



## Finding Freedom Among Wild Things

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A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of travelling with UCC National staff colleagues to the Wild Goose Festival in Hot Springs, North Carolina. Together, we hosted the UCC hospitality tent and met many incredible human beings who had travelled near and far to attend this eccentric gathering at the intersection of faith, art and social justice.

One of the key characteristics of the festival that I cherished throughout the entire weekend was the complete immersion in nature. The festival took place under the canopy of majestic Carolina trees in the valley of the Smoky Mountains right alongside the river. Cell service was extremely limited, so we were quite literally forced to remove ourselves from the outside world and social media and be present amongst the wild things around us.

Together, we learned from researchers, authors and activists all pursuing a more loving and just world. We made new friends effortlessly while sharing similar stories of pain and joy, and we found healing in belonging with one another. In his poem, "The Peace of Wild Things," Wendell Berry writes about the gifts the natural world offers us in finding peace, rest and freedom. The Wild Goose Festival curated a community along the river, under the trees, allowing us to free to be in our bodies, free of despair, free to feel deeply. I heard over and over again, people felt they were able to bring their fullest selves without shame. As we stood and danced amongst the peace of the wild things, we embodied their peaceful presence ourselves.

I returned to the Washington office feeling renewed and restored, incredibly grateful for an opportunity to have a few days away from the political chaos we witness here on a daily basis. The Wild Goose Festival was a humble reminder to me to seek moments of refuge when the despair of the world grows too heavy. As justice advocates, finding peace and restoration is incredibly valuable to sustain us in our work. Wherever your place of peace may be, may we find freedom in what

the natural world offers us.

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