

Did You Feel What I Felt?

By Dawn Amos

Have you ever been part of a deeply gathered meeting, only to wonder later whether your experience was really the group's experience? My two most vivid memories of deeply gathered meetings were here in Illinois. One was at a Blue River Quarterly business session where we labored long over a difficult and important issue, and the other was at Illinois Yearly Meeting in 2004, during the address by Christopher Sammond. I have since wondered whether my perceptions were the same as others in the meeting that evening. Recently I asked IYM Friends to tell me a little about their experience of the Sammond talk. I was a bit surprised by the variety of responses.

In my case, the address and ensuing worship practically knocked my socks off.

Christopher began by spiraling gently around an invitation to recall a child-like, tender-hearted connection to God, not shielded and armored with "will" and ego the way most adults engage with the world. I had no idea until later how vulnerable I become by accepting this invitation.

Next, Christopher shared two personal stories that helped me understand the ways in which we all carry emotional wounds, and how those old wounds can be triggered in the here and now. He explained how we might better cope with those situations in which we are triggered, and when we understand that others have been triggered. The key is to keep that same tender openness, to be honest and simple about sharing our feelings, and not pin blame. At the same time, it is important to resist minimizing another person's pain. Sammond said about a hurtful encounter with someone in his yearly meeting, "My trying to explain myself is a way of defending myself. I can't offer my tender open heart to him if I'm trying to say, 'Well, I really

didn't screw up. Listen. Hear me out.' It doesn't matter -- it's not helpful."

So far in the talk, I could be in a very open, accepting place. Then Christopher turned to the issue of racism. And in the blow-ups that I've witnessed between white Friends and Friends of color, usually it hinges around the fact that white folk do not understand or see systemic racism and when people of color talk about their experience in the framework of systemic racism, the white people respond defensively, like I did to that person in Yearly Meeting.

If you find yourself thinking "What systemic racism?" or "I'm not racist!" there is every reason for you to read this section of Christopher's talk. For me, this moment was devastating, and yet it also took a big load from me. For once I could give up my fear of being racist, my shame and guilt at living in a racist culture, and my defensiveness.

These are heavy burdens that completely get in the way of healing an ancient wound. Hearing, accepting, and validating other people's pain is the first step.

What you can't get by reading the transcript is that Christopher's address seemed to transfix the meeting. I had the physical sensation of a great weight holding me to the bench, like gravity had increased tenfold. It also felt like being in shock after hearing stunning, profound news. We remained in worship for a long time. A few messages were shared, and someone invited us to close. We just *couldn't rise*. More worship and more messages ensued. Again we were released by a speaker, and again we could not rise. Not until someone began singing "We Shall Overcome" did the spell seem to break.

This experience was partly incorporated into the IYM Epistle of 2004. Coupled with other messages of the 2004 yearly meeting sessions, IYM

I had the physical sensation of a great weight holding me to the bench, like gravity had increased tenfold. — Dawn Amos

was inspired to sponsor two Kenyan Friends to attend the World Gathering of Young Friends, and the seed of an idea — of a friendship between IYM and an African yearly meeting — was born.

But how did others experience this worship session?

One Friend said, “I remember that the meeting did not want to end; people stayed sitting after it was done, as if the communion was still in effect.” Another Friend agreed: “For me, the most powerful thing about that evening was that it was the only time I’ve ever felt that worship was totally under the control of the Spirit. We were not able to come out of it until the Spirit let us go. A few people tried to end it, perhaps thinking of the speaker’s need for rest, or of the parents’ need to get to their children, but we were not able to break out of the hold that God had on us. The worship was deep, cleansing, and hopeful.”

And another Friend shared my experience: “My clearest memory of that evening was how palpable the sense of God’s presence was for most of us in that room. How we did not get up and leave when the person closing the worship broke the silence with her handshake.”

Yet there are other impressions, too. “I felt there was a bit of ego in his message. And yet, in many ways to me, he was like a prophet, crying in the wilderness regardless of the readiness of those to hear. [...] In retrospect, I could see that some aspects of his talk were perhaps not entirely spirit led.”

