

**BELGIUM & LUXEMBOURG YEARLY MEETING
RESIDENTIAL YEARLY MEETING 2017**

EPISTLE

Greetings to Friends everywhere from the Belgium & Luxembourg Yearly Meeting,

We held our residential yearly meeting for the second consecutive year at Maldegem in East Flanders, from 12 to 14 May 2017. The guiding theme of this year's gathering was "Quaker lives, personal lives – what can I say?" Twenty-six adult Friends attended, as well as three children. We were pleased to be joined by Friends from Britain Yearly Meeting, France Yearly Meeting and Netherlands Yearly Meeting, as well as by a representative of the Europe and Middle East Section of the Friends' World Committee for Consultation, who brought a message of greetings from the EMES. We also received a message of greetings from the FWCC's World Office. We began on a joyful note by welcoming a young Friend into membership.

We adopted an open model of organisation: Friends attending the gathering were invited to put forward subjects for workshops which they wished to hold and these were put into the timetable: there were three or four such sessions for each timeslot and Friends could choose freely which groups they wished to take part in, with the possibility of moving between workshops.

The subjects of the workshops could be divided into four broad groups: nurturing and developing our meeting; examining our faith; living our faith; and living as Quakers in the world. In considering the holding of meeting for worship, while trying to strengthen Quaker practice, we are minded that we should not only tolerate but embrace each other's differences, strengths and weaknesses. Although we have a thriving Quaker community we are mindful that constant effort is needed to maintain this and to reach out to people in the different language communities. At this Yearly Meeting some workshops naturally moved into languages other than English.

Although we have no creeds, we have Quaker testimonies, but these must not be imposed on Friends as a substitute for a creed. Our faith is grounded in silent worship and comes from leadings from within. We spent some time discussing theological terms, especially those used in Christianity, and we found that they opened up a deeper debate. One result of this workshop was a resolve to see how this discussion can be taken forward in future deepening sessions. As Quakers we can find inspiration in many places and a workshop on blues music and Quaker spirituality surprised us with new insights. We also learned that even simple questions such as "who am I?" can lead to thought-provoking responses.

It has never been more important to speak truth to power and we resolve to continue the discussion on how we can improve our visibility and influence, amplifying our voice in order that we can live our faith in the world more effectively.

There is a need and a desire for Quaker values in the world and we note that many people, especially the young, share our concerns. We are convinced that there is an important role for Quakers and for organisations such as the Quaker Council for European Affairs in an increasingly troubled world. It is up to all of us to increase our efforts to meet this need.

In and on behalf of Belgium and Luxembourg Yearly Meeting

Ruth Harland, Clerk
Chloé Tan, Assistant Clerk