

Among Friends

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The joy of all-age worship

Dear Friends,

I had the good fortune of finding myself in Brussels on Sunday 9th October, when the Meeting held their monthly all-age worship. We had been advised in advance that the theme would be “chocolate” and to bring some to share, together with any story associated with it.

I had picked up my favourite bar of dark chocolate with ginger whilst visiting Friends House in London – it has an excellent café and fair trade goods for sale. I was reassured to read that the cocoa producers in Ghana have a strong relationship with the company that imports the chocolate, and that their villages and communities benefit from the trade. Moreover, although I have never been to Ghana, I have a sense of connection with the country since our niece married a young man born in London of a Ghanaian family. Our much-loved great-niece, born in June, has therefore this heritage in her background.

Many Friends shared their stories of what they had brought and why – from memories of hot milk and chocolate on cold winter days as a treat at the end of



Meeting Room in Quaker House, Brussels

Photo: Marisa Johnson

the week, to special deliveries arranged from abroad, to celebrate memories of other communities people had belonged to. The nine children who were present clearly enjoyed sharing their stories, as well as the products themselves.

We were reminded that drinking chocolate had been manufactured and sold by Quakers as an alternative to alcoholic drinks, that caused much misery by making people drunk. It was held as an example of a practical and positive approach to problem solving – not just requiring people to abstain from taking alcohol, but offering a safer and delicious alternative. These days, as we struggle to come to terms with our profligate lifestyle that is so detrimental to the planet, we are enjoined to embrace simplicity, not as a privation, but as the discovery of the freedom that comes from weaning ourselves from consumption, whilst appreciating all the material and spiritual riches that we are fortunate to enjoy.

Marisa Johnson, Executive Secretary

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Undertaking a Spiritual Review of the Life of the Meeting

Sue Glover Frykman, Sweden Yearly Meeting writes:

Friends in Britain are probably very familiar with spiritual reviews. There, the tradition of reporting on the spiritual life of meetings dates back to 1682. Friends in Britain also make regular use of ‘Advices and Queries’ for reflection, inspiration and as a challenge, whereas Quakers in other parts of the Europe and Middle East Section may not be quite so conversant with them.

In June this year, at Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Meeting, two members of the YM’s Ministry and Oversight group conducted a spiritual review of the life of the Meeting. Visitors were also invited to attend. I took part and was impressed with the process. I found it inspirational. It made me think more deeply about my own Meeting, and why I go to Meeting at all. I went home from the yearly meeting with a determination to ‘spread the news’ about this valuable exercise – in the first instance to the Elders of Sweden Yearly Meeting and the contact person of the Småland Worship Group, to which I belong.

Basically, a spiritual review means becoming aware of the ‘health’ or ‘progress’ of the meeting and attending to what seems necessary. It’s an exploration of what we, the members of a meeting, think and feel about it. The questions used by Belgium and Luxembourg inquire what Meeting means to us, what our experience of Meeting for Worship is, what the Meeting is like at its best, and what we would like to explore or see more of.

In the Belgium and Luxembourg context, the review was conducted in quite a large group. Participants wrote their answers to each question on pieces of coloured paper, which were then folded up and placed in a bag. The bag was passed round the circle and each participant randomly picked out a contribution. Going around the circle, each person read out what was written on the paper they had chosen. All the written responses were then collected by the members of the Ministry and Oversight group for further discernment and action. The exercise was simple and effective. As a participant I found the spiritual review rewarding, because it offered an opportunity to connect with my own spiritual experience and journey and that of others, and to take stock of own place in the

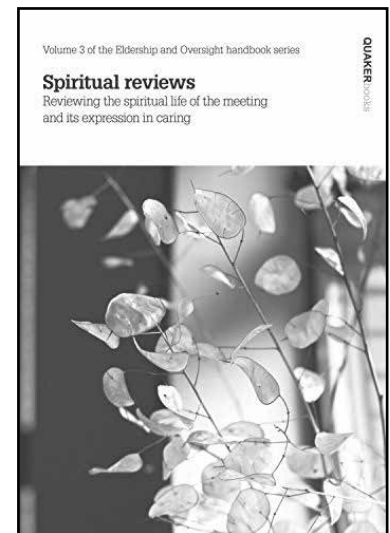
worshipping group to which I belong.

