

Epistle of 25th Central European Gathering of Friends from 2-5 June 2022 at Zbraslav, Prague, Czech Republic

Dear Friends,

We greet Friends everywhere from the ancient town of Zbraslav and its beautiful surroundings on the outskirts of the Czech capital. We are grateful for once more being able to meet and embrace each other in these troubled times of pandemic and now even war in our part of Europe. Since the last CEG we have remained in regular contact via internet and with the outbreak of war in Ukraine we have felt the need to be in close and more frequent contact with our friends.

We were 20 in presence and 9 who joined us on-line in our second hybrid meeting. We shared information from our different groups and countries, and it became clear that the war in Ukraine was very much present in our minds and our activities as Friends in Central Europe. Our friend Michal Kołakowski Mickiewicz spoke passionately about his concern that all must be done to stop this horrible disaster and urged support to our Russian Friends, whose testimonies are currently being put to an extremely hard test.

Several of us are hosting Ukrainian refugees in our households as well as in the premises of the Prague Quaker Centre. In particular, Warsaw Friends' cooperation with a clinic offering post-trauma therapy appears to make our small group of Quakers more known in this region. Assistance to refugees through a number of projects throughout the area has been made possible thanks to generous contributions from Quakers around the world, money which is now channelled through our CEG account, and thanks also to the publicity through the EMES website. As well as helping refugees in our region, this activity has helped raised the profile of CEG in the Quaker world.

The theme chosen for our gathering this year was: **CEG – Where we came from, where we are now, where we are going.** We were therefore delighted to hear that our Friend Kasia Kaczmarkiewicz is starting our CEG documentation project in preparation for her plan to write a book about Quakers in Central Europe. We are grateful to EMES for the grant we have already received, which will serve as essential initial funding for this project.

As to where we are now, we are in the process of formulating a statement of our identity as Friends in Central Europe, and hope to complete it at the future gathering. Where are we going? The discussion of this question gave rise to both positive and negative responses. Some Friends stressed that although we are a relatively new and developing Quaker group, we already have some tradition and that some even very established groups face the same issues that face us.

We rejoiced in the presence of young people at our gathering both from our own community as well as Ukrainian refugees who are guests of Liz Coling our Co-Clerk. They joined with our children on the trampoline and with us in our singing. In her presentation, Irena Marušincová told us how she had asked for her children's thoughts about our gathering, and their positive but also critical comments will inspire

our provision for young people in Gdańsk, the beautiful city we have chosen for our next gathering. Irena reminded us that children are the future of our movement.

Ondřej Fafejta made a presentation about the American author M. Scott Peck whose Quaker schooling undoubtedly inspired his thinking about community, which resonated in further discussion about our process. We also thank Bradius Maurus for his presentation on Spinozan spirituality.

We would like to thank the Marušinec family for the musical accompaniment during our daily singing. Thanks to the sound of their instruments our musical worship could be appreciated by other guests of our hotel.

We were delighted to welcome EMES Executive Secretary Michael Eccles in person to our gathering and we thank him for his active participation.

At this gathering Jalka and Cathy Butler completed their terms of service as Elders. We join the Clerks in sincerely thanking them for all their help in holding our gathering in the Light every time we have needed it.

With Quakers everywhere we hold in the Light the people of Ukraine and Russia and deplore the ongoing destruction and loss of life caused by the senseless war being waged against Ukraine. We pray for a just and lasting peace in that country and throughout our region. We thank all Friends who continue to donate money to the CEG Funding for Ukraine Group (FUG), which can be accessed from the [EMES website](#)

We are looking forward to meeting again in Gdańsk in 2023.

In Peace,
Ewa Gawrońska, Gerald Turner and Paweł Milka