

**Epistle from the Belgium and Luxemburg Yearly Meeting 2022 annual gathering  
held at Chant d'Oiseau, Brussels, Belgium**

**17 – 19 June 2022**

*Community, Compassion, Unity*

To Friends everywhere:

Dear friends, lieve vrienden, chers amis, liebe Freunde, Léif Frënn, queridos amigos, cari amici, greetings.

28 friends from Belgium, Luxembourg, France, Germany, Wales and England gathered in the peaceful Maison Notre-Dame du Chant d'Oiseau (Bird Song) <http://www.chant-oiseau.be/language/en/>

This gathering was two years in the making and was our first in person since 2019. We each came with our individual gifts such as unique life experiences, cultural diversity, inner guidance, loving hearts, hope, courage, and curiosity. Some also arrived feeling disconnected from one another, weary and awkward.

Jennifer Kavanagh and Edwina Peart were invited to bring fresh perspective on the theme of Community, Compassion, and Unity.

Jennifer grounded the three topics in the truth of our interconnected oneness. This mutuality extends into all forms of life throughout the universe. The reality, though, is that a community can never be perfect. We are not saints. We can love each other, disagree, and make each other uncomfortable. Compassion, however, is a relationship of mutual benefit with no dividing line between giver and receiver. We are called to take action and responsibility for one another. Unity is not uniformity. Unity is found in and through the Divine within us and can hold paradoxes for us.

Edwina challenged us to think about the application of these concepts of community, compassion, and unity in our Quaker community using the lens of the war in Ukraine. She noted diverse instinctive reactions to welcoming war refugees into our communities accepting native Ukrainians while creating barriers for African, Caribbean and Middle East nationalities. Who are we welcoming into and excluding from our local Quaker community? Are we willing to really question why attenders leave Quakers?

After these two presentations, breakout groups were formed in English, French, and Dutch recognising the rich language and cultural diversity in our Yearly Meeting.

There was also time for individual presentations and discussions on subjects such as community building at Pendle Hill, which currently holds a daily blended meeting for worship with 10 people or more in 'The Barn' and perhaps 100 online. We discussed in what form of meetings might our Quaker community go forward with face-to-face, blended, or online as we have used all three since the pandemic began. Presentations/discussions were also led on Diwan House in Brussels, a local charity for refugee asylum seekers to which our Meeting has long given practical and

financial support, and how we can critically look on security concerns in our world today in order to explore longer-term peaceful solutions. We are particularly mindful of present conflicts and tensions in Eastern Europe.

In the final all-participants session of the day, Jennifer and Edwina posed questions for us to answer in a variety of ways including a one-to-one inner/outer circle exercise, increasing person-to-person communication in a simple context, something we haven't been able to do since the pandemic started two and a half years ago. The main day ended with a guided social, musical and spiritual evening demonstrating the connection of the rhythm and sound of the musical genre known as "Gospel" or "The Blues" with the human spirit and heartbeat.

On Sunday morning before closing Meeting for Worship, we were challenged by Jennifer and Edwina and given individual time to reflect, through writing or drawing imagery, on the Unity that we each aspire to reach, reflect and generate in our Yearly Meeting. With this encouragement, we hope to walk forward together into the post-covid world discovering new ways to communicate and build community with compassion for all.

- In Friendship • Met hartelijke groeten • Bien amicalement
- Mit freundlichen Grüßen • Mat Frëndleche Gréiss • En amistad
- In amicitia

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. E. Harland". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a long, thin, slightly curved line that extends from the end of the signature towards the right.

Ruth Harland, Clerk

Submitted by epistle drafting committee of Sasha Hologne, Janice Thomson, and Daniel Clarke Flynn