fortunate to hear great stories from time to time from friends in our local meetings. Stories of God at work in tangible ways, stories of healing, renewal, unexpected blessing, even the stories of a life well-lived coming to an end.

Sometimes sharing a story is not for shared delight but to share the burden, to risk taking a part of us that is hurting and hold it out for others to see. When I get brave enough to share about something I am fretting about it takes some of the heaviness and worry away. We are not often eager to share these things with one another, it can be humbling. But I am convinced that our shared stories of success and our stories of our shortcomings knit us together. It requires trust and a commitment to good listening.

Recently, I have been taken with how many of us wrestle with the issue of poor mental health. It seems like the stories of grappling with our depression/anxiety, trying to help our loved ones navigate mental health challenges, and the everyday influences of fragile mental health in the world around us are pervasive.

I have no doubt that poor mental health is on the rise. I have heard folks share their own story of struggle with another person who then begins to respond with their own similar struggles. People that might not agree on a lot but who share a story of pain and doubt. That shared burden helps us see one another as more than a set of beliefs or some other stereotype and helps us recognize that this person is much more like me than I might have thought. This person lays awake at night worrying about a child or a sibling who is in a dark place…..just like I do.

Friends, we need each other. We need to share our stories of joy and our stories of doubt and even failure. We have a hurting world that needs a safe place to tell their story and find others who will walk alongside; who won’t judge them, but will embrace them.

I have high hopes that our local meetings will take on and deepen the challenge laid out by Quaker author Elton Trueblood; “…the creation of centers of loving fellowship, which will in turn infect the world” (Company of the Committed, pg. 113). Would the broader community describe your meeting that way? Would you characterize your meeting as a “loving fellowship”? Is there room for folks to live out the story of their lives within our meeting? Will our love be stretched and expanded to accompany our fellow humans as they face into mental health struggles? Will we let others accompany us when we struggle with the same?

Our 2024 Annual Sessions theme of Embracing God’s Abundance is not just a flowery description of some pipe dream. It is a challenge to each of us to both actively embrace and to share with others the abundance we experience. As we get closer to our July sessions, I hope you will pay attention to see where that abundance appears even if it is a small flicker. How can we help one another fan that spark to flame? Can we/ will we be that for each other? Can we be the Christ-Light for those who, like us, struggle in the darkness at times?