As well as being a review of what is happening now, it’s also an opportunity for change and growth. What is important is that everyone is heard and feels cared for, and that the review process fits the needs and circumstances of the group. We have

begun the process in my own worship group in Sweden. As we are few in number, and know each other well, we have chosen to respond to the questions in worship sharing format, i.e. sharing our responses to the questions out of, and in the silence, with pauses between people’s contributions. It’s interesting that verbally articulating our thoughts and feelings about our worship group as a whole, and our part in it, perhaps for the very first time, helps to clarify why we do what we do and we might be able to do better or differently. It also enables us to listen to and be open to where the spirit might be leading us.

There are different ways of conducting spiritual reviews. A very helpful booklet is “Spiritual reviews” (Volume 3 of the Eldership and Oversight handbook series), which was published in 2012 by Quaker Books, London. It’s a slim volume with 33 pages of helpful ideas and advice and can be purchased from the Quaker Book Centre at a cost of £4 (plus postage and packing if you are ordering online). The booklet outlines why spiritual reviews are valuable, how a review process can be planned, how children and young people can be involved, what kind of questions can be asked and how to engage with them. It also describes the reporting process and how the review can be taken forward.

Based on my own, albeit limited experience, I can strongly recommend the process. It could lead you and your group to new spiritual depths and heights. Who knows?



European Young Friends: All-Age Gathering in Bonn August 2016

Evelyn Shire (Britain Yearly Meeting, and formerly, Ireland Yearly Meeting) writes:

What if yours is a small yearly meeting where there are no other children the age of yours? What if you are an isolated Friend? A gathering is the chance of a Quaker community and family experience? Fifteen years ago I attended such an event - a European Friends gathering near Frankfurt where there were several young families. The small children we read stories to then, are now 20-something year-old Young Friends who had so much enjoyed this childhood experience that they decided to run another all-age gathering themselves.

So we all met in Bonn this August for a very successful, enjoyable event, and hopefully worth all the hard work. It was all part of the thirtieth anniversary celebration of European and Middle East Young Friends. Over a hundred people from a dozen countries stayed the week, and more came on the “birthday” celebration day. Most of western Europe was represented, with Poland, Russia, Georgia from further east and one Peruvian Friend representing wider World Friends. A Kenyan and a Rwandan were due to come also, but unfortunately were prevented by visa problems.

Conversations took place in many languages. But inevitably much of the event happened through English, as a world language, with some talks in German then translated. English speakers had to learn to avoid being too “powerful” in discussion. Efforts were made to help Friends who needed extra translation. Meanwhile, there were many simple parent child interactions going on, understandable even by those of us with less linguistic skills. Communicating mostly by smiles, I was allowed to watch and listen when a Russian mother read from a nursery book to her small child, and hear her language.

We were in a church-based youth hostel/centre on the edge of Bonn, with a field at the back and forest going down to the Rhine. The days were filled with a range of activities – as many as possible being all-age. (I contributed a very adapted “Appleseed” with a group of children and their parents where there were three different languages).



Family experiences

Photo by Evelyn Shire

Evenings were for bonfire parties, ceilidh, “taize” singing, and a grand, largely comic, talent show on the last night.

A theme of life stages, where experience could be shared between the generations ran through the week. There was space for quiet adult discussion type of workshops and of course lots of informal conversations. We sang a lot - about “building bridges”, and a catchy song in German which (roughly) said “whatever happens there will still be music.....” the “Finlandia” song of peace was particularly popular. It made us think of Ramallah Friends when we were told that a Friend there often sings it in meeting, and when he is absent, others sing it to remember him....

I felt the gathering was especially emotionally intense as we were meeting at this particularly uncertain and difficult time for Europe. Everyone is affected – even beyond the EU boundaries. Together we need to hold onto our vision.

We were reminded of the importance of the role Quaker Council for European Affairs plays in Brussels and expressed support for this vital work. QCEA are at present, together with Quaker Asylum and Refugee Network, doing a survey of refugee support groups across Europe and would be glad to hear from readers of the Friend. (For the survey itself: www.surveymonkey.com/r/QARN-QCEA and if you have any questions please email survey@qcea.org.)

And if you would like more information about EMEYF itself and how to support it please visit www.emeyf.org/friends-of-emeyf/

Border Meeting – At The Borderline

Susanne Odeh, German Yearly Meeting writes:

On Friday, September 9th, 31 Friends crossed various borders to get to the Centre Culturel St. Thomas in Strasbourg, France to be part of the River-Rhine-Border-Meeting.

