

Epistle of the 2014 Central European Gathering in Vienna

After 4 years in other countries we returned this year to Vienna, Austria for our 18th Central European Gathering of Friends. We were blessed with the presence of Friends from Belgium, Belarus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Scotland, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine, England and Austria. We are grateful for the financial and spiritual support given by German YM, Swiss YM, the JRCT, Hampshire & the Islands Area Meeting and EMES as well as the organizational preparations and hospitality by Jalka and Johanna Steindl of Vienna.

We really appreciated the freedom afforded by having a program made up of a large variety of topics with the proximity to Vienna attractions and simultaneous space to retreat and share among ourselves in small groups. There were sessions on our considerations on what it means to be a yearly meeting, we learned and shared first-hand about the crisis in Ukraine which intertwined meaningfully with what we heard from Alexandra Bosbeer from QCEA about Quakers and our engagement in European affairs. We are thankful for her presence as well as that of Julian Wood from EMEYF and hope that this kind of visitation support can continue. Jalka led a group of us on the newly established peace trail in Vienna, part of the Discover Peace in Europe project (www.discoverpeace.eu) which she conceived and saw through over the past few years. We had a discussion about hospitality and were enriched by Brian Phillip's visit and his research about the ethical struggles of Hans von Dohnanyi and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in their resistance to Hitler. Zsuzsa Eastland shared with a group her concern to work for reconciliation in the Carpathian Basin through a children's summer camp and felt supported.

As has become a tradition over the past years we enjoyed singing, dancing (including a tango evening in memoriam for Ivars Abelis of Latvia meeting); and also - as a first - our self-prepared evening meals. Daily meetings for worship and an Experiment with Light session deepened our spiritual fellowship and we are looking forward to our unfolding development over the coming years.

Signed: Cathy and Arne