
Gatherings: Friends General Conference '07

Praying for the Quality of Worship at The Gathering

By Mariellen Gilpin

Sue Davison, Brad Laird, Monica Tetzlaff, Sophie de la Mar, and I all went to Friends General Conference in River Falls, Wisconsin, in early July, and attended a workshop called "Rediscovering Eldering," led by Elaine Emily. I can't begin to tell you what a powerful experience it was to worship every day with a whole roomful of Friends whose calling it is to pray for the quality of worship and nurture others' spiritual lives. I will share with you a few vignettes from the workshop.

Elaine introduced the two Friends who were her spiritual nurturers during the workshop. Each morning the three of them met for worship an hour before the workshop began. The room where we met was soaked in prayer before we arrived. Both spiritual nurturers participated now and again in our discussions, but mostly they were focused on praying for us and for the quality of our worship. When we walked into the room, we fell naturally into a deep focused silence that lasted about half an hour before Elaine began to speak. That first morning when Elaine finally spoke, she smiled and said, "I can feel from the quality of the silence that you are all experienced pray-ers."

One morning we broke into pairs and took turns holding one another in the Light for a full five minutes each. We were encouraged to use whatever style of prayer we were most comfortable with. The focus person was instructed to close his or her eyes and note any impressions we received while we were being prayed for. I was the first focus person, and I dutifully closed my eyes, but not before I looked into the amazing blue eyes of Monica, my pray-er, seated across from me. My overwhelming impression

was that I was being loved, and I felt I didn't deserve this. It was an effort of will to relax into the experience and let myself be loved. Shortly I realized the love was coming to me in waves or pulses, sometimes with bursts of light.

Then it was my turn to be the pray-er, and Monica's turn to be the focus person. I thought fast, because my illness means I can't safely hold someone in the Light myself—to focus on praying for someone for a full five minutes would quickly make me hallucinate. So, I asked Jesus to hold the focus person in the Light for me, and repeated the request in various formulations, each shorter than the last, until the time was up.

Then we had an opportunity to compare impressions. I asked about the pulsing sensation, and Monica explained she had been sending love and compassion on her breath. And Monica in her turn reported that when she was focus person, she had felt she was being rocked as if in a fishing boat like those Jesus must have known. We looked at each other with amazement at this demonstration of the power of prayer to impact another. Never before had either of us known the precise instant in which we were prayed for, and never before had we focused so completely on the experience that we could receive so much information about the pray-er and her prayer. We felt the experience had been truly an intimate one; our relationship with one another was profoundly deepened and changed. We had each been loved, and we knew it in a way neither of us had ever experienced. During the group discussion, Brad warned the group we should never pray in that way for someone of the opposite sex unless there was a third person present. It was too much like falling in love. This was way more intimacy than we were ready for with someone whom we hadn't known until a few hours before.

Another day we gathered in groups of five or six; our instructions were to hold each person in the little group in the Light for a total of fifteen minutes altogether. This was difficult for me, because right after the workshop I was scheduled to

lead a group presentation devoted to promoting my book, *Discovering God as Companion*. I constantly had to rope my mind and lead it by the nose back to praying for the other people in my group. At the end I reported it had been really hard work and explained why; it turned out that another person responsible for a session immediately afterward simply hadn't tried to do the exercise. I was exhausted and yet exhilarated: the quality of the silence in that roomful of Friends all praying for one another at the same time can only be described as full of grace.

Another day we gathered in groups of three, with one person being the person with a problem, another the spiritual nurturer, and the third person observing from the point of view of the focus person's meeting. I asked to be the person with the problem, which I proceeded to air to the other two. My spiritual nurturer, Sue, helped me achieve more clarity with obvious joy to be of such service to me. And then, both Sue and Brad, the observer, volunteered to come to my second book presentation and pray me through it. I was exceedingly grateful.

And, as a matter of fact, two other Friends from the workshop also volunteered to pray my second presentation. Elaine Emily came as well, as did a number of Friends who have

written for WCTS over the years. I can't tell you what a steadying influence those five seasoned pray-ers had on me, and on the group. One of the effects of my medication is that sometimes when I'm talking off the cuff, a critical word or phrase simply escapes me, and I stand there with egg on my face while I struggle to communicate with some other phrase than the perfect one which escaped. Talking to eighty people turned out to be something I could do thanks to the five spiritual nurturers and a roomful of Friendly auditors, who seemed to understand that the book was something they wanted and needed to know about. Afterwards I was both exhilarated and at the same time aware that I'd left my knees back at the dorm room, and that I should go immediately to my room and reclaim them, preferably lying down. Two nurturers held me in the Light until I reached my room; I was carried across the campus on a bed of prayer.

The last day of the workshop, Elaine Emily asked us to form groups to write an epistle; at once I suggested we five write an epistle to Illinois yearly meeting. It was truly a gathered meeting for business; Monica wrote steadily as the four of us proposed a sentence here, a thought there, with a single dream of bringing back to IYM the deeply focused worship experiences we had had together.

Epistle to Illinois Yearly Meeting

Dearly Beloved Friends in Illinois Yearly Meeting and the monthly meetings in IYM,

The five of us, Susanna Davison, Sophie De La Mar, Brad Laird, Mariellen Gilpin, and Monica Tetzlaff, attended a Friends General Conference (FGC) workshop on eldering led by Elaine Emily and eldered by Bob Schmitt. We have experienced the power of being in a whole roomful of elders working for the quality of worship and calling out each other's gifts. We are eager to bring these experiences to IYM. We know that the old forms of eldering were laid down for good reasons, that the misuse of authority in the past leaves us wary. However, we have rediscovered the heart of eldering and its foundation in love. Elderling may also be called spiritual nurture. True eldering is rooted and grounded in love for the community and the individuals in it. It is widely understood that everyone can minister. We have experienced that ministry is deepened by eldering. An elder praying for the quality of the ministry can work as a spiritual midwife, helping birth the ministry. We acknowledge that there are many elders in IYM. It is important that we recognize and support this gift. We need to broaden our common understanding of what eldering is and to deepen our practice of it. We propose to call out elders and those who have a potential for eldering through an eldering workshop. We hope that IYM can unite with our intention.

Service

The Amos Service Trip to Kenya

Dawn Amos

Thirty-four individuals and eight groups, mostly from IYM, contributed nearly \$8,000 to send our family to Kenya to participate in an African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI) work camp during July 2007. These and many others also supported us in spirit, several of whom thanked us for what they saw as a courageous undertaking and a visit of goodwill.

We have returned home, happy and healthy, to share with you a great deal of good news. Though the media focuses on the negative, our experience in Kakamega was happy, construc-

tive, enlightening, and inspiring, if sometimes bewildering. As I've told many of you, and as you may read in our reports at <http://quakerservice.blogspot.com>, there were two lessons of the trip that best describe our experience.

The first came from 8-year-old Marlena. When an African neighbor here in Carbondale asked her what it was like in Kenya, she replied "Oh, the same as it is here." While at first I wondered what planet she had been on when we were in Africa, I came to understand that to her, people go about their lives in much the same way as here – eating, sleeping, errands, school, church, playing. This was a profound wisdom for me, because it meant that she had fully adapted to the differences, especially regarding water, elec-



Before and after pictures of work done in Kenya.