This particular River Rhine Border Meeting has been gathering each September since 1960 ! From the onset the aim has been to tighten personal Friendship regardless of nationalities.

This year's topic was ***At the Borderline***. So, after being welcomed by the *French Team* Mike Zipser and Susanne Odeh and the exchanging of greetings from other Friends, we placed newspaper strips on the floor to lay out Europe's national borders and everyone stood where they momentarily live: France, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, England and even the Canary Islands and New Mexico, USA.

After reshuffling and repositioning ourselves to where we were born, we even had to add Cape Town, South Africa!

Saturday morning after Meeting for Worship, Renke Meuwese held this year's keynote-presentation. Renke is a Dutch Friend, fluent in all four Border Meeting languages, Dutch, German, French and English. Everybody has their specific Calling, he says. So he started in May 2016 his second time to work in the refugee camp in Calais, known as *La Lande* or *The Jungle*. He explained the history and the geography and then the Camp's set-up.

Renke is part of two Voluntary Organisations (Help Refugees.org and the local Auberge Migrants). Their work consists of a variety of jobs: woodwork and building, shopping, preparing and cooking 2000 meals, organizing the warehouse and distribution, putting up tents, giving medical aid and hygiene awareness training, running Mobile Distribution Team around the camp, legal advice and correct information (many asylum seekers have been told *fairytale* by traffickers). Every month the volunteers organize a census-- respect for their logistics: each tent can be found by number and with GPS. In July they had 9016 refugees, including 600 unaccompanied minors.

The French State provides 1500 meals a day, phone charging points and portaloos.

The camp *La Lande* has grown in size after camps



Renke Meuwese talking about his work in The Jungle, Calais Photo: Kate McNally

in Paris were closed. Also many asylum seekers hope to get a quicker result for their refugee-status, as the camp is under frequent threat of being closed down. Interestingly, only a small percentage actually wants to go to Britain!!

The refugees themselves often live in ethnic groups. We must not underestimate the need for communication in one's own language to prevent loneliness and depression. The camps' inhabitants themselves provide religious rooms, community kitchen, some education and most important: Mediation! Looking at the numbers of people living in this fairly small space (quarter of a square kilometre), relatively little crime and violence against each other happens.

Doesn't the Camp, the way it is run, attract even more and more people? Well, the people are there now, so they have to be looked after. The reasons for their migration need to be tackled.

Thank you, Renke, for this well-prepared, clear-spoken and informative presentation and the two short video films.

We had some big-group worship-sharing afterwards. After lunch, in the early afternoon, three options were being offered:

- One was to stroll around the Centre of Strasbourg, a city whose surrounding borders in history were frequently relocated to make her alternately a German, a French, a German and eventually again a French Town.



Participating in one of the exercises

Photo: Kate McNally

- The second group went to the Footbridge of *Le Jardin des deux Rives*. Some years ago, Kehl and Strasbourg, two cities on opposite banks, had a joint bi-national grand Garden project, where the River Rhine wasn't seen as a border but as the centre.
- Thirdly, some Friends met local Mennonites to review this year's wake at the Eurosatory, the world's second largest arms fair, held bi-annually in Paris, and to discuss future plans.

After everybody had returned, two discussion group sessions were programmed, one before and one after dinner.

Putting up Borders, Experiencing Borders, Crossing Borders was the topic.

We split into five small groups and placed ourselves widely-spread across the vast and slightly wild monastery garden. Due to the warm and friendly weather, we could sit there until nightfall.

As we had *expanded* the word *BORDER* from its physical-geographical definition to also its emotional, spiritual, personal and gender meaning, the discussions and worship-sharings were profound, enlightening and

Friendship-invigorating to the members of each group. The *Colourful-Cultural-Evening*, commencing at the Mediterranean hour of 9 p.m. was joyfully filled with poems, songs and a Dutch Friend's *poldering* performance. It ended with a moving epilogue and further private personal conversations.

Sunday Morning saw some *hardliners* engaging in Early-Risers' Gymnastics before breakfast and the final Plenary Session. After feedback and look-out, we had agreed to share some positive, enlightening experiences with Borders. Furthermore we shared fond memorial thoughts for Edward Haasl, our long term Belgian Friend who earlier this year had passed the final border between Life and Death. He was a man of wisdom, two nations, many languages, and together with his heartfelt roaring laughter and deep, warm voice he is a tenderly-strong rock in the history of this Border Meeting.

