

NORDIC Yearly Meetings' Epistle 2017

We send our warmest greetings to Friends around the world from our combined Nordic Friends yearly meeting of 2017.

The Nordiska Folkhögskolan near Gothenburg, Sweden, was founded 70 years ago to manifest the peace in the wake of World War II. It rests in an idyllic setting on a hill overlooking a remnant of warfare: medieval Bohus Fortress (1308). The fortress is in ruins, while the school continues to carry forward a tradition of education, featuring a flourishing inter-Nordic curriculum, for all ages post-high-school.

The venue chosen for the Nordic Friends Yearly Meeting 2017 was appropriate not only for its practical and scenic qualities but also because of the fact that Jeanna Oterdahl (1879-1965) – a writer, educator, and Friend – was a co-founder in 1947. Jeanna taught here and also was on the board for 20 years. We have read her poetry and sung her songs in our meetings.

The theme for the gathering "Am I my brother's keeper?" was chosen to address our concern for the condition of the world today, where violence is too often normalized in our societies: in politics, film and TV, by the multinational war machine and its consequences, and with the erosion of the social contract in a world of rising conflict.

The theme was explored in a talk by Finnish Friend Jaana Erkkilä-Hill (in no less than four languages: Swedish, English, Finnish, and Norwegian). She helped us to see that our societies are full of Cains, who feel they are entitled to more and have the right to take it by force; and also the many Abels, the innocent victims, and how few Jobs, who accept the ups and downs in life with the gentle attitude that they deserve neither the good nor the bad. She also touched upon what can be done for the Cains we encounter, besides explaining their ill deeds by saying that they too were slighted. How do we nourish the good in Cain? Jaana concluded that Cain and Abel represent two sides of each human being, and each of our societies, in patterns of both active and passive violence. In addressing this complex and difficult picture, our first response is to be "quietly waiting on God".

We had workshops, in some of which we were using our thoughts and words to fathom the theme, in others motion or silence brought us to new kinds of consciousness.

The Friends Service Committees of Norway and Sweden focused our awareness through a quick series of learning stations covering their work in Central Africa, Bangladesh, Gaza, and other places. They had us write postcards and tweets urging those in power to ameliorate problems in these places –one offered the foreign minister an air ticket to visit Gaza.

We held a celebratory and welcoming worship for young Friends who have prepared for membership in Norway YM through their three-year youth “confirmation” program. It was a joyous and rich occasion of prayer, ministry and song.

Again we have appreciated the spiritual enrichment and extended fellowship of this gathering of the four Nordic Yearly Meetings. With large and small we have been one hundred and twenty-three souls, including visitors from six other European countries, India and USA. We look forward to meeting again in three years’ time, and leave with the hope that we may make positive contributions to peace wherever we go.

With our warmest salutations,

Hanne Hognestad, Norway
Wilhelm Dahllöf, Sweden
Leena Lampela, Finland
Jessica Klaphaak, Denmark