

Religious Society of Friends

Religieus Genootschap der Vrienden

Société Religieuse des Amis

Religiöse Gesellschaft der Freunde

Quakers in Belgium and Luxembourg

Epistle – Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Meeting

Drongen, Belgium

15-17 November 2019

When we 'Let our lives speak' it is what they speak that matters

To Friends everywhere,

We, Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Meeting, held our Residential Yearly Meeting in Drongen Abbey, near Gent, Belgium from 15 – 17 November 2019.

We welcomed our speaker, Paul Parker, Recording Clerk of Britain Yearly Meeting. We were delighted to see Friends from all three of our Meetings in Brussels, Gent and Luxembourg as well as representatives from Britain Yearly Meeting and Netherlands Yearly Meeting, and visitors from Belgium, the UK, the USA and the Netherlands. We also welcomed 5 young people, who in their separate programme learned techniques of interviewing and used them to discuss their choices and their lives with Paul Parker.

The chosen themes of our Yearly Meeting were “Living adventurously” and “Trusting the Light in our daily lives”. Our speaker, during his presentation shared his spiritual journey to where he couldn’t imagine himself being anything other than a Quaker. He reminded us that the use of language can be a hurdle to our understanding of the process of seeking the Inner Light and encouraged us to seek the metaphor that speaks to us. He used the image of a daffodil that, placed in a vase of water into which dye is added, slowly takes on the colour of the dye under the influence of light. We were thus reminded that the power of transformation and embracing of the Inner Light may not be an instantaneous event but a gradual process.

Living adventurously, guided by the Light, is a constant exercise in discerning the path towards that Light. By seeking to live without fear, daring to take risks and trusting that our promptings to change will lead to transformation, we recognise that sometimes we tumble into challenging situations but that what is important is how we deal with them.

Taking the risk of truly listening to others whom we might instinctively avoid opens us up to change as well as indicating a path for them to hear us. Our relationship with people is an essential part of our Faith: it is a way of connecting with God.

We have considered what it means to live adventurously. We often interpret this as being either a frightening challenge or an exciting leap - poised at the top of a roller coaster can feel terrifying. Letting go becomes easier when we know that we will be cushioned in difficult paths of the journey by our community. To use another metaphor, we don’t have to see the whole staircase to take the next step.

We need to learn to be brave, to take our Quakerism out to the wider world trusting we can come back to the Quaker community for replenishment. We should remember that being led by the Light

may not feel comfortable. What is important is the path, and to always remember that we ourselves might be mistaken, for example in the failure of Friends to adequately address issues such as gender, racial and sexual orientation equality. Things start to change with that discomfort; we grow to no longer be the person we were before the change began.

“Be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.” George Fox, 1656

In and on behalf of Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Meeting,

Ruth Harland, Clerk

Phil Gaskell, Assistant Clerk