Local Friends joined Meeting for Worship, and after Lunch we parted with an *Au Revoir* and *Tot Ziens* in Belgium next year in September for the next River-Rhine-Border-Meeting.



Renke Meuwese and Gretchen Castle

Photo: Kate McNally

Tips for conflict management within groups

Jesús Espinoza, Barcelona Monthly Meeting, writes:

If I ask you to evoke a moment when you felt disappointed with your group of Friends, your family or your workmates, surely you will remember a good number of them easily. And if I ask whether this situation resulted in an open conflict within your group, most likely you would say “no”. Possibly you would tell me that, at the time, you found a way to manage your discomfort so that no disagreements came to light. Maybe you decided that the feelings you were experiencing were due to an excess of ego, or maybe you repressed what you felt because transmitting it to the group would not be beneficial. This is a very common attitude towards conflicts, which perceives that we that conflicts are erosive to our relationships, something that create fractures between us and our fellows. However, by refraining from managing conflicts, we are just postponing the undesired effects of disputes, which will reappear after some time.

I have been working as a practitioner in conflict management for some years, helping different kinds of groups at establishing practices to manage their in-group conflicts. Last summer I was invited to lead a workshop on conflict management at the Nordic Yearly Meeting in Ilkko, Finland. After that, a good Friend suggested I write a short text containing the main ideas beneath the workshop’s dynamics. I was very enthusiastic about that and started writing this little article, in which I would like to offer a useful introduction to the basics of in-group conflicts management, based on my professional experience, which I hope will help you in dealing with conflicts around you in an efficient way and will prevent your group from missing any opportunity for a better group-experience.

So, first of all let me start with a question: how would you describe conflict? Experts haven’t found a satisfactory and sufficiently encompassing way to define the idea of conflict. A classical definition can be taken from industrial psychology theory, which sees conflict as something that reduces production in companies and, thus, must be eradicated. However, this idea has proven to be a misconception. From a more recent perspective, some practitioners think

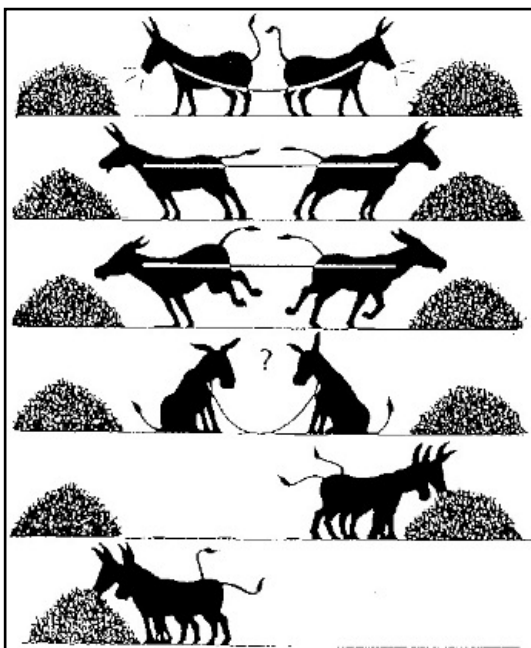
that a change of mind is needed here, as conflicts can work as a motivation to make companies go further and innovate. According to this, a conflict is a challenge that moves us to learn how to make a good administration of it. When not managed well, conflicts may become entrenched and even violent, distorting the dynamics that structure groups. Thus, it is the responsibility of the groups to find ways to constructively manage disputes arising within them. The first step to such a practice is to examine the nature of the group and build up a culture about conflict within the group, according to its needs. By doing this, we make sure that, once a conflict arises, the group is going to see it like an opportunity for development instead of an undesired trouble.

The second step is to be ready to look for rational and long-lasting responses to conflict. Have you ever been urged to make quick decisions? What were your feelings then? Usually, when facing a potentially damaging circumstance, feelings of anxiety and distress appear in us. As many people perceive conflict as something threading, they struggle to find quick solutions to it, or delegate this into somebody else invested with authority. It is a natural response: all living beings try to avoid situations that seem to be threading to them and, in the case of human beings, we also care about safeguarding our emotional homeostasis. However, ‘quick fixes’ can be a way to escape from the conflict by giving up or imposing our own criteria. As this kind of solutions is usually based on authority, fear and power differences, it is not inclusive. These fear-based solutions usually cause one of the parties in the conflict to yield too much forcedly, ending with a sense of loss and making more probable that the same conflict appears again in the future.

