

EPISTLE FOR SWITZERLAND YEARLY MEETING, CHARMEY, JUNE 2011

Greetings to Friends Everywhere,

Fifty-four of us, including seven children, gathered as Quakers from all parts of the country to meet in Charmey (near Gruyere) for the second time. We were also privileged to have visiting Friends from Britain, France and Netherlands Yearly Meetings.

Our theme this year has been "Swiss Friends in a Changing World – What can we as Quakers say". Our deliberations began with a photo presentation about many aspects of global change. These were grouped into themes: Migration, Resources, Energy, Climate, Industry, Finances, Hunger, Child labor and modern slavery, and Agriculture.

Leading up to this yearly meeting the various Swiss meetings and worship groups have been discussing Global Change, and two of the FWCC Queries were used as themes for the autumn meeting of German-speaking Friends and the retreat. Bringing these together we discovered we all found it difficult to address these questions and our experiences at our yearly meeting have not been any different. Living in an area of the world that ranks high in consumption of the world's goods, we find it inappropriate to give advice to others and find that we need to work on how to reduce our own use of this planet's resources.

At Easter time this year, Switzerland was privileged to host the 2011 FWCC-EMES meeting at the Herzberg Center which also dealt in part with the Global Change Queries. Several Swiss friends took part and it was especially impressive for our young friends to meet and interact with many others from around the world. After having worked on the Queries for almost a year, Swiss Friends are very conscious that we are part of a world-wide process which will come together in the 2012 World Conference of Friends in Kenya.

We were privileged this year to have Caroline Dommen, member of the Geneva QUNO office staff with us who gave us an insight into the work done there. QUNO is working worldwide to bring Quaker concerns to the United Nations (www.quno.org). Recognizing the importance of QUNO for Friends, Switzerland Yearly Meeting decided to make a contribution towards the renovation of Geneva Quaker House where all this valuable work is being done. Geneva Quaker Foundation, the owner of the house, still needs to raise a substantial sum for urgent repairs.

We were impressed to hear of a new project in Tanzania called the Dar Reality Project (www.dar-reality-projects.org) which supports small community projects at the grassroots level with the involvement of the local populace. This initiative has been set up by a Quaker family.

We shared a creative session with the children and explored in many different ways how a better world might be. We greatly enjoyed the results of the all-age workshops on aspects of global change that we learned from the photo presentation on the first evening. We admired six posters made by the children, based on the SPICES (Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Caring or Community, Equality and Stewardship) – Quaker testimonies and queries for kids. An evening in the local indoor swimming pool was also a big hit for all generations! The children decorated stylish coffee cups which were then sold to raise money for the Dar Reality project in Tanzania.

After last year's meeting on the Peace testimony and this year's consideration of the Quaker response to Global Change we are looking forward to next year's meeting which will focus on spiritual nourishment.

- Switzerland Yearly Meeting, Society of Friends