“Christopher gave his message in a straightforward manner, revealed himself as a person who knows he has sometimes hurt

others, even if it was not his intent and also as a person who himself has been wounded. It was not an unfamiliar message, yet his directness made it possible for many of us in the room that night to take it in at a deeper level.”

And also, “He took great risk in doing that, not only in being totally open about himself, but in bringing us a message that could be predicted to shake us, and bringing it in such a way that we could not reject the shaking.”

Friends, that experience left me with a spiritual seed, which rubs and annoys until it is tended into softness, germination and growth. God now makes me very uncomfortable when I neglect the wound of racism. Perhaps as a Yearly Meeting we will tend the seed of an idea from 2004, of a friendship with an African yearly meeting. And perhaps one day this will help heal our wounds.

You can read the text of the Sammond address at http://iym.quaker.org/2004book/Christopher_Sammond.rtf. The 2004 Epistle is at <http://iym.quaker.org/2004book/exep.htm>



In meetinghouse at IYM 2005

Dismantling the Dormitory

Carol Bartles, Trustee

The dormitory on the Yearly Meeting site has served many families and a wide range of Friends since 1960. Designed to hold up to 120 people, this structure served as a living example of simplicity.

At the 2005 Annual Session of IYM, Friends decided to dismantle the IYM dormitory, recycle and reuse all materials in the building. The wood will be reused to build cabins in the campground.

Here are several photos of the deconstruction of the dormitory. Five members of the Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage of Rutledge, Missouri, stayed in the Junior Yearly Meetinghouse March 13 - 22 and took the dormitory apart — board by board. They removed nails from the plywood and all boards that can be reused in construction. The materials have been stacked and covered with tarps, waiting to be used in the construction of cabins. The fir flooring and floor joist have been cut into sections 12' x 16'.



New Dreams at Winter Retreat

By Mariellen Gilpin

Thirty-seven Friends drove through an Andrew Wyeth painting — a fresh snowfall along the Illinois River valley — arriving at Camp Menno Haven the weekend of February 11-12. Many came with a sense of specific mission (wanting workshops moving from one local meeting to another, for instance, or retreats to teach spiritual nurturing skills). But just as many Friends came simply because they wanted to help out with the continuing process of discernment — or as one Friend put it, “Mariellen leaned on me *really hard* to come — and I’m glad I did!”

Friends gathered in interest groups to season the Dream Gathering information (reported at IYM ‘05 after a year-long process of deeply listening to our monthly meetings’ felt needs). We considered the *value* of the information, the *trends* in the data, and made *recommendations*. These fruits of our discussion were our gift to the IYM Standing Committees, to use as they are led. It was the sense of the meeting that the results of the Winter Retreat needed further seasoning in the Standing Committees, and that the Standing Committees should report back to the monthly meetings by this coming fall. In between Friends ate (the old camp cook must have been hired away by the Cordon Bleu; sorry), napped, traded stories, caught up on one another’s lives, worked jigsaw puzzles into the wee hours of the morning, and walked in the woods.

Some of the exciting results of the Winter Retreat ‘06 were a joint meeting of Environmental Concerns and Peace Resources interest groups — a meeting so productive that they want to have the two Standing Committees meet together soon. And Friends saw that several interest groups were calling for retreats and work-



shops at other times than the annual sessions — retreats on spiritual nurture, or peace, or the environment. It’s not just Young Friends who want midwinter Quakes!

A visioning process has begun as a result of the Winter Retreat; we dream of Winter Retreat ‘07 becoming several simultaneous gatherings of Friends interested in the environment, or peace, or spiritual nurture, each group in its own meeting space at Menno Haven the same weekend. We dream of constructing email lists of Friends in all our local meetings who have a common concern for some issue (like peace), so that we can get the word out about these retreats to the people who will be most attracted. We dream of mealtimes and social times at Winter Retreat ‘07 where Friends can meet Friends with interests both alike and different, and discover how very much they need to know these Friends better. Stay tuned for annual session’s discernment about a Winter Retreat in ‘07!