To facilitate the search for inclusive and endurable solutions, it is advisable to reinitiate communication among the parties in conflict. Some practitioners call this ‘confrontation’, but I like to call it ‘to give space’. Once this space is set, it will help the parties to share their perspectives, and they may ask for each other’s support to analyse the roots of the conflict. Such support can be given by listening actively; nonetheless, we could find that some of the

parties do not show any interest in listening. Many reasons can be holding this behaviour: maybe there is no will in continuing the relationship. If that is the case, the best that can be done is to establish a concrete period of time for a decision to be taken. More frequently, parties will need to cool down strong feelings awoken during the dispute, and they will need some time out in order to get that. However, if the communication between the parties is still difficult to reinstate, there is the possibility of resorting to the help of a third party who will act as a mediator, which is intended to behave in a neutral and impartial way.

Finally, we can not miss the touchstone of any process of conflict management: respect. It is always necessary to be respectful of those with whom we have a conflict, since it is essential to maintain a healthy interaction with them if we want to settle differences. But, what does 'respect' mean? To practitioners, respect means being able to acknowledge the legitimacy of the interests of those with whom we experience differences, even if we don't agree with them. To me, this sounds as a very Friendly way to describe 'respect' and I like to connect it with the Quaker Testimony of Equality. Acknowledging that all people are entitled to their own picture of the world, whether we like it or not, is a very important precept of Quakers around the world, something that is expressed in this extract of Advices and Queries (no. 19)



(...) Each of us has a special experience of God and each must find the way to be true to it. When [other's] words are strange or disturbing to you, try to sense where they come from and what has nourished the lives of others. Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you. Avoid hurtful criticism and provocative language. Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue. Think it possible that you may be mistaken.

Most Friends already share a common culture of conflict management. In many of our groups, elders and overseers sometimes act as mediators between the parties in the conflicts that may appear. Meetings for clearness are also a strong tool to give space for inclusive solutions when managing in-group disagreements. However, I've seen the same problem about addressing conflicts everywhere: people don't talk about their worries at all, or talk about it but in an unconstructive way. Understanding that conflicts are opportunities that must be managed, learning how to find inclusive and realistic responses, 'finding space' to reinstate communication and treating all the parties in conflict with respect are the basic steps into a better constructive in-group conflict management.

PEACE
IS NOT THE ABSENCE
OF CONFLICT BUT
THE ABILITY TO
COPE WITH IT

Helping the helpers

Sara works in Italy with refugees she first met in a refugee camp in Lebanon. They were early recipients of “humanitarian corridor” visa opportunities organized through churches in Italy and Sara’s civilian peace corps, Operation Dove. She enjoys the work but alludes to challenges in her relationship with her friends from the camp as they moved to Italy.

Maya works in the UK for Voices for Creative Non-Violence, organising talks in schools across the country about militarisation and making regular visits to peace team partners in Afghanistan. She works on a “Fly Kites, not Drones” campaign, including Afghani children living in England, to build awareness about drone warfare. She talks about the trauma she sees in the children in both countries and struggles with deep sadness processing her own experiences travelling back and forth from a war zone. Nuran recently moved back to Istanbul to work with Mavi Kalem, an organization for the empowerment of women and girls. Mavi Kalem also helps Syrian children in education, protection and community livelihood, and until recently she herself worked near the Syrian border with refugee relief agencies. As we gather at the end of the day and someone suggests holding those unable to join us in their thoughts, she’s moved by the memory of two colleagues kidnapped and killed in Syria while working on relief projects.

These are three of the 12 Helpers who joined the “Helping the Helpers Training”, September 1st-6th at a rural retreat centre in central Italy. The training focused on community-based trauma awareness and prevention techniques for people working with migrants in Europe and Turkey. With the immediate goal of offering skills and techniques to help “Helpers” understand trauma, including its impact on their own lives, the longer term dream is building sustainability for the migrant support network.

Dr. Leyla Welkin, a Quaker psychologist who worked with the UN in Turkish refugee camps, led the training with Trauma Sensitive Yoga instructor Kirsten Voris. Welkin describes how her frustration working with international



The Helpers, trainers Dr. Leyla Welkin and Kirsten Voris, and coordination group UpUpA
Photo: Fabio Cea

institutions and their staff to offer programs for Syrian refugees inspired the content. “People who serve survivors of trauma, like refugees, are at risk of becoming affected by ‘secondary trauma’, or the internalized effects of revisiting tragedy day after day,” says Welkin. “This accounts, in part, for the high turnover and frequent burnout of those serving traumatized people. I created this training in order to offer tangible skills to relief workers, which will directly benefit both migrants and the communities that welcome them.”

