

*Religious Society of Friends
Religieus Genootschap der Vrienden
Société Religieuse des Amis
Religiöse Gesellschaft der Freunde*

Quakers in Belgium and Luxembourg

Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Meeting 10 to 12 June 2016

To Friends everywhere: Greetings!

The theme of the 2016 residential meeting of Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Meeting was “Who am I as a Quaker in this rapidly changing world.” In our opening session, each of us dropped a stone in a bowl of water. We were able to see how even the smallest action can have a rich, rippling effect.

Thirty Friends and attenders gathered together in the Jeugdherberg (Youth Hostel) ‘Die Loyale’ in Maldegem in East-Flanders, Belgium. We were very happy to welcome visitors from Britain Yearly Meeting, France Yearly Meeting, the Netherlands Yearly Meeting, as well as the Clerk of the EMES of the FWCC. Friends who are no longer with us were also very much in our thoughts. We are thankful for the hospitality and the warm welcome extended to us by all of the ‘Die Loyale’ Youth Hostel staff.

We chose to explore the theme through the Open Space method. This was a new departure for many of us, and we were thankful to our team of facilitators from Meeting who talked us through the process step by step.

As a result, through spontaneous contributions from all participants, we built our own agenda for the three-day gathering. The children and young people present were also responsible for the agenda and brought their ideas and energy to the gathering. All activities were open to all age groups. The children and young people led an exploration of our surroundings as well as games and craft activities. Meditation was happening alongside football. In building our agenda, we felt a great commitment to the success of our gathering. This was a gathering that was as much about being as doing, and found space for deepening, lightness and fun.

There was freedom to offer an activity, freedom to take part in activities, and freedom to move about between activities. We felt that the Open Space reflected the importance that we attach to freedom and to responsibility, both individual and corporate.

Our program included a wide range of themes, taking in the spiritual, the personal, as well as how we can make a difference in facing the challenges around us, such as the refugee crisis. A number of us were attending the protest against the arms trade at Eurosatory in Paris and our gathering was an opportunity to reflect on our peace testimony.

Our gathering testified to the energy and to the curiosity of our exploration of what it means to each of us to be a Quaker in a rapidly changing world. The richness of the stories that we shared, the ministry that we heard, and the fellowship that we enjoyed, gave us renewed hope and confidence that our voices – and our silences – may be heard in these troubled times.