It’s just what we do...

By Julia Pantoga

In each issue of *Among Friends*, the Quaker Volunteer Service, Training and Witness Committee (QVSTWC) will be highlighting volun-

teer service experience of one or more of our community members. This month we interviewed one of our young people, Trevor Munroe about his past service work and hopes for future work.

1. What projects have you participated in?

Several with my mom, including: Friends Disaster Service and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Weekend Workcamps. Volunteer service work was how we spent most of our “vacations.” Later, on my own, I volunteered at Pine Ridge with the Lakota Native Americans. There I did work with others on building houses for tribal members.

2. What was meaningful to you about this experience?

Part of the time I stayed with a family in their house. That was important. I spent time talking and listening to native music and other music with people who had been raised on the reservation. We compared views on spiritual beliefs. I appreciated being able to learn about Native American culture and their problems.

3. What did you learn?

I was interested in hearing a man involved in teaching the Lakota language and culture to others on the reservation. He explained that their culture is in decline. Much work is needed to keep

the culture and language alive. Also I was sad and it was sort of shocking to see sign after sign on the sides of the road we used. Each sign marked a place where an individual had been killed in a drunk driving accident. There is a lot of alcoholism, and a lot of deaths from it. Yet, with all the sadness, the experience, and seeing the work of tribal leaders, was uplifting.

4. Will you continue to do volunteer service?

Yes! The work at Pine Ridge changed me. I saw the importance of work and how it actually and directly helps people. “I got to offer comfort to people.” The spiritual aspect was very strong. It was in the connection with others, with people helping each other and doing it together.

5. What do you think you might learn if you go to Africa for volunteer service with the African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI)?

I’m interested to learn about Quakers in Africa. I would like to understand the situation of Africans and how colonialism has affected them and how their lives are today. African music is of interest, too. I am young and have no commitments or obligations now, and this would be an opportunity to offer help in whatever way I can.

Automatic Giving to IYM?

Several people have wondered how to go about adding a donation to IYM to their monthly budgets, aside from writing a paper check each month. The Finance Committee has looked into electronic giving to IYM, and unfortunately most of the electronic systems you are familiar with would diminish your gift to the yearly meeting by nearly 3 percent. For other kinds of collections, that is a worthwhile fee, but for voluntary giving, there are better solutions.

One great technique is for you to initiate an automatic electronic/paper check using your online bill-pay system. Many people use online bill payment offered by their banks to send checks and electronic transfers each month, often automatically. My own bank provides me this service for free because I auto-deposit my paycheck to my account. This saves on envelopes and stamps. I also use this for my monthly meeting donation. It is worth looking into!

If you’d like to set this up, you are now asked to send the payments via the IYM Assistant Treasurer.

Payable to: Illinois Yearly Meeting

Send to: Dawn Amos, 310 Union Grove Rd., Carbondale, IL 62903-7685, 618-457-8726

You can designate the destination of your gift, or leave it unrestricted. For example, if you prefer that your donations go toward site improvements, you can supply “PIF” for Property Improvement Fund in the memo line. Otherwise, the donation would be applied to the General Fund. Each year-end you will receive a summary statement for tax purposes, along with thanks from IYM. The giving to Illinois Yearly Meeting has been phenomenal, and we still have a ways to go with our projects and goals. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

Meeting Reports

Downers Grove

By Sue Styer

DGFM enjoyed a spring retreat led by Madeleine Van Heck, author of *Overcoming Blindspots: Strategies for Smart People Who Do Dumb Things*. The theme, "Sitting in the draft of an open mind," dealt with how to be open to those whose faith beliefs differ from our own. We try to hold a retreat once a year to help refresh our meeting.

