

## **Epistle of the Switzerland Yearly Meeting 2016**

### **Held at Herzberg, Asp ob Aarau, Aargau on 13-16 May 2016**

Friends,

On May 13 we opened the 2016 Switzerland Yearly Meeting, themed “Out of Sight and Out of Mind? Refugees and us in Switzerland today”, with song and worship sharing. The refrain of the song, *Nowhere to Stay*, helped open our thinking on the topic:

*Everyone’s a refugee  
We’re all afraid here, can’t you see?  
What’s happened to our empathy?  
Is this the end? Or can we reinvent this failed humanity?*  
(Kathleen Koch, 2016)

We were gifted that Patrick Taran, member of Geneva Monthly Meeting, shared his expertise having worked on migrant issues for the past four decades, leading an interactive keynote address on the present situation in Europe and Switzerland. During his presentation we discovered that about 75% or more of us in attendance would be considered “migrants,” or are the sons or daughters of migrants, under the U.N. criteria. Patrick pointed out that the refugee “crisis” is much more one of perception – and of values – than of reality, and challenged us to reflect on Quaker testimony and witness. We discussed this theme throughout the weekend culminating in an epistle with a position and set of proposed actions, which will be considered by the SYM.

While we were considering the topic, the children went on a trip to visit an art museum in Aarau, where they enjoyed a special video exhibit called *The Sleeping Eskimo* by Portuguese artists João Maria Gusmão & Pedro Paiva, and then ate delicious cupcakes of all colors and flavors. Later on, they interviewed 21 of the attendees about their experiences as #Migrants and shared a selection of their results during the social evening. It was fascinating.

A notable characteristic of the SYM meeting is the number of languages spoken, reflecting the broader Swiss society. Several volunteers took turns translating between German, English, and French throughout the weekend. While at times our patience was challenged, we appreciated the variety and depth of expression enabled by this practice.

Herzberg offered a “green” location for our meeting – there was a new “smart flower” solar panel out front that moved throughout the day to catch the most possible sun. Even though it rained continuously through Saturday, at least we knew where the sun

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should have been. Nearby trails were perfect for silent walks, where the backdrop of Aarau and the rolling countryside were finally revealed on Sunday.

Also of note: Small groups considered additional concerns focused on sustainability and CO2 emissions, and funding challenges faced by the Quaker U.N. Office. We came together for a lively social evening, where a huge variety of musical talent was shared: cello, viola, harmonica, saxophone, recorders, piano, and voices. We even had storytelling, hand massage, and Taizé chants.

We were 49 Friends and attenders in total, including five children and two delegates from Britain Yearly Meeting and German Yearly Meeting.

In closing we offer text from a Friends' Hymn:

*As we leave this friendly place  
Love give light to every face  
May the kindness which we learn  
Guide our hearts 'till we return*  
(Vincent Brown Silliman, 1932)

Greetings to Friends everywhere!