

## **Epistle from The Swedish Society of Friends 71<sup>st</sup> Yearly Meeting, 14-16 May 2021.**

This year, as in Fall of 2020, our Yearly Meeting took place on Zoom. The Yearly Meeting lasted for three days, with about 40 participants from the whole of Sweden.

The theme was *Our methods – Beautiful façade or strong foundation?*

Our Yearly meeting's pedagogue Julia Ryberg introduced the theme. She stated that a house is more than a façade and a foundation – it consists, as well, of walls, roof, interior and of those who live and act there, and of the culture they create. Our Society of Friends is a house, and it has a tradition that offers good spiritual nourishment and promotes peace. When the façade mirrors those load-bearing walls of life, walls that have survived more than 300 years, then the façade is beautiful and there is no contradiction between the façade and a solid foundation.

Of course, sometimes a house needs renovation and rebuilding – but do not touch those load-bearing walls. Julia also meant that we, in these challenging times, must let the society outside the Quaker community know more about our tradition. We need to offer humans practice sessions in listening in silence and then making themselves heard. We spoke with each other about our thoughts regarding the theme first in selected small groups, later in a plenary session.

Julia's presentation apparently offered different listeners to assimilate different messages, from the façade as a sign to our tradition being the solid foundation.

One Friend read aloud epistles written by other Yearly Meetings and began the first evening by reading the epistle from the EMES (European and Middle East Section) Yearly Meeting, where she had been a participant. That way, one might say that she returned to the old Quaker tradition, when the Quakers made themselves living epistles, or couriers from one Quaker meeting to another. Our Friend gave a historic and geographical background, explaining how the tradition of epistles had developed over the centuries. We were also told that the inclusion of the Middle East section was more important than ever, since members of the Quaker Meetings in Brummana (Lebanon) and

Ramallah (The occupied West Bank/Palestine) gave harrowing testimony about a situation created by lacerations from war and repression, but paradoxically also about hope.

Our time is characterized by seriously great challenges. We have the Climate crisis which connects with the Ecologic crisis. There is also the crisis, which is caused by increased weaponry, with or without nuclear weapons. We found out that Sweden is one of those countries, which last year increased their military spending the most.

But crisis can mean hope *and* possibilities, and such is the case even now.

We see a need to share our Quaker values and methods, externally but even internally.

We decided to make an overview, about how we can, and should, communicate internally and externally in this new age with its new technical possibilities, and it was determined to have a work group draw up a holistic approach.

As an example of reaching out with our Quaker values, we mentioned our work on trying to convince the Swedish government to sign the UN Resolution against Nuclear Weapons.

Two of our Friends gave a wide and deep overview of the crises and possibilities of our time. Among other topics, they emphasized the importance of three eco-words: economics, ecology, and ecumenism, which have identical language roots.

The focus on economics has served us well, but now it is time to emphasize ecology, the huge but precious fabric of life, and ecumenism which was highlighted with a quote from the Norwegian quaker P. I. Haukeland's book *Himmeljorden (The Heaven's Earth)*. This quote puts light on how we all belong to each other, and how we all relate to The Whole, making this relation more important than any wealth.