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November 13, 2011

...To Friends Everywhere,

We are a small group, composed of Friends of African descent, and one European American from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Virginia who gathered at the Cenacle Retreat and Conference Center to worship and have fun, to be refreshed and replenished by one another.

Early in our worship together, we found the metaphor of an oasis spoke to our condition. When we meet together, it allows the opportunity to rest and to soothe our souls, to share the sweet balm of shared experience and understanding, to renew and replenish ourselves for the return to the wider world. One Friend, weary from being isolated in her meeting, found reaffirmation of her Quaker identity and support for being Black **and** Quaker. We all recognized a yearning to be ourselves and be fully accepted in our meetings for who we are, not just a “flavoring”, but a nourishing “main dish” at the feast for the Spirit which our Meetings can provide. Another Friend recognized the renewal which comes from not having to explain who you are. For many Friends of Color, the Quaker world in North America can at times be challenging. It is not always easy to be an "only" in a group, whatever status you might occupy. To be among a group of Friends who have experienced some of the same feelings you have, allows the chance to be fortified to return to the broader world.

We know that there is work to be done in the Religious Society of Friends. We have wrestled with God, and sometimes we tire of keeping our fighting boots shined and at the ready. Many among us recognize a call to ministry, a call to help move the Religious Society of Friends toward wholeness by creating opportunity for a realistic welcome to people of color among us in meetings in the United States and Canada. We know that we must support one another to answer this call.

Our retreat time was rich with deeply grounded worship, laughter, music and singing. We visited the \*DuSable Museum, which is the first independent museum in the country dedicated to explore African-American history, and had a brief guided car tour of the South Side of Chicago, including a drive by 57<sup>th</sup> Street Meeting, the University and few doors from the Obama home! We were fortunate to have temperate weather and no precipitation!

We were blessed by our time together, and fortified to return to our work in the wider world.

Jean Marie Barch, Marvin Barnes, Joan Crawford, Janice Domanik, Jessica Easter, Debbie Evans, Steven Flowers, Margaret Jackson, Vanessa Julye, Paul Ricketts and Genevieve Wimp-McCann

\*The Museum is named for Jean Baptiste Point DuSable, a Haitian of African and French descent, who in 1779 established the trading post and permanent settlement which would become known as... Chicago.