



Photo courtesy of Roy Love.

Chris and Roy Love report on Central & Southern Africa Yearly Meeting

Some sixty-three Friends from Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, plus children, with guests from Kenya and the UK, met for Central and Southern Africa Yearly Meeting at St Augustine's Priory in the attractive countryside of the eastern Free State, South Africa, near the Lesotho border, from 27 April to 3 May. Our Kenyan guest was Churchill Malimo, executive secretary of the Africa Section of the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC), based in Nairobi.

The week began with 'Summer School'. The opening session encouraged us to engage with the internet or Facebook. We considered our experiences of Meetings for Worship for Business, posed fundamental questions to a panel of 'weighty' Friends, took part in a Friendly Bible Study, and had an introduction to Alternatives to Violence, in which different Meetings in the region are involved.

The opening business session began by remembering four Friends whose lives were examples to us. Reports followed from the Yearly Meeting (YM) co-clerks (Justine Limpitlaw and Helen Holleman), the treasurer (Mark Povall), and also from various organisations in which Quakers are active, including Cape Town Quaker Peace Centre, the South African Council of Churches, the Zimbabwe Secondary Bursary Fund, Zimbabwe Food Relief Action and Phoenix Zululand, which focuses on relationships between prisoners and their families. Lee Taylor, of Friends of Hlekweni, gave an update on the Friends' new strategy, their continuing support for Samathonga and other schools in the Bulawayo area and plans for peacebuilding activities in these schools.

Reports from the Monthly Meetings included joy that Pretoria Worship Group is seeking Monthly Meeting (MM) status, and that Lesotho Allowed Meeting, whose young attenders greatly enriched the Young Friends' activities at YM, continues to be vibrant. Less happily, there was concern about depleted numbers in Botswana and Harare MMs, and the challenges faced by Harare Friends in finding a

Quaker warden for their Meeting house. On hearing of hunger amongst Zimbabwe Friends the YM made arrangements for financial help to be made available. A regular theme at this YM was how the YM could support Friends in the region.

Jennifer Kavanagh gave the Richard Gush Lecture. Using her own life's journey, Jennifer illustrated the theme of the title: 'No other: A Journey into Oneness'. By this she meant oneness with oneself, with each other and with God. She had learned to appreciate the importance of relationships, and that in working alongside people there is no such thing as 'the other'. In reflecting on major contemporary crises involving refugees, climate change and sustainability, she stressed the importance of community based actions. Jennifer concluded by reading from the Southern African version of *Advices & queries*:

'Are our lives whole? Do we divide our worlds into spiritual activities, family life, secular pursuits...? Let's make them one. Let's find the goodness in the other, the infinite in the humdrum, the wisdom in the ancestor, the eternal in the here and now.'

The YM exemplified this. Each morning began with Meeting for Worship followed by Worship Sharing groups; meals engaged us all in fellowship; new friendships were made and old ones renewed. Special interest groups included 'Integrity and the Digital Age' (especially as it affects children), a shocking film on vanishing species, and a South African example of positive social action.

In a region where Quakers and Quaker Meetings are very widely scattered, and overall numbers are small, the Yearly Meeting is of huge significance in bringing Friends together for learning, worship and the nourishment of spiritual lives. This was a truly joyful celebration and we were privileged to be part of it.

Chris and Roy are former members of Botswana and Lesotho Meetings.

Further information: <http://bit.ly/FacebookCSAYM>