

FWCC Section of the Americas Report

Submitted by Christine Ashley, Representative

April 5, 2021

I bear greetings from outgoing General Secretary of FWCC, Gretchen Castle and Executive Secretary Robin Mohr. As we began FWCC's Section of the Americas 10-day virtual annual session on March 13, 2021, (COAL) Committee of Latin America Friends memorably stated that, "God has called us to service for just such a time as this. We know that with God's help, we will meet the challenges that are coming for us in this time." Changes wrought by the pandemic have made for major adaptations to the way FWCC and Friends worked this past year. **There have been brave shifts in 2020-2021 FWCC programming to allow for vital support and nourishment of Friends during the pandemic, and some of these changes will continue after the pandemic. How FWCC plans for the present and future has also changed.**

- "Change is coming and change is already here." The 2015 Strategic Plan was laid down and a new approach to strategic planning is being employed. Twice each year, the Executive Committee will plan for the Section's next six-month period, based on assessment of relevant external circumstances. This will allow FWCC to identify the two most likely (alternative) scenarios for the following six months, which will allow FWCC to do tentative advance planning for that period. The Section has begun preparatory planning for the following year, in order to be well prepared to undertake further discernment without committing to any course of action too far in advance.
 - What comes next? The tools are so much better (as are we!) at using the tools. If the technical barriers to participation have fallen, what is possible and how will we step into these possibilities?
 - What leadership roles will Quakers take around the world on climate change, social change, racial inequality around the world? FWCC does not take positions on social or political issues, but provides a channel for Friends to find one another and cross theology, geography.
- The FWCC Traveling Ministry Corps, a speakers bureau, held training in Tacna, Peru in early 2020, and intervisitation opportunities between monthly and yearly meetings were carried out **entirely virtually via videoconferencing platforms**. Two Young Friends Meetings, World Quaker Day, a Children's Congress, the first-ever Latin Women's Congress and a Men's Conference were held virtually.
 - The virtual platform generally opened up space for more participation and so even when in-person intervisitation again becomes possible, more events will take place virtually than in the past. For example, the Latin American Women's Conference resulted in an incredible online assembly

with 300 women connected to enjoy the event (Cuba, El Salvador, United States, Bolivia, Peru, Honduras, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Mexico). The Latin American Children's Conference was headed by members of the Christian education groups of the Yearly Meeting of El Salvador and the Traveling Ministry Corps and was FWCC's first experience with programming for children. More than 300 children connected.

- In anticipation of a fundamental change of approach in how intervisitation will be undertaken throughout the Section, the Nominating Committee has not added new members to the Traveling Ministry Corps Program for the coming year
- FWCC Section of the Americas offered yearly meetings 25 grants of up to \$1000 all branches from South America, Central America, North America, and the Caribbean \$1000 (US) to meet growing technological needs during the pandemic, thanks to the Shoemaker Fund of Delaware.
- Sierra Cascades Yearly Meeting of Friends and Friends Church of North Carolina have now been approved for affiliation.
- 10 days of annual sessions lifted up a central message: isolation during the pandemic has lifted up how Friends yearn to be closer to one another and to God. It was in this way that a prayer-filled and community-felt annual sessions meeting began, carefully tending to the joy of being in communion with hundreds of Friends around the continent. Sessions held space for grief and pain, felt as a result of tragedies and insecurities over the past year. There was also much joy felt in being together: worship, bible study, workshops and prayerful business meetings were well attended, ranging from 50-350 people in attendance. The FWCC Section of the Americas Annual Sessions will now be able to meet annually, due to virtual capacity-building; come one, come all!