Pairing psychological awareness with Trauma Sensitive Yoga creates a full body application of the material, shared Voris. “My very first clients were members of the aid community in Turkey. I could see what a great benefit they were getting from their yoga practice. Their stress levels went down, they were able to sleep and to leave their jobs behind when they came home in the evening.”

Welkin and Voris coordinated with an Italy-based international action group, UpUpA, to sponsor and organize the event. The project received significant support from international donors, including Quakers in the US. Representatives from the Coalition for Work with Psychotrauma and Peace based in Croatia participated in a closing session with the group to consider a migrant psychosocial support network with participants and other interested partners. For more information, visit the training Facebook page at www.facebook.com/HelpingTheHelpersTraining

News from Woodbrooke

Throughout 2016, Woodbrooke welcomed 3,300 visitors on over 130 courses and retreats, and supported an increasing number of Friends as they participated in our expanding *online programme of study courses, webinars and retreats*. This is an affordable and convenient way to access our learning, and our current offering has appealed to Friends throughout EMES. Watch out for our 6 week online retreat, *European Quaker Voices* and *Being a Quaker Clerk: an online course for clerks around the world* in our 2017 programme. Our post-graduate courses have also remained very popular, and our *Postgraduate Certificate in Quaker Studies* and *MA in Quakerism in the Modern World* are also distance courses held entirely online.

Our extended programmes are popular. Our two year *Equipping for Ministry* programme gives Friends a firm grounding in what it means to be a Quaker today, and encourages them to explore their personal callings. *The Young Adult Leadership Programme* helps 18-30 year olds strengthen their knowledge of the Quaker faith and its history and develop practical life skills. Our 18 month *Soul of Leadership programme* helps those in formal and informal leadership roles to develop the inner resources to help them serve with long-term effectiveness and integrity.

As well coming to Woodbrooke, you can arrange for Woodbrooke to come to you. Our travelling teaching service, *Woodbrooke on the Road*, can be tailored to meet the particular learning and spiritual needs of your meeting. We offer a range of specialised and accessible workshops covering Quaker history, theology and testimony. We can also help you explore the building blocks of what it means to be a living and faithful worshipping community.

If you are interested in joining us in any of these events, we would like to remind you that special funding is available so that you can take advantage of what we have to offer.

For those of you wanting to extend your involvement with Woodbrooke, you might want to consider serving as one of our *Friends in Residence*. These are Friends who stay with us for a few weeks at a time and who nurture our daily worshipping life, welcome visitors and support residents out of office hours. You can also volunteer to help our Garden Manager maintain and improve our 10 acres of gardens and grounds by serving as a Gardening Friend.

For more information about Woodbrooke' call +44(0)121 472 5171, email enquiries@woodbrooke.org.uk or www.woodbrooke.org.uk

New Opportunities for Ministry and Outreach

The EMES Ministry and Outreach programme is the grateful recipient of a new round of funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. In the next three years the aim is to consolidate and further develop the work that has been done since the programme began in 2008. It is envisaged that Friends in the Section will participate in this work in three specific ways.

First, we invite Friends to *document the history of Quakerism in their area*. This can be done in local languages as well as in English. The stories of how Quakerism has developed in various parts can be used for outreach (for example in the form of pamphlets or on websites) and for comparative study. Learning together about how our respective Meetings have evolved can be a way to deepen fellowship.

Second, we invite Friends to *document the lives of significant members of their Meetings*. Testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of Friends is a Quaker tradition that we can continue to share. The purpose of documentation like this is to capture the breadth and depth of Meetings by interviewing older Friends and remembering the lives of those who are no longer with us.

Third, the aim is to *gather our combined Quaker experience of faith and practice and make it available to each other for reference and mutual learning*. This will then become an evolving EMES Quaker Faith and Practice. It will be available online and as downloadable documents and printed material.

As a complement to the above opportunities, the new *FWCC-EMES Information Resource for Quaker Meetings* is now available on Woodbrooke's Moodle site: <http://moodle.woodbrooke.org.uk/course/view.php?id=215>. This online open access resource is work in progress and can be added to in various languages. Meetings are encouraged to suggest materials for inclusion. The documentation of Quaker history, Quaker lives and Quaker faith and practice can be gathered in this online resource.