We are moving forward slowly towards building a new meetinghouse. The recent bids from the contractors have been more than we expected, and we are now looking at ways to reduce our costs, perhaps by doing some of the work ourselves and replacing more expensive components with less expensive ones. We are hoping that we can reduce costs without having to start over with new architectural plans.

Brad Ogilvie began a nonprofit group called The Mosaic Initiative. Its goal is to eliminate HIV/AIDS from planet Earth. The initiative will do this by providing information and developing leaders where at-risk people are found; by providing scholarships to those with HIV/AIDS who are on disability who desire to return to work but require further education; and by its annual mission to Kenya to help residents develop year-round programs for education and relief work. Young Kenyan students created holiday cards that Brad sold to raise money for support work in Kenya.

Betty Clegg spent the winter with her daughter Barbara and family at The Farm in Summer-town, TN. She spent a good part of that time recovering from a broken hip. We are happy to report that Betty is now back on her feet and doing well.

Deborah Davison and Isabella Davison-Arancio

were formally welcomed into membership on October 23. We welcomed Loraine Bartnik to membership on February 22. We celebrated the membership of long-time attender Barbara Matt on February 26. We also said goodbye to Barbara and husband Joe at the same time as they prepared to move to Iowa to be nearer to their daughter.

We are sad to report that Pauline Forsythe died Feb 19, 2006. She was one of the original members of our meeting and shared a long history with us. She was remembered at a memorial service on March 11: "The world will miss Pauline's rare spirit, but those of us who knew her will carry it on."

Lake Forest

By Pam Kuhn

Lake Forest Friends Meeting happily reports another new baby in our community since our last report. Jame Roberta Sewell joined us on January 13, 2006, on her mother Irene Freutel Sewell's birthday. All are well and happy including father, Tim Sewell.

Lake Forest Meeting continues to enjoy many activities which have deepened our spiritual life, helped make us aware of our role in the world and are just generally a chance to be together. I'll only touch on a few of them in this report.

The Peace and Social Concerns Committee sponsored a one-day retreat at the meetinghouse about the peace testimony. We spent the day together including reading published peace testimonies from the past. Working individually and together, we explored values, beliefs and ideas that may be part of our personal peace testimonies. Some common key characteristics arose that we viewed as important to being a Quaker peacemaker today. Some of them were: being lead by and grounded in God; prayer; agape; love; listening; relying on faith; openness; empathy; humility; Spirit-led; sacrifice; peace begins in our own hearts, rippling out;

gathered; reflective; silence; joyfulness/sense of humor; risking; letting go; compassionate toward one another; gifts to each other; not turning away; tolerance; understanding; relationships across cultures; diversity and the acceptance of it; roles models; absence of arrogance; absence of ideas/creative solutions; choosing words with precision; activism; different levels of peacemaking; perceiving need and therefore help. Our retreat was a prayerful and blessed occasion.

In this time of turmoil, we have also discussed the problem of giving information to each other without becoming a political center rather than a monthly meeting. We wrote a set of guidelines but mainly we have put someone in charge of keeping the information table in a Friendly fashion.

We have explored the *Journal of John Woolman* in our adult discussion sessions this spring. It is amazing how much is still relevant today. Friends are still laboring at Yearly Meetings much as they were in the 18th century!

It is springtime as I write this. We have been working at cleaning up our woods, cutting the buckthorn, and fixing up a secluded spot to be used both as a place for children to play and as a place of remembrance. Looking at all that needs to be done, the task seems enormous but little by little we are working together in the manner of Friends.

Peoria-Galesburg

By Elke Narkiewicz

Peoria-Galesburg Meeting remains a small intimate circle of Friends. Recently Tim and Elke Narkiewicz, along with children Stella and Hollis (currently members of Upper Fox Valley Quaker Meeting), moved to Monmouth from Batavia, Illinois.

Our Meeting occasionally receives visitors, mainly students from Knox College. We plan on

moving our worship space from the home of Chuck Schulz to a room at Knox College, with hopes of making newcomers feel more at ease and to make it more accessible for students. We would like to see our Meeting grow, as it has gotten quite small over the years. We plan to develop a simple First-Day school program for our little ones as well. When possible, we join Friends at Clear Creek Meeting for worship and fellowship on the First Sunday of the month.

