

## **Epistle of 2017 Central European Gathering of Friends in Brno, Czech Republic**

On 18-21 May 53 people including 9 children and one dog, Berta, met in Brno, Czech Republic for the 21. annual Central European Gathering. Although Friends transcend all borders, we acknowledge people coming from Austria, Belarus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Ukraine and United Kingdom. A gathering of families, of friends, of Quakers indeed. The Central European Gathering has been evolving towards a regional meeting from a bridge-building started by Austria, Czech Republic and Hungary and EMES, gathering isolated Quakers and groups in central Europe.

The gathering began with country reports. The highlights included the growth in meetings in Poland and the influence in Czech Republic of funding by Bader Philanthropies. In retrospect, we highlight the importance of welcoming newcomers at the beginning of future gatherings. There were presentations by Gabriela Hotovcova, Michael Luick-Thrams, Kristjan Laes and Jasmine Piercy, and a video by Charles Tauber. Cathy Butler facilitated a workshop on identity (including feeling at home among Quakers). Jalka introduced us to her work on creative, constructive handling of conflict. Julia Ryberg of EMES talked about and encouraged us to develop small grant fund projects to strengthen our Quaker groups and the links among us and document, for example, our Quaker practices and histories.

Friends remembered dearly Waltraud Engel and Evzen (Eugen) Schart. We brought their presence amongst our midst through our words and memories. The children playing outside offered us a sense of continuity. Music has become an important element in Central European Gatherings.

We thank Czech Friends who organized the gathering in the beautiful setting of Penzion Zahrada in Brno. Just as this gathering has evolved into a vital Quaker community, we as Friends have deepened our sense of each other and of our faith as part of our identity.