Within the Information Resource for Quaker Meetings there is a limited access interactive forum for Friends currently serving their Meetings in care and nurture (also known as Eldership and Oversight). This interactive forum is moderated by a few experienced Friends and is both the result and continuation of the Ministry and

Outreach programme's work on nurture and care.

The EMES Small Grants Fund is available to Meetings in the Section (excluding Britain) and can for example be used for documentation projects such as those named above, or indeed any other project that strengthens Quakers' shared identity and Quaker connections and brings Quaker values to the wider community. Information about how to apply is available on the EMES website:

<http://www.fwccemes.org/emes/emes-small-grants-fund-sgf>

The Ministry and Outreach Coordinator (Julia Ryberg) and the Executive Secretary (Marisa Johnson) are available to answer questions about these new opportunities and to guide Meetings in their ongoing corporate growth. Julia can be reached at julia_ryberg@hotmail.com and Marisa at emes@fwccemes.org

The Ilkon Gathering

Jane Rose, Finland Yearly Meeting writes:

Here is a small interim 'newsletter' in response to our recent Finland Yearly Meeting gathering in Tampere where 17 of us gathered together in mid-August.

The spirit was working amongst us from the first session on Friday evening where we settled, as if by candle-light, and each person present revealed something of themselves by sharing personal and intimate poetry, words, photos, pictures and music. This time together went very deep and for me was a real opening both to our yearly meeting community as well as to our weekend together.

Saturday was as if looking into a prism and seeing gifts of service and experience in many different lights: from feedback from our representatives to other Yearly Meetings and conferences, through exploring our own gifts, to exploring tools for conflict resolution and mediation. Sauna and singing together as well as a healing meditation for a small group completed the evening. The day was threaded through with silent moments.

On Sunday after Meeting for Worship we received the

names of those only able to be with us in spirit; an unseen outer circle of Friends supporting our time together. Following this, we had a session of worshipful discussion concerning two upcoming events in 2017; one of which is the Nordic Yearly Meeting to be held near Gothenberg, Sweden in late June. Nordic Yearly Meeting is an amazing chance to feel part of a much wider Quaker Fellowship and to experience Quakerism in a different way than is possible among our small and widely scattered group of Friends in Finland. Two of the worship groups told the rest of us about their support work for projects in Africa and Myanmar (www.s4sk.org.uk). We also spoke about continuing our ministry of spiritual healing which has lapsed. It is now felt that both the time and the need for this ministry are rising again among Finnish Friends.

Our Sunday finished with an Experiment with Light meditation. This was gathered and deep and there was a short time of worshipful sharing afterwards. We are grateful to all who organized and participated in this weekend in the Ilkon Centre. We hope it will not be the last time we gather there. The environment, facilities and catering were perfect for our needs.

QCEA peace lead starts

The Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) has appointed a new Peace Programme Lead.

Olivia Caeymaex, who took up her role at the end of September, will work with European institutions, governments and other civil society organisations to discourage the use of harmful and ineffective military policies, and build capacity for peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

Olivia becomes the third member of the QCEA team, working alongside Representative Andrew Lane and part-time Office Manager Xavier Verhaeghe.

Before joining QCEA, Olivia worked as the Special Assistant to the United Nations Deputy Special

Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, based in Dakar. Olivia is fluent in English, French and Spanish and will work to represent the peace concerns of all European Yearly Meetings.

These are challenging times for the European continent. Governments are beginning to unpick the institutions of dialogue and human rights that they have been building for more than six decades", said Olivia, "The last three years have seen growing support for nationalist movements and increased use of military responses to political and humanitarian problems. I am delighted to be part of the QCEA team that will be swimming against that current.

Olivia has eight years peacebuilding and conflict prevention experience, including six years at the United Nations and experience in Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Leading by example



Quaker
Council for
European
Affairs

Andrew Lane, Quaker Centre for European Affairs, writes: Misha Roshchin, Clerk of Moscow Monthly Meeting, joined the QCEA team in Brussels during October and November. His presence is part of our Quaker witness to the peaceful world that our faith shows us is possible. Since 2013, our continent has taken backward steps toward the division of the past. Increasing fear and mistrust is the self-fulfilling prophecy of some political leaders, whose rhetoric is visible every day in the news. The victims of renewed East-West tensions can be found in Syria and Ukraine, but insecurity will only spread without a transformation in political, moral and cultural leadership.

Misha's work in Brussels is therefore allowing Quakers to be a bridge across division, an example we are encouraging European policy-makers to follow. Prior to his arrival, we had already published our special Around Europe 'Peace after Brexit' in Russian.