South Bend

By Sue Styer

South Bend Friends managed a major production on February 19. Members Monica Tetzlaff and Brad Laird married under the care of the Meeting. Six times our usual attendance came to honor this popular couple at Meeting for Worship and for a potluck afterward. The first day school took its responsibility seriously, greeting those new to the situation, seeing that coats and food got to the right place and everyone to a seat. One of those careful ushers provided the following account:

“The Quaker Wedding was a nice experience for me because I got to hear so many different people read poems and talk about Monica and Brad. I’m really happy for them. The dancing was really fun, and the D.J. was great. He was really friendly and interesting. I think, though, that my favorite part was preparing and helping make decorations for the wedding. We made tissue paper flowers, garlands of peace doves, and hearts for a Valentine’s Day theme, helped people put the food for the potluck in the right place, and opened doors for visitors. In the ceremony, each child put a rose in a vase before the vows were exchanged.”~ Grace Lidinsky-Smith

Key to the oversight committee were the central figures of our last wedding, Bob and Madelyn Godsey. They shepherded a complex operation with love and grace.

Madelyn, as our librarian and archivist, has been working with our records and setting up a system for memorials. The first entry in our memorial book will be for Edna Wynn who died April 1 after a brief illness. Edna was a constant minister to others. She and her husband Floyd moved to the Peabody retirement community at North Manchester in 2004. They had just rejoiced with us as they returned for Monica and Brad's wedding. Meeting held a memorial meeting for Edna on April 30.

Meeting is in the midst of preparing for a retreat for visioning with Maureen Pyle at Quaker Haven camp near Syracuse on May 5 and 6.

Urbana-Champaign

By Mariellen Gilpin

Our meeting is in transition from a small dedicated group who told each other, "If we build it, they will come," to a much expanded group including people new to Quakerism as well as new to this meeting. Here are some signs of health and vigor:

- Last spring we had an Introduction to Quakerism study series, which 16 people, old and new, attended.
- Two of that group, Michael and Jacqueline Hannah, became members of meeting and shortly were married under the care of the meeting. Fourteen Friends served on two committees for clearness for membership and one committee for clearness for marriage.
- Hospitality and Transportation committee held a Pancake Brunch after worship. Proposed by a child member of the committee, adults and children worked together and raised almost \$200, which went to African Great Lakes Initiative/Friends Peace Teams to send an AIDS orphan to school for a year, and to Right Sharing of World Resources. The Pancake Brunch did much to unite the meeting. We are held together by syrup and the common cause; we look forward to other Pancake Brunches for AIDS orphans.

- The Peace Bazaar, now in its 34th year, invited participation from other church groups and raised over \$3000, which went to 12 local and international peace and justice initiatives.
- On Christmas Eve we held a candlelight worship and carol sing, and then a few Friends stayed after the cookies for a candlelight silent vigil.
- Friends approved a minute on Green Burial, which has been forwarded to Blue River Quarterly for their approval as well.
- An all-meeting memorial meeting for worship, patterned after those held at IYM during the annual session, was suggested this spring. Friends were invited to reflect on the lives of Friends, friends, and family who have died. We intend to make this an annual event in the life of the meeting.
- Jacqueline Hannah has organized monthly silent mini-retreats, to be held on Saturdays before second Sundays. These retreats feature both periods for silent worship and periods for "active silence," during which Friends may read, write in their journals, do crafts, go for walks, or do other activities which help them center. The first of these silent mini-retreats will be held April 8, and Friends who live nearby are warmly invited to join us.
- Dorothy Neumann and Carrie Melin organized a Meditation on Peace, to which other churches were invited. We hope there will be many more such events, hosted in different churches.
- Peace and Service committee, with Charlotte Green as convener, has initiated contacts with several local faith groups, and jointly sponsored two Hiroshima Day events, a press conference speaking out against the war in Iraq, an interfaith radio show called Acting on Faith, and has helped a local Methodist Church start a peace studies group for their congregation.
- A lively First-Day School for Wee Friends has been in existence since we moved into the new meetinghouse. Recently a class for Tween Friends with five eleven-year-olds got underway, reading *Lives That Speak*. They

worked at Catholic Worker House one Sunday morning and enjoyed it very much. Plans are underway for a First Day School garden behind the meetinghouse, featuring tomatoes and peppers.