Misha arrived in Brussels almost immediately after his research visit to Crimea and eastern Ukraine, assessing the current political and human rights situation there. It is not easy for western European organisations to access these areas and there is much interest in hearing what Misha has to say. His academic expertise in Islam is also opening doors for our Quaker message to be heard on issues from anti-Muslim hate crime to violent extremism. We have had a very busy schedule which has included encouraging the Uzbek Ambassador to progress with his country's planned criminal justice reforms and hosting an inter-faith peacebuilding lunch. We are making connections for the future and will be continuing this work after Misha returns to Russia. Olivia Caeymaex, our new Peace Programme Lead, is already planning a series of further inter-faith lunches that will continue to bring people together who would not otherwise meet, crossing delicate divides in our global community.

A few days before Misha arrived, Quakers from across Europe gathered at QCEA's General Assembly. Friends finalised changes to how our organisation is governed and began to shape our new peace programme. The QCEA General Assembly also commissioned a second work programme promoting human rights. This is timely as Russia and the UK are both considering loosening their relationships with the European Convention on Human Rights – an issue which is out of the media at the

moment, but is actually the top concern of the more peace-minded governments that we have met recently.

We are not powerless.

Our faith gives us a powerful message and the strength to live it visibly in our daily lives. It will take all of us to 'bring the kingdom' and achieve a transformed world. QCEA's General Assembly has recognised that it will also require new ways of working from QCEA. Olivia and I have been asked to build new programmes based on constructive engagement, positively reinforcing the glimmers of Light, rather than just speaking out against the darkness.

Quaker House Brussels is already becoming a more active space for engaging the next generation of European policy-makers. Eight Syrian-led fundraising dinners have brought hundreds of people into the House over the last three months. QCEA has co-organised a day conference looking at peace and gender equality that took place in early November. Alternatives to Violence and Non-violent Communication courses will take place in December.

Our common European institutions are under strain.

At the centre of the failure to provide loving responses to forced migration, economic inequality and many other challenges – has been a failure of leadership. Therefore, from January QCEA will also be offering a new Quaker space for aspiring European policy-makers and policy-influencers to think deeply about the values and skills of leadership.

Thank you to everyone who supports this European-level Quaker work, whether it be financially, through volunteering or by keeping us in your thoughts.



Misha Roshchin

Photo: Andrew Lane

Diary Dates 2016/2017

More dates for 2016 are available on the website: www.fwccemes.org. Please send items for inclusion in the diary to Marisa Johnson at emes@fwccemes.org.

2-4 December 2016: EMES Peace & Service Consultation in Kortenberg, Belgium. Enquiries emes@fwccemes.org

16-19 March 2017: FWCC Section of the Americas Meeting americas@fwccamericas.org

29 March – 2 April 2017: FWCC Africa Section Triennial Meeting, Rwanda

20-23 April 2017: Ireland Yearly Meeting office@quakers-in-ireland.ie

21-23 April 2017: Quaker Grenztreffen CH-D German speaking, Lindenberg, Schwarzwald Grenztreffen CHD@quaeker.org

4-7 May 2017: FWCC-EMES Annual Meeting of Representatives, Bonn-Venusberg emes@fwccemes.org

Experiment or Experience with Light using Skype

Every week, a little group of Friends decide together the days and times for the next week. At the appointed hour, 9am UK time, I call participants. Everyone puts the camera on his or her computer for a few minutes, the time to say hello and to select the text for this occasion. We turn off the camera and microphone and one of us reads the text: six short paragraphs with a 5 minute break after each. Next, we take five to ten minutes for ourselves, maybe to express individually, in silence, our experience by writing, drawing or simply to move around a little. Then we have a few minutes with camera and microphone on in order to share, if we wish. We listen and say thank you and goodbye.

If you want to join us, all you need to do is type in www.skype.com, press "Download Skype" and register with a user name and password. You then send me your user name at richardthompson1@gmail.com to receive an invitation and it's done! We are a little community, currently from Sweden, Russia, Latvia, Israel, Tasmania, England and France, who have never met but share the essence of the Quaker way together, a very rewarding experience.

Richard Thompson

Among Friends is the newsletter of Europe and Middle East Section of Friends World Committee for Consultation. We want Among Friends to reflect the diversity of Quaker life and experience across the Section and welcome articles, photos and news of forthcoming events.

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