- We're trying to expand our intergenerational acquaintanceship in meeting. Religious Education committee recently sponsored an Intergenerational Sunday, when Friends were invited to share one of several fun and meaningful activities. Friends had a good time, and hope for many similar events soon.

- A Spiritual Journeys series during February and March featured both new and old Friends, and drew groups of ten to fifteen to hear the talks, which occurred at 9:30 on Sunday mornings. There has been deep sharing and authentic witness in these talks, and wor-

ship afterwards has been deep and reflective.

- Ministry and Oversight committee and Religious Education committee are collaborating to increase the participation of Friends without young children in the religious education of our children. When the new Tween Friend group started, there were as many adults and kids present; we doubt that will be a trend, but Friends are rising to the challenge.

- Worship is often completely silent, with sometimes a living sense of the Presence. We are hearing new voices in worship, and we are excited to have them.

New voices, new ideas, new energy are rippling through the life of our meeting. There is a rich symphony of Spirit in our midst. Y'all come visit soon, y'hear?

Minute on Green Burial

Approved at monthly Meeting for Business, January 15, 2006, at Urbana-Champaign meeting:

Minute: "Green burial" refers to a method of body disposal that involves no embalming, minimal casket/shroud, no grave liner, and minimal grave marker. The intent in green burial is for the body to decompose in the ground naturally and quickly. In a green burial cemetery, the "perpetual care" portion of the plot fee is devoted to restoration and maintenance of the area as a nature preserve (forest,) rather than as a lawn.

It is the sense of the Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting that green burial is in accord with Quaker testimonies of simplicity, equality, and environmental care. We support the concept of green burial becoming an available option in our locality, and we recommend to Blue River Quarterly, Illinois Yearly Meeting, and indeed to all Friends, consideration of a minute similar to this one.

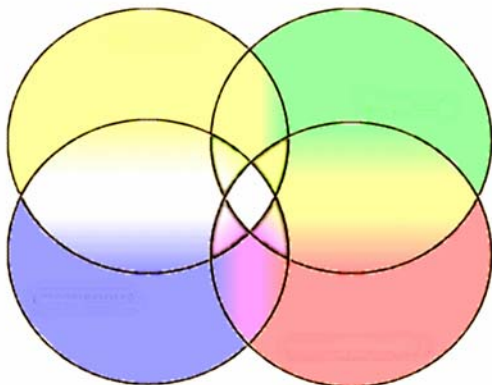
Other Reports

Why Friends World Committee for Consultation?

By Dawn Amos

Why should Illinois Yearly Meeting participate in FWCC? I would like to answer this question by sharing some of what I have learned this spring. Two hundred Friends from North, Central and South America met at Chiquimula, Guatemala, in mid-March, 2006. Not since the early 1990's has the Section of the Americas annual meeting been held south of the U.S. border, and it allowed for many more Latin American Friends to attend. The Section's mission is "In bringing Friends together *face to face* and *heart-to-heart* across traditions and national borders, FWCC Section of the Americas seeks to promote exchanges that advance spiritual renewal and vitality within the Religious Society of Friends." There are many worship styles or traditions among Friends, and in fact the "liberal, unprogrammed" branch is much smaller than most of the others. It can be a challenge just to get two or four Friends from these branches to have a meaningful conversation. Yet we all call ourselves Friends!

If you imagined the main four branches of Friends in a diagram, it might look like this:



The Friends who participate in FWCC either are, or usually will soon find themselves, along the interior "X" where their branch intersects with one or more others. That is, as a Friend from the unprogrammed tradition, I might have more in common with Conservative Friends than with Evangelical Friends. In the very center, you would find Friends for whom "it's all good!" These Friends take joy in most any form of Friends worship, even if they might have a personal preference of one over the others.

There are Friends at the outer reaches of each circle who do not feel comfortable with FWCC's mission. One yearly meeting is in a period of trial affiliation with FWCC, and one of the members opposing affiliation stated "Yoke ye not with unbelievers." If Friends cannot reconcile with each other over language such as this, then how can they, with integrity, help alleviate conflict outside the Religious Society of Friends? FWCC provides a perfect forum for growing past these very real divisions to truly see that of God in every one. Indeed, the diagram shows us a lovely flower.

FWCC is divided into four regional Sections. In each Section, we also have divisions of language, not to mention geography and border controls. Spanish and English are the two official languages of the Section of the Americas, yet even for the Latin American Friends, Spanish is frequently the second tongue, as it is for us Northerners. There are many indigenous languages spoken among Friends in our Section.

So how do we overcome all these barriers? For me, the key is face-to-face meetings such as this one. In each Annual Meeting, small worship groups are organized to include the range of age, gender, worship traditions and geography. We meet twice, and we worship-share over queries related to the Meeting theme. At Chiquimula, each group had an interpreter. I

learned about the faith and works of a Bolivian pastoral Friend along with those of unprogrammed and pastoral U.S. Friends. Each person comes from a very different cultural context. We stretch to understand that Friend and that context, and it puts our own experiences into perspective.

Another key is the willingness of Friends to learn each other's languages. This doesn't mean just Spanish and English. It also means religious language -- the language of faith. Some words in one faith language, like "unbeliever," can strike at deep wounds in someone who has another faith language. On the other hand, when some Friends hear "God" or "Jesus" or "Christ" consistently referred to as "The Light", the term can seem diluted and less meaningful. We are challenged to stretch our own idea of the meaning of faith-related words, and to heal any wounds we might carry from misuse of these terms.

May I take this moment to offer thanks and praise to Illinois Yearly Meeting for being such a faithful partner in FWCC. Not every yearly meeting makes the effort to name FWCC representatives and fund their travel to the annual Section meetings. You in Illinois Yearly Meeting have provided me with some of the richest experiences of my life. I only hope to return the favor by sharing with you the excitement of working with Friends from across all the divides of language, geography and worship tradition.

Captivating Guatemalan Tours

By Dawn Amos

Before and after the FWCC Section of the Americas annual meeting in Guatemala this spring, many Friends enjoyed Antigua-area tours (one shorter, one longer) hosted by members of the monthly meetings associated with the Guatemalan Friends Scholarship/Loan Program (www.program.guatemalafriends.org). The tours are simply excellent -- we were beautifully cared for -- and not very expensive. You



can soon find out about next year's tours at www.geocities.com/guatemalastudytour.

Antigua must be one of the most picturesque towns in the world, with three dramatic volcanoes on her skyline, and lovely cobblestone streets lined with vividly painted one and two-story buildings. The buildings are otherwise nearly featureless on the street side, but as you walk along the wildly uneven sidewalks, you can peer into doorways and glimpse gorgeous courtyards. To my North American eyes, this was a reversal, since for us it is often the exterior that is showy and the interior that is sparse or dull. It made me wonder whether Guatemalan interior (spiritual) lives might tend to be richer as well.

The tour allowed us to experience antiquities such as church ruins and Mayan ruins. We also had the remarkable pleasure of visiting the homes of students benefiting from the scholarship/loan program. While poverty is deep in Guatemala, the students typically use their educations to benefit others in their hometowns. I was struck by the sincere gratitude toward God that the students expressed. We were treated to a mini concert by the sons of one of these students, who with her husband now operate a small neighborhood church not much different in size from one of our